

# YARN ABOUT YOUTH

REPORT NOVEMBER 2012

**ayac** Australian Youth  
Affairs Coalition

  
**Reconciliation  
AUSTRALIA**



# What do young Australians think about the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians?

**90%** think the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is important

**35%** think the relationship is good

**16%** think that we trust each other

**51%** think the relationship is improving

**80%** think Australia is better off because we have many different cultures

**67%** rank their knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories as high

## Yarn About Youth National Survey 2012

Reconciliation Australia and the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition would like to thank the participants of the Yarn About Youth Roundtable and young people who filled in the Yarn About Youth National Survey.



**In May 2012, Reconciliation Australia and the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition launched the Yarn About Youth program to find out what issues matter to young people and how young people and the youth sector can progress reconciliation.**

From May to July we consulted with 740 young people aged 15 to 26 via an online survey.

In August we brought together representatives from 22 key youth sector organisations for a roundtable to discuss the survey findings and a way forward for youth sector organisations around reconciliation. Over half of the participants were engaged and active Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young leaders.

When it comes to reconciliation, young people have a clear vision of what they want Australia to look like and there is energy to achieve this vision. However they need support to get there.

We have heard the messages from young people:

- The relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians is not strong but they want it to be better.
- They want Australia to be more equal and inclusive.
- They want to do something to advance reconciliation but they do not know how to get involved.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are stepping into leadership positions but they need more support for their voices to be heard.

The survey and roundtable identified a number of gaps that young people and the youth sector believe are preventing progress towards their goals. These include:

- Inconsistencies across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth leadership programs;
- A lack of opportunities for young people to contribute to reconciliation; and
- The absence of a national representative body and policy platform for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

This report captures some of the current issues and recommendations identified by young people and youth sector organisations. It aims to be a starting point for further discussions about how to address the gaps and map a practical way forward for reconciliation and more effective engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.



# What is Reconciliation?

Reconciliation Australia's model of reconciliation is based on the three pillars of relationships, respect and opportunity:

## Relationships

Good relationships are based on trust, understanding, communication and mutual respect.



## Respect

Pride in the cultures that have existed in this country for tens of thousands of years and the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to Australia's development.

## Opportunity

Creating opportunities that will achieve equality in life expectancy, education, employment and all the important measurable areas of disadvantage.

Reconciliation Australia is the national body promoting reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and other Australians.

The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition is the national voice representing young people and the youth sector in Australia.

**“If you haven't built relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations, change doesn't come about.”**

Youth participant at the roundtable



**We asked young people about the most important issues facing Australia today and the changes they want to see in their lifetime.**

## Creating a more equal, inclusive Australia

Young people are engaged in social issues. They place a high importance on reducing racism, discrimination and prejudice in Australia (see table 1).

When it comes to closing the gap in social and economic wellbeing between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians, young people have a lot of passion and energy to see this happen. They do not just want to ‘close the gap’ but ‘smash the gap’.

Young people spoke about wanting to remove any barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people achieving so that their success is no longer extraordinary, but rather, commonplace.

**“We do not want to just close the gap, we want to smash the gap!”**

**Youth participant at the roundtable**

**Table 1: What issues are most important to you?**

Rank	Non-Indigenous	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
1	Climate change and the environment	Racism, discrimination and prejudice
2	Racism, discrimination and prejudice	Health
3	Education	Education
4	The state and impact of the economy	Constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
5	Employment	Employment
6	Treatment of refugees and asylum seekers	Closing the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous peoples
7	Reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians	Drug and alcohol issues
8	Drug and alcohol issues	Climate change and the environment
9	Health	Identity and culture
10	Disadvantage, poverty and inequality	Human rights and equality



## Better relationships

Young people told us that stronger relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians are essential to achieving lasting change as well as genuine recognition of the effects of colonisation.

This is perhaps the reason that young people see the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians as so important (see table 2).

Young people want the opportunity to build better relationships. Only a quarter of non-Indigenous young Australians have frequent contact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians but over half would like to have more frequent contact.

Young people also want to know more about history and culture. School education is clearly an important factor in this. Almost half of the non-Indigenous young people who completed the survey said that school is their main source of information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, history and culture.

Moreover, 81 per cent of young people believe that students should learn more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures at school.

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices are heard and respected

It is widely accepted that there is no sustained platform for national advocacy and self-representation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young leaders want the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to underpin the way governments and other organisations operate. This will ensure that the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are heard on issues that affect them.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young leaders that we spoke to want to see First Australians in leadership roles at all levels, including Prime Minister one day!

This will allow them to not only drive change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians but for Australia more broadly.



**81%** of young people think students should learn more at school about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures



L-R: Warren Roberts, Tara Liddy and Graeme Fordham



L-R: Warren Roberts and Andrew Cummings

**“Aboriginal people should form a greater part of the Australian community and hold office and authority at all levels, in an equal society.”**

Survey respondent



“I think the discrepancy in health and education rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is unacceptable, as is the amount of racism directed against Indigenous Australians. I really want to be part of the solution to these problems.”

Survey respondent

## We asked young people for a progress report on their vision for change

### Barriers to success still exist

There are still significant barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people being able to participate fully in the social and economic opportunities enjoyed by the wider Australian community.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people identified ‘racism, discrimination and prejudice’ as the most important issue in Australia today. Non-Indigenous young people identified it as the second most important issue (see table 1).

Another barrier is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander university students represent only around one per cent of all university students<sup>1</sup>. Similarly, only around half of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students complete year 12, compared to almost 80 per cent of non-Indigenous students<sup>2</sup>.

The estimated average life expectancy of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander male born today is still 11.5 years less than that of a non-Indigenous male. The estimated average life expectancy of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander women is 9.7 years less than that of a non-Indigenous woman<sup>3</sup>.

### The relationship is not strong

While young people think that the relationship between First Australians and other Australians is important, they do not believe it is strong. We do not trust each other and there are high levels of prejudice (see table 2). Somewhat encouragingly, around half of young people do believe that the relationship is improving (see table 2).

1. ABS 2011 Census of Population and Housing, ABS cat.no 2002.0, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2012.
2. COAG reform Council, Indigenous Reform 2010-11: Comparing performances across Australia, COAG Reform Council, Sydney, p49.
3. ABS Gender Indicators – Australia, ABS cat.no. 4125.0, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2012.

**Table 2: How do young people’s views on reconciliation compare to older generations?**

	% Young people*	% Older generations **
Agree we trust each other	15	9
Agree we are prejudiced towards one another	70	71
Agree the relationship is good	33	43
Agree the relationship is very important	66	43
Agree the relationship is improving	51	49
Know a lot about Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories	65	39
Feel proud of Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures	74	50
Strongly agree that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are important to Australia’s national identity	63	21

\* Non-Indigenous young people who responded to the survey \*\* Non-Indigenous respondents aged 18 and over who completed the 2010 Australian Reconciliation Barometer



**81%**

of young people would like to do something to advance reconciliation but only 34% know what they can do

## Young people need more support

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people have a long history of stepping up into leadership roles. A growing number of government and non-government organisations are now delivering leadership programs.

However, the representatives at the Roundtable told us there is a lack of consistency and coordination in the delivery and evaluation of these programs. Many youth organisations are also struggling to sustain their engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people do not have a process for self-representation and advocacy through which to have their voices heard at the regional and national level. A lack of community consultation is an issue across the board. The undervaluing of genuine consultation and voice can be linked to systemic racism and discrimination. The right structures to support and promote young people's voices to be heard needs further development.

There is also a lack of opportunities for young people to get involved in reconciliation. A majority of those who responded to the survey really want to contribute to advancing reconciliation but they do not know what they can do.



Benson Saulo

**Despite the barriers, there are a number of opportunities for change**

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young leaders are stepping up

There is enormous momentum building for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to be more involved in decisions that affect them and in creating change for young people in their networks.

In 2012 there have been youth forums looking at constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and creating an independent and national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth body.

This year also saw the first National Indigenous Youth Parliament held, and the establishment of the National Indigenous Youth Leadership Academy.

**"I am humbled by the young people in the room and your capacity to drive such a positive agenda."**

**Youth sector participant at the roundtable**



L-R: Michael Galuzzo, Kiyah Missen, Shannan Dodson and Steven Brown



“The youth sector is well placed to lead the rest of the community in indigenous/non-indigenous relationships. We as a sector need to role model what we expect everyone else to do.”

Youth sector participant at the roundtable

## Foundations for strong relationships are there

Understanding and respect are the foundations of a good relationship. Our survey results show that non-Indigenous young people have a high level of knowledge and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures (see table 1).

Moreover non-Indigenous young people feel personally proud of Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. They believe that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are important to Australia’s identity as a nation.

Given the strong foundation, there is a great opportunity to facilitate better relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous young Australians.

.....

**74%** of non-Indigenous young people feel personally proud of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures

.....

## Youth sector wants to play a **key** role

Youth sector organisations are committed to effective youth participation and engagement but find it challenging to maintain engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. However there is a commitment to learn how to better engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

The sector is ideally placed to support and foster reconciliation in young people because of their connections working with non-Indigenous young people.

The sector can also support the development of a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth policy agenda. The development of this agenda would be led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people around the country.

The development of this policy agenda needs to model a genuine youth participation approach as well as enacting the right to be involved in decision-making. It should also be developed in partnership with different organisations within the sector.



Blake Tatafu



L-R: Benson Saulo and Sorrell Ashby



# How do we harness this energy and turn it into action?

## Agenda for change:

### Empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to achieve success and help 'smash the gap'

- Maintain the current level of opportunities for leadership whilst ensuring genuine follow up and youth engagement.
- Support the development of national representation and advocacy.
- Ensure young people are part of decision-making structures.

### Building relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous young people

- Support the development of programs that build relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous young people.
- Ensure that, as part of the National Curriculum, students learn more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.

### Effectiveness and coordination across the youth sector

- Adopt a rights-based approach underpinned by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- Work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.
- Share evidence of successful approaches to engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people across the youth sector.

## As a young person, what can I do?

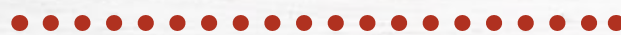
Young people are already doing a lot to contribute to reconciliation. A majority of those who completed our survey are talking to others about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues and building personal relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

These everyday actions make a significant contribution to improving the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians.

There are many great organisations that you can get involved in. If you are a university student, consider doing courses through the university's Indigenous studies centre, volunteering for the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience or getting involved with the Youth Awareness Resource Network.

If you are a member of a youth service, ask the service to help organise activities for National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week.

If you are an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander young person wanting to step up into a leadership role, consider joining the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, getting involved with the National Indigenous Youth Leadership Academy or being part of Oxfam Australia's ChangeCourse program. These are only a few of the great opportunities out there.



# 70%

**of young people are talking to others about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues**





*“We need to be looking at practical and real ways for young people to get involved in reconciliation. In ways that are meaningful to them.”*  
Youth sector participant at the roundtable

## What can the youth sector do?

Youth services are working to improve the way they engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. The sector can also play a vital role in introducing non-Indigenous young people to the importance of reconciliation.

Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) are about changing the culture of an organisation so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people feel valued and respected. A RAP is a structured plan that could help youth organisations create more sustainable leadership opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and generate opportunities for non-Indigenous young people to contribute to reconciliation.

Non-Indigenous and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth organisations must work effectively together to meet the shared goal of reconciliation and effective engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

Many youth organisations are already upholding the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to be involved in decision making structures that affect them through representation on their boards and advisory groups.

As organisations are consulting on different approaches to engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, consider partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in your local area. It is also a great idea to share learning and evidence of what works across the sector through your youth peak body.

### What will we do?

Reconciliation Australia and the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition have heard the message from young people and the youth sector.

There are significant gaps in support for, and representation of, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and helping non-Indigenous young people to contribute to reconciliation.

### We hope to achieve change in this area through:

- Promoting the views of young people on reconciliation and the importance of youth voices.
- Building better coordination and connection through engaging with key organisations from the youth sector to progress the recommendations from this report.
- Facilitating partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous youth organisations.

**For more information about the activities of Reconciliation Australia go to: [www.reconciliation.org.au](http://www.reconciliation.org.au)**

**To find out more about the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition go to: [www.ayac.org.au](http://www.ayac.org.au)**





Cover art by Kiyah Missen, a participant at the Yarn about Youth Roundtable.

Reconciliation Australia and the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition acknowledge the traditional owners of country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respect to them and their cultures and to elders both past and present.



**Reconciliation**  
AUSTRALIA