

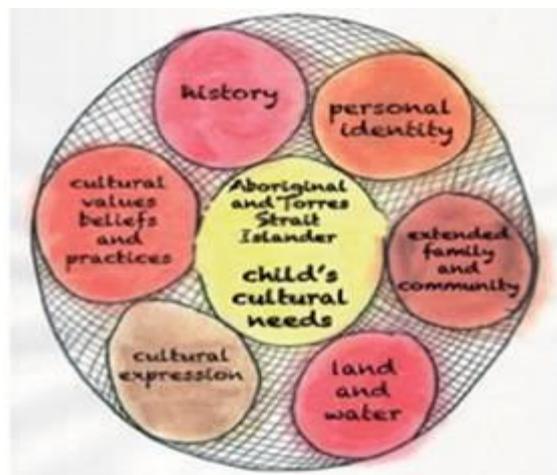


The importance of cultural identity for Aboriginal young people in care

Through a number of consultations across April and May this year, I had the pleasure of yarning with six Aboriginal young people who graciously shared their stories and talked to me about the extent to which they felt their cultural identity had been supported as a 'child in care'. This information was used for a presentation that I gave at the Child Aware Approaches Conference in Brisbane on 16 May.

The presentation captured the experiences and views of the young people by mapping their own words against the five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle; these being prevention, partnership, placement, participation and connections.

The Aboriginal young people talked to me about their experience of discrimination and stereotyping, and articulated a need for greater support for parents, families and community. They were also clear about the need for non-Indigenous people to listen to and work together with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to effect change. The young people spoke about the importance of maintaining family connections, of knowing about their cultural heritage and country of origin from an early age, and of being able to have cultural experiences provided not only to them but also to their non-Indigenous peers.





The importance of cultural identity for Aboriginal young people in care cont...

Each of the young people spoke of their pride in being Aboriginal even though many told me they are still learning about what that means as a result of not having been given enough information about their family and cultural background as they were growing up. They also had some great ideas about how Aboriginal young people could be supported to understand and experience their culture.

In the words of one young person was a clear message that similarly came through in the views of all the young people...

“It’s okay to not know about Aboriginal culture, it’s not okay to not ask.”

I thank each of the young people who spoke with me for sharing their story, and I look forward to yarning further with them, as well as with others who may be interested in doing the same. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance provided by the CREATE Foundation in bringing young people together for these consultations.

Jodie Griffiths-Cook

Public Advocate and Children and Young People Commissioner
ACT Human Rights Commission

