

Combined Voices Consultations Summary

QATSCIPP Website Article

The Queensland Government's response to the needs identified by the Combined Voices campaign comes in the form of a plan called 'Together Keeping Our Children Safe and Well'. This plan aims to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are strongly connected with their families and culture in a safe and nurturing environment. The purpose is to provide a framework for the government and non-government sector to work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to promote the safety and well being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

CREATE and QATSCIPP have collaborated with the Murri School to ensure children and young people's views are part of this plan; after all it is designed for their benefit. CREATE and QATSCIPP will provide feedback into a review of the current policies, practices and procedures used by the Department of Communities in assessing the needs of and interventions necessary to secure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people's safety from harm. The scope of this review is to be developed in consultation with, amongst others, CREATE, QATSCIPP and a representative group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

More information

In summary, CREATE and QATSCIPP have worked with the Murri School to seek feedback from two groups of children and young people as prescribed below;

- Consultations with children aged 6 to 12 years to provide positive community messages into the Combined Voices Campaign and,
- Consultations with young people aged 13 to 18 years to provide their views and opinions about child protection issues such as connection to culture to contribute to the Comprehensive Plan.

Sixteen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people participated in the consultations. The participants, 10 girls and five boys, were aged between eight and 16 years old. Some of the children and young people had experienced time in out of home care whilst others lived with their immediate family.

What does a good and safe home mean to you and what does this mean to you?

Expressed equally through the art that they drew and the words they spoke, the children and young people talked about the connection between the presence of family members and the feelings of being happy and comfortable at home. Many of the comments moved away from the physical characteristics of a 'good home' and concentrated on the way in which the quality of a home can be measured by simply being associated with the presence of family.

Comments included;

- Living with my big brother
- Having stuff that represents my culture like a didgeridoo and boomerangs
- Living with my Nan, she makes the best food

- When your parents pay attention to you
- Being able to learn about my culture, because I don't live with my family
- Living with my mum is more important than anything
- When Mum is there, when Dad is there, when someone is home
- Having rights and being able to do what I want
- Loving
- My father, sisters and brothers are important to see. It's not my right (to see them) but I want to have a say in seeing them (but I don't)
- When you sleep in your own bed
- Where there are family and friends around and hearing my grandpa's stories
- Free to do anything... you can be who you are
- Knowing it is safe to walk the streets because you know them and they know you

What does culture mean to you?

Children and young people reflected their thoughts on culture in a global and overarching manner, indicating that culture was something that extended beyond each of themselves and united their family and community as a whole. Children and young people spoke of the material characteristics of culture, such as boomerangs and flags, but highlighted the importance of both the individual and communal power of their heritage.

Comments included;

- The word culture makes you not feel selfish
- Respect
- Kinship and Grandparents
- Mission breeds
- Knowledge passed down through family
- The word makes me feel deadly and strong
- Culture makes me express myself
- Respect our people, respect our elders
- It's everything inside of me, you can throw spears, it's how you eat...
- It makes me think of family
- Stories and dreamtime
- Culture is loose, it's big, it's everywhere, it's important because it's all around Queensland
- Culture is important, it tells you who your family are and who you are
- It is ownership of who you are
- Discovering new friends and family
- It is important so you can learn language properly, culture is part of who we are and we are losing it, it's important to be able to pass culture on to other people... the next generations
- We are losing culture because parents are so busy...

What can different organisations and the government do to keep kids safe?

Children and young people highlighted the importance of how both Government and non-government organisations interact with children and their families before making any decisions that could affect the probability of a child becoming subject to statutory intervention. Many ideas focused on interactive and educational means to 'help' a family.

Comments included;

Organisations

- PCYC programs – getting young people involved in these programs
- Youth Centres and Church for kids
- Going on group empowerment trips
- Talking to kids, not just family, when there is a problem
- Talking to aunties and uncles and teachers – these people motivate us and protect us

The Government

- Listen to us and respect us
- Tell the family, ‘We are watching you...’, tell them what is wrong so they have the chance to change
- Give the kids a choice of where they go (if they have to leave the family home)
- Giving the family help instead of just telling them what is wrong
- The Department is responsible (for young people removed from home) because they are taking kids away and then (is responsible if) kids don’t learn culture. If the Department say your parents aren’t good then they (the Department) need to be *better* than your parents.

What would you say to people who have to make decisions for or about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people?

Children and young people indicated a strong desire to have their voice heard about any decision that would affect them directly. Some children and young people suggest that they feel an air of injustice around the fact that a decision can be made to remove a child without feeling that child has made any significant contribution to the decision. Another strong message was around placing children and young people with family members to ensure they remain connected to their culture but can remain in a safe and good home.

Comments included;

- Change the decisions you make, (it’s important) to be able to stay close to friends and family
- Ask me first! Let me have a say about what happens when I’m older
- Listen to our feelings and what we like and don’t like and think about what you are doing first (before making the decision)
- Parents should have a good education
- It’s kinda like they are still doing the stolen generation
- Think about where you are going to send the kids
- Place the kid with their closest family somewhere where she will feel welcome
- Given them the chance to have their voice heard and talk the situation out

The children and young people that participated in these consultations provided valuable and insightful feedback. They highlighted family members as the dominant contributors to their well being, safety and connection to culture. The group have reflected that culture and family are intertwined and interconnected, and have expressed that connection to and contact with family might influence one’s perception of their connection to their culture; a loss of one very well may influence the lack of connection to the other. Aiming to reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in care, CREATE and QATSICPP will deliver the

messages of these Murri School students and put their voices into motion to achieve the desired changes as set forth in the Comprehensive Plan.

See pictures below...

