



Commissioner for Children and Young People
Western Australia



Children and Young People from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds Speak Out

February 2016

Suggested citation

Commissioner for Children and Young People WA (2016). Children and Young People from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds Speak Out. Commissioner for Children and Young People WA: Perth

Alternative formats

On request, large print or alternative formats can be obtained from:

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ISBN: 978-0-9925924-6-2

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Message from the Commissioner

Western Australia has a rich and culturally diverse history that has contributed strongly to the values and way of life that we all enjoy.

The cultural diversity of our youngest citizens continues to grow with 2011 data reporting that almost one in five children and young people under the age of 18 were born overseas, and more than one in 10 speak a language other than English at home.

While many children and young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds are doing well, others may have experienced trauma and significant stress in their lives, as well as difficulty settling in a new country, presenting significant challenges to their health and wellbeing.

As Commissioner for Children and Young People, one of the key functions of my work is to ensure all children and young people in WA have the opportunity to have a say about the issues that affect them, and this is even more important for those who are disadvantaged or vulnerable for any reason.

In 2015, my office asked almost 300 children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD) about the positive things in their lives, the challenges they face, their experiences settling in Australia and their hopes for the future.

This report showcases their views and places the spotlight on what is important to them and the ideas and opportunities they have identified. It is an important resource for agencies that have a role in supporting their health and wellbeing.

The consultation was undertaken using a peer consultation approach, the first time this innovative approach has been used by my office.

A group of 12 young people from CALD backgrounds, aged 18 to 25 years, worked on the project from early in the design stage. Their responsibilities included input into consultation design, data collection and assisting with analysis. The use of a peer-led approach has been central to the success and richness of this consultation.

My thanks go to the 12 consultation peer leaders who so enthusiastically and professionally sought the views of their younger peers. My thanks also go to the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia, and particularly to Lianda Gibson, for supporting and guiding the process.

Finally, I would like to thank participating schools and organisations, reference group members and, most importantly, the children and young people who took part for sharing their views and experiences.

Colin Pettit

Commissioner for Children and Young People

Message from consultation peer leaders

As young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, we were enthusiastic about working with the Commissioner's office on this consultation.

We saw it as a great opportunity to be part of a process to help improve the lives and experiences of children and young people from culturally diverse backgrounds.

We are a diverse group. Aged between 18 and 25, our birthplaces span eight different countries and between us we speak 22 languages.

For six months we worked with the Commissioner's office and the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia to record the views, ideas and experiences of nearly 300 children and young people.

We went out to schools, sporting organisations and community events. There was even a trip to Katanning!

It wasn't always easy getting some of the children and young people to talk to us but it certainly helped that we could personally relate to so many of their views and experiences.

We all know first-hand how challenging it can be to settle into a new country, as well as the frustration of not being understood, or feeling judged because of the way we look.

We could also share their feelings about the best things about living in Western Australia, including freedom, safety and opportunities.

We love that so many children and young people told us they feel positive about their futures. They have high hopes and big dreams.

For many children and young people we spoke to, this consultation was the first time someone had asked them about their lives. We feel privileged to have had the opportunity to speak to so many and to hear their important stories, and we are excited they now have the opportunity to be heard by a wider audience.

Children and young people know how they want the world to be better. They just need someone to listen and act on what they say. We hope everyone reading this report will do just that.

Consultation peer leaders:

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About the Commissioner

The Commissioner for Children and Young People is the independent advocate for all children and young people in WA aged less than 18 years.

The role of the Commissioner is described in the *Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2006*. The Act requires the Commissioner to give priority to, and have special regard to, the interests and needs of children and young people who are vulnerable or disadvantaged for any reason.

The Commissioner talks to children and young people and others in the community about what children and young people need to be healthy and reach their potential, and considers the research and evidence about children's wellbeing.

From this information the Commissioner works with children and young people, their families and government to improve policies, legislation and services that support children and young people's wellbeing.

In this consultation the Commissioner focused on hearing the views of children and young people from CALD backgrounds to better understand the unique challenges and issues they encounter that impact on their wellbeing and capacity to have a good life.

Contact us

If you require more information or would like to discuss the themes within this report in more detail, contact the Commissioner's office.

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Introduction

“Thank you. Not many people ask us what we think.”
17 year-old girl (Burma)

“This interview is the other positive experience for me because I think I’m very happy for you to ask me some questions and I can answer. I think if I answer these questions I could help other students like me who come from other countries to Australia. And my family is also very happy to let me do this interview. So I think this has been another positive experience for me.” 17 year-old girl (China)

The population of children and young people in WA is diverse. Almost one in five (18.4%) children and young people were born overseas and more than one in 10 (10.6%) speak a language other than English as the main language at home. People in the broader Western Australian population follow more than 130 religious faiths and speak approximately 220 languages and dialects (not including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages).

Children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds are a highly diverse group, and the issues and challenges they face may differ depending on: the particular cultural group with which they identify; the number of years they have been in Australia; their pathways both to Australia and once residing in Australia; and the level of community and family support they receive once they are living in Australia.

Some children and young people from CALD backgrounds (and their families) experience language barriers, feeling torn between cultures, intergenerational conflict, racism and discrimination, bullying and resettlement stress. Some have traumatic pre-migration experiences

such as family separation and loss, war, violence and immigration detention. This is particularly the case for those children and young people from a refugee background.

It is important for all children and young people’s wellbeing that they have a strong sense of identity and sense of belonging, and for children and young people from CALD backgrounds the need to develop a sense of identity and belonging in the context of both their culture of origin and the new cultural context of living in Australia can be challenging.

Since 2007, children and young people from CALD backgrounds have participated in a range of the Commissioner’s consultation projects. To build on this work, the Commissioner decided to hold consultations in 2015 to examine in greater detail the wellbeing of this substantial part of the WA child and youth population.

Consistent with the Commissioner’s statutory functions, the focus of the consultation was on those children and young people from CALD backgrounds who are particularly vulnerable, such as refugees and recent migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds¹.

¹ For the purposes of this consultation the term CALD does not include children and young people from the many diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural and language groups represented in WA. Information about the Commissioner’s 2014 consultation with more than 1,200 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people can be found at www.ccp.wa.gov.au



“I’m with my parents, new friends and I got the chance to go to school.”

Methodology

In undertaking consultations with children and young people the Commissioner works collaboratively with organisations and the broader community to inform the project and to ensure engagement with children and young people from a broad range of backgrounds.

Reference Group

A Reference Group was established to inform the development and implementation of the consultation. The Reference Group included representatives from the government, community, education and research sectors, as well as young people from CALD backgrounds. Members of the Reference Group are listed on page 33.

Peer leaders

The consultation with children and young people from CALD backgrounds is the first time the Commissioner has used a peer consultation approach.

The Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA) was engaged by the Commissioner to support a group of young people aged between 18 and 25 years from CALD backgrounds to undertake consultations with their younger peers.

The 12 consultation peer leaders live in suburbs across the Perth metropolitan area. Between them, they speak 22 languages and represent eight different countries of birth.

Consultation methods

The peer leaders helped to create a **survey** for young people up to the age of 18 years, then supported young people in their local community to complete the survey (see Appendix One).

The peer leaders delivered the survey in different ways, depending on the preference of the participating child or young person. For example, answers could be written by the participant or scribed by the peer leader. The survey could be delivered in English or in another language if this was spoken by the peer leader.



Peer leaders were also supported by staff from YACWA and the Commissioner's office to run some small group consultation activities.

Staff from the Commissioner's office and one of the consultation peer leaders visited Katanning to ensure the consultation heard from children and young people living in regional WA.



An **online survey** was also developed using Survey Monkey to enable any child or young person from a CALD background living in Western Australia to participate in the consultation.

A total of 296 children and young people participated in the survey.

As a means of obtaining more detailed information from children and young people, survey participants were asked to indicate if they were interested in participating in a longer **one-on-one interview**. These interviews discussed in greater depth their experiences and views about settling in Australia. Twenty-one interviews were conducted with children and young people by the peer leaders.

Fifteen survey participants also shared their personal stories as short **case studies**. Their stories are recorded in the companion publication *'This is Me'*.

About the participants

Gender

Participants in the consultation represented a diverse range of children and young people from CALD backgrounds including refugees, recent migrants, international students and children whose parents live in Australia on working visas.

Gender	Number	Per cent
Boy	132	44.6
Girl	158	53.4
Prefer not to say	6	2.0
Total	296	100



Birthplace

More than 50 different countries were recorded as the birthplace of children and young people in this consultation. They include:

Afghanistan	Hong Kong	The Netherlands	South Africa
Africa*	India	New Zealand	South Korea
Azerbaijan	Indonesia	Pakistan	South Sudan
Bangladesh	Iran	Palestine	Sri Lanka
Botswana	Iraq	Papua New Guinea	Sudan
Burma/Myanmar**	Italy	Philippines	Syria
China	Japan	Puerto Rico	Tanzania
Cook Islands	Kenya	Qatar	Thailand
Congo	Kuwait	Romania	Uganda
Cyprus	Lebanon	Rwanda	USA
Egypt	Liberia	Senegal	Vietnam
Eritrea	Malaysia	Singapore	Zambia
Ethiopia	Nepal	Somalia	Zimbabwe
France			

* While Africa is not a country, it was the response provide by five participants to indicate where they were born.

**Some children and young people use Burma, others Myanmar. This publication uses whichever term the child or young person used.

Note: 'Place of birth' does not necessarily indicate ethnicity. Some children and young people were born in refugee camps or their parents were otherwise displaced from their country of origin. For example, a child who indicates they were born in Thailand may be a child of Karen refugees from Burma.

A small number (21) of children and young people were born in Australia and have refugee or migrant parents.

Location

Most children and young people who participated in the consultation live in the Perth metropolitan area, with others living in Mandurah and the Peel region. There were 18 participants who live in regional WA, including Broome, Kalgoorlie, Katanning, Busselton and Margaret River.

Age

The children and young people ranged in age from five to 17 years. An additional 37 young people who completed the question were older than 17 years.

Age	Number	Per cent
8 years or under	19	6.4
9 years	11	3.7
10 years	15	5.1
11 years	31	10.5
12 years	19	6.4
13 years	15	5.1
14 years	29	9.8
15 years	60	20.3
16 years	35	11.8
17 years	62	20.9
Total	296	100

Time in Australia

The 250 children and young people who completed this question reported they have lived in Australia for periods ranging from one week to 17 years.

Length of time in Australia	Number	Per cent
Less than 6 months	10	4.0
6 months to 1 year	27	10.8
More than 1 year to less than 3 years	29	11.6
3 to 5 years	54	21.6
More than 5 years to 10 years	103	41.2
More than 10 years	27	10.8
Total	250	100

Most children and young people moved to Australia with their families. Usually they travelled with at least one parent; sometimes with siblings or a member of their extended family, for example, 'my aunt' or 'grandmother'. However, 13 young people came to Australia on their own.



“Australia is a multicultural country and you get to learn about other people’s culture.”

Summary of themes

The best things about life in Australia

Children and young people were asked to name up to three of the best things about their life in Australia. Common responses included:

- family, friends and school
- sport
- freedom and safety, some talked about freedom from war, violence or fear, while girls and young women spoke about having the freedom to participate more fully in society
- opportunities, including in education and employment and the potential to have a successful future. They recognised that to make the most of these opportunities they would have to apply themselves and work hard
- the comparative ease of access to food, housing and health care.

Settling in

Just over half found settling in to Australia ‘quite easy’ or ‘very easy’. A further 38 per cent found settling in ‘okay’. The remaining one in ten found settling in quite hard or very hard.

In response to this question, children and young people said:

- there were challenges to settling in Australia, but those that had been in Australia for a while said they feel they fit in much better now
- it was important, but sometimes difficult, to learn English and many felt a real sense of achievement when they felt they were able to

communicate effectively, but it also impacted on their ability to communicate at home in their first language

- one of the things they find most difficult about being in Australia is being separated from family, particularly if the family members overseas could be exposed to trauma or hardship
- teachers are more supportive, school more ‘fun’ and teachers less ‘scary’
- because of the views and expectations of their parents, or the requirements of their culture or religion, they may not be able to do things that other children and young people can, and this can impact their friendships and social activities
- it was important for them to make friends and find people who they can trust and connect with
- a small number said they have found it hard to feel like they belong here because they are seen as different.

Racism, bullying, discrimination and stereotyping

These topics were frequently raised by children and young people during the consultations, including being identified among the things they found most difficult about living in Australia.

Children and young people said:

- they believe racism can be addressed through education and opportunities for people to learn about different cultures
- they feel that the perpetuation of stereotypes and negative images in the media exacerbates racism and that people should learn not to judge them based on this reporting or on one-off incidents.

How could things be improved?

Common ideas raised included:

- more support settling in to Australia including practical assistance, advice on the availability of services and access to social activities
- more widespread understanding about cultural difference and more culturally appropriate service delivery
- assistance with education and learning English.

Accessing help and support

When asked where they go when they need help or support, children and young people spoke about:

- the support of family, friends and school
- other multiple sources of advice and help available including police, school staff and service providers
- use of online sources (a small number only)
- when seeking help, having a support person who speaks English well, or who has been in Australia for some time, was important
- a few found it difficult to find support that they feel comfortable with.

The future

The vast majority (82%) of children and young people surveyed felt positive or very positive about the future. Of the remaining children and young people, 15 per cent felt neither positive or negative about their future, three per cent felt a bit negative, and only one young person felt very negative about the future.²

Responses from children and young people included:

- varied career goals, from professional careers to sports and music
- a recognition that some future plans differ from what their parents would like them to do
- wanting a job that would help other people.



² The responses of a small number of young people participating in the consultation prompted some concern about their welfare. Where the identity of these young people was known, follow-up included personal contact from a member of the project team and, where appropriate, referral to external sources of support. Anonymous respondents to the online survey who needed support were directed to a list of appropriate youth and community organisations.

The best things about life in Australia

Children and young people were asked to name up to three of the best things about their life in Australia. In many areas the views of children and young people from CALD backgrounds were consistent with the views of other children the Commissioner has consulted. In other ways however, their responses differ quite markedly, providing insight as to what they may have experienced before coming to live in WA.

Family, friends and school

Family and friends were commonly identified as the best things in their lives. School, including enjoying school, having the opportunity to attend school and having the opportunity to receive a better education, was also frequently raised.

“I’m with my parents, new friends and I got the chance to go to school.” 15 year-old girl (Philippines)

“At school there are both girls and boys together and I have friends that are girls. My teacher is very helpful and kind.” 14 year-old boy (Iran)

“Having a better education, learning new things and being closer with my family members.” 14 year-old girl (Liberia)

Sport

Sport was frequently identified as one of the best things about living in Australia. While AFL and soccer were particularly popular, a diverse range of sporting opportunities were mentioned including athletics, netball, basketball and cycling.

“I play soccer, and I have won best player and top scorer, and I have won a medal for running, for coming first place, yes, and learning English, which is the three achievements I have done.” 17 year-old (Afghanistan)

“Being able to go to school and getting an education, but also playing social sports with clubs such as AFL or soccer.” 16 year-old boy (Botswana)

“Playing netball, going to school and hanging out with my friends.” 13 year-old girl (Egypt)

“It is safe, sport, sport carnival.” 12 year-old boy (Pakistan)

“Playing AFL, school, finding new friends.” 11 year-old girl (Uganda)



“The freedom to have a decision and make choices, and the freedom to live the life I’ve always wanted to.”

Freedom, peace and security

Many children and young people identified freedom and safety as among the best things about their life in Australia. The term ‘freedom’ was used in different ways. Some children and young people talked about freedom from war, violence or fear. Girls and young women spoke about having the freedom to participate more fully in society.

“Safety, religion, freedom, school.” 13 year-old boy (Sudan)

“The freedom is better. In Sudan girls are not allowed to go out because it’s dangerous, you can’t go out at night.” 15 year-old girl (Sudan)

“Not having to worry about wars and people burning our houses.” 12 year-old girl (Thailand)

“The freedom to have a decision and make choices, and the freedom to live the life I’ve always wanted to.” 16 year-old girl (Kenya)

“...since coming to Australia I have much more freedom and girls and women have their rights to do whatever they want to do here so it’s been really good so far.” 17 year-old girl from (Afghanistan).



Opportunity

Children and young people said they have lots of opportunities living in Australia. They spoke about opportunities in terms of education and employment and saw Australia as offering them the potential to have a successful future. They recognised that to make the most of these opportunities they would have to apply themselves and work hard.

“Opportunities are much more achievable here and if you work hard you will be a successful person in the future. I have much more freedom in Australia.” 16 year-old boy (Burma)

“It’s a nice country, so much freedom and opportunity.” 17 year-old girl (Burma)

“So I think I’m very, very blessed and lucky to be here ‘cause I’m going to make something out of myself.” 18 year-old female (Zimbabwe)

“I have a lot of opportunities to achieve things in life.” 14 year-old girl (Congo)

“The opportunity to study human biology at a multicultural school that encourages its students to be successful. More freedom. Open-minded people around me in the community.” 17 year-old girl (Uganda)

“Multicultural society, helpful environment.”

Food, housing and health

Reflecting on their experiences before coming to Australia, children and young people said the best things about Australia included access to food, housing and health care.

“The housing is a lot better here. I get my own room so that’s one thing! I get my own privacy. With health, it’s a lot better because it’s better with science. You get a lot of vaccinations, free vaccinations, especially for younger people, students. You get a lot of health support, free health support.” 16 year-old girl (Iran).

“Better living condition, e.g. health, housing, education.” 15 year-old boy (Myanmar)

“We are more healthy.” 16 year-old girl (Senegal)

Multiculturalism

Being around people from different countries was seen by children and young people as one of the best things about their life in Australia.

“The country’s diversity.” 14 year-old girl (Uganda)

“Multicultural society, helpful environment.” 16 year-old girl (India)

“Australia is a multicultural country and you get to learn about other people’s culture.” 12 year-old girl (Thailand)

“It’s a good country, there’s lots of different cultures so that’s a big positive, and I guess I’ve learned to look at people from, not on the outside, you know, learn to know people before you actually say anything about them.” 18 year-old male (Malawi)

Australian environment

Some children and young people identified the Australian environment (natural and built) as one of the best things about living here, for example the weather, beaches and theme parks.

“Australia has got beautiful beaches with friendly people all around, especially in Perth where I currently live.” 16 year-old boy (Afghanistan)

“The beaches.” 11 year-old boy (Azerbaijan)

“Theme parks, houses, services and churches.” 14 year-old girl (Liberia)

“Australia is a very clean country.” 11 year-old girl (India)

“[Clean] air, not so many people.”
17 year-old girl (China)

“Beautiful places and wild nature.” 17 year-old boy (Thailand)



Settling in

Children and young people were asked to rate how easy or hard they found settling in, or 'fitting in', to Australia.

Just over half of the children and young people who completed this question found settling in 'quite easy' or 'very easy'. A further 38 per cent found settling in 'okay'. Many children and young people who have lived in Australia for more than two years noted how difficult it was when they first arrived but said they feel they fit in much better now. A small number said they have found it hard to feel like they belong because they are seen as different.

How difficult was it to fit into Australia?	Number	Per cent
Very easy	54	19.2
Quite easy	92	32.7
Okay	108	38.5
Quite hard	19	6.8
Very hard	8	2.8
Total	281	100

"I found it easy to fit in and adapt." 17 year-old girl (Puerto Rico)

"I think I'm fitting in better than I was when I [first] came." 11 year-old girl (Kenya)

"When I come to Australia I was feeling so alone and sad but now I am so happy and I like Australia." 15 year-old girl (Afghanistan)

"Adjusting to the atmosphere and environment here is hard when you're used to what you were born in, but once you're settled here it ends up being the best place ever I suppose." 17 year-old girl (Zimbabwe)

"It was sort of easy [to settle in] because there were some other people who were from where we came from and they were already in Australia, so they kind of helped us." 15 year-old girl (Tanzania)

"Yeah, sometimes I'm a troubled person and I sort of bend the rules, break the rules, and that causes problems in the house and I feel like maybe if I wasn't here, maybe if I was back in Africa it would all be better, because around here all people try to do is fit in." 16 year-old boy (Uganda)

"When people discuss things with migrants I feel like they set us apart as different and that we shouldn't really be here." 15 year-old girl (South Sudan)

"And one thing that I'd say was the most depressive thing in my whole life was when, I think it was actually Year 3, I used to have these weird thoughts about how there was a machine that could scrub you to the point you were lighter... I just didn't think that it was normal to be dark... TV shows and everything like everyone was white or white skinned, it just didn't make sense." 13 year-old girl (Rwanda)



Learning English

The importance, and often difficulty, of learning English featured highly in the consultation. For many children and young people there was a real sense of achievement when they felt they were able to communicate effectively. Others spoke about the challenge of learning and using English without that impacting on their ability to speak their first language and, in particular, to speak with parents and grandparents in this language.

More than 60 per cent of the children and young people who completed the question said they speak English at home 'sometimes' or 'never'.

How often do you speak English at home?	Number	Per cent
Always	52	18.0
Almost always	60	20.8
Sometimes	154	53.2
Never	23	8.0
Total	289	100

"I didn't know any language, any English, when I first came here and it was difficult for me especially for the first six months but for the first year as well. Adapting to the language and I had to talk Farsi at home and English at school. Sometimes I'd get it all mixed up. So the language was a big thing at first when we moved but because I came here at such a young age I was really fast to adapt to the language and I learnt it." 16 year-old girl (Iran)

"People speak too fast." 9 year-old boy (Sri Lanka)

"On one side it's good that I've learnt another language. I can talk to other people and get myself out of trouble, if that makes sense. But whereas on the other side, I'm starting to forget Farsi, my own language a little bit, since I talk English in my house and at school and at other places." 17 year-old girl (Afghanistan)

"No opportunity to speak your language outside home." 9 year-old girl (parents born in Afghanistan)

"Now my English has improved a lot so sometimes I can help other new students who can't speak English very fluently, I can help them to explain or to solve their problem and I felt a belonging and a part of Australia. It's a good feeling for me. When I found out, 'oh, I can help other students. I can help other people', I felt really happy." 17 year-old girl (China)

Children and young people told us it is hard when their parents don't speak English very well. They may be called upon to help, including being asked to translate in potentially upsetting situations like in the hospital or when people make racist comments.

"We have to translate for our parents. Especially at the hospital." 12 year-old girl (Thailand)

"Our parents not knowing how to speak English and it's very difficult in Australia if you don't know how to speak English." 12 year-old girl (Thailand)

"Helping my family to catch the bus to where meeting new people, and helping the family to go to the shop, because my Mum can't speak English very well she finds it difficult to leave the house on her own. She will not understand anything when she leaves without me and my sister." 16 year-old boy (Burma)

School

Some children and young people see school in Australia as easier than in the country they lived previously, with teachers seen as more supportive, school more 'fun' and teachers less 'scary'.

"School has been great, learning new things and meeting new friends. Since I have great education, I am sure to have a lot of opportunities."
15 year-old girl (Congo)

"But when I came here, everything [at school] was so much easier. If you didn't understand, the teacher would take time to sit down with you and really explain it to you. And they had like after-school curriculum class where you can go and get extra practise as well. Yeah, so education is better here."
18 year-old female (Zimbabwe)

"The first six months were really hard for me, especially at school. I couldn't understand what the teacher was saying. I went to school and they had an English program running for kids who just came to Australia and so that was really helpful. I was surrounded by other people who had just arrived and we were learning together."
16 year-old girl (Iran)

"They have sent assistant teachers to our class. They help us. They stay in our class and when we have problems they'll come to us and they are very patient and explain the problem and the question. If we don't understand they will think of other ways to solve the question."
17 year-old girl (China)

For others, particularly those with limited schooling, school can be very difficult. Some children and young people identified that they would have liked more support in school. Others said they believe the teachers have lower expectations of them because of their background.

"One of the most difficult things is school – hard to understand, too much work, homework."
14 year-old girl (Uganda)

"Studying is hard and learning system is different."
16 year-old boy (Zimbabwe)

"When you first come there isn't much help with school work and other things that children need help with."
16 year-old girl (Kenya)

"Teachers aren't supporting me to do the highest [courses]."
18 year-old male (Afghanistan)

"The teachers underestimate me [because I am from Africa]."
17 year-old boy (Rwanda)

Children and young people who attend schools where there are higher populations of students from CALD backgrounds report feeling a greater sense of belonging than in circumstances where they feel they are one of only a few students who look different.

"Well the thing is I don't hate education, I don't mind, I do enjoy learning, I just don't like my actual school ha ha! I feel like since it's a new school and there's not that many black students, they just don't know what to do."
13 year-old girl (Rwanda)

"I graduated Intensive English Centre and went to [another school] and that school didn't have a lot of refugees from other countries. I had friends in that school but some of them were racist... they were just like making fun of me, like 'you're an Arab' and stuff like that – which wasn't good..."
15 year-old boy (Afghanistan)

"When I first came there was people from different places, I had many friends from different countries and it was so much fun. And the teachers were very understanding."
13 year-old girl (Rwanda)

“It’s very hard to fit in because people judge you before they get to know you.”

Separation from family

Many children and young people said that one of the things they find most difficult about being in Australia is being separated from family. For some children and young people this feeling is exacerbated by the concern that their family overseas is being exposed to trauma and hardship while they themselves are living a more comfortable life in Australia.

“I don’t have a happy feeling [about other members of my family not living in Australia] because we might be living here having a lot more freedom than they do there. They’re living near wars and stuff, people getting killed and stuff, it’s kind of sad... I feel sad when I think about my family that is in Afghanistan.” 17 year-old girl (Afghanistan)

“What I have found difficult living in Australia is that I have no parents and I find it hard sometimes looking after myself.” 18 year-old male (Afghanistan)

“Sometimes my mum and my dad miss their daughter [who is still living in Thailand], their niece and nephews and they little bit cry.” 16 year-old boy (Burma)

“Not having family support like grandparents.” 15 year-old boy (South Africa)



Pull between cultures

Some children and young people said that because of the views and expectations of their parents, or the requirements of their culture or religion, they may not be able to do things that other children and young people can. This can impact on children and young people’s friendships and their participation in social and recreational activities. It can also affect their ability to feel that they ‘fit in’.

“Sometimes it’s a bit hard with my mum because obviously she grew up in a different background, with a different kind of childhood and it’s kind of hard to get her to understand where we are right now, to kind of understand our friend groups and the culture here.” 16 year-old girl (Iran)

“We had a school camp so we had to wear shorts so I went and bought like a few pairs of shorts. They were not like short, they were just up to here and my mum cut them all with scissors.” 18 year-old female (Zimbabwe)

“They don’t always get to meet up with their friends ‘cause they have to stay at home. Some parents don’t let their children go out into the world.” 17 year-old boy (Thailand)

“Life in here is different for a teenager than how it is in Afghanistan, because they [my parents] expect me to live like a teenager back there, hard-working and always studying and not having enough time.” 17 year-old boy (Afghanistan)

Making friends

Making friends and finding people who you can trust and connect with was identified as a high priority. Children and young people spoke about how difficult it can be to make friends in a new country, particularly when you look or act differently, or have trouble understanding English.

“It’s very hard to fit in because people judge you before they get to know you.” 15 year-old girl (Uganda)

“Yeah, I didn’t know how to be myself. I thought maybe if I acted white then I would – they would accept me as one of them. No one wanted to be my friend, I was black. I was different.” 18 year-old female (Zimbabwe)

“At times I feel I was denied of joining groups due to my nationality, but at the same time I was able to meet people who knew how I felt or felt the same as me.” 17 year-old girl (India)

“Recently I got new friends and they are Australian. I want to tell you about my experience. Recently I found if you can be confident and friendly, try to talk to other people, you will find... because when I arrived in Australia a few months ago I was afraid of talking to other people, I was afraid of talking to Australians because they can speak English very well but I can’t. Recently I tried, I tried to talk to them and I found that they are really nice and helpful, and friendly. We became good friends. So I want to tell other people, other students who come from other countries like me, the students who can’t speak English very well, I want to tell them – don’t be shy, try to talk to local people – Australians and the other students. I found Australians are really nice and friendly so if you try to talk to them I think they will like to talk to you, play with you, yeah.” 17 year-old girl (China)

Learning how to do things and get to places

Many children and young people described how things that most people take for granted were confusing and strange. Many spoke about not knowing how things work in Australia, including rules and how to find their way around.

“I remember the plane ride [coming to Australia] and food, and how we first got the butter and we didn’t realise what it was – and then we got the soap and we thought it was food.” 13 year-old girl (Rwanda)

“Navigating the city – confusing.” 15 year-old boy (Thailand)

“The most thing I found hard about Australia is to follow the rules.” 14 year-old girl (Sudan)

“The most difficult things have been a) getting an A in English; b) being discriminated by [the shopping centre] security guards; c) how the government works.” 16 year-old boy (Sudan)

“Another thing was shopping was different. Shops were so different here. It was so much more traditional over there. The technology was really different. The culture of the people were different. Things that were in the TV were really different and having to adapt to that. I remember for the first week that we came here, once we got lost it was me, my sister and my mum, and we didn’t know anywhere and we were lost around the city. Luckily we found the cops and they helped us out and they took us home.” 16 year-old girl (Iran)



Constant moving around

Children and young people from CALD backgrounds spoke about having experienced moving house and school a number of times since settling in Australia, making it difficult to make and maintain friendships.

Transitions, including moving to a new school, from an Intensive English Centre to mainstream school, or to high school from primary school, were frequently identified as challenging.

“The most difficult things about living in Australia have been getting to know new people, changing schools.” 14 year-old girl (Sudan)

“The fact that I had to move schools a lot [has been difficult] and having to make new friends. Also the fact that you are different from others, and racism.” 14 year-old girl (Uganda)

“Moving schools/house.”
11 year-old girl boy (Sudan)

“I still do feel isolated sometimes, especially because I recently moved school again and all my friends have been in the other school so it still kind of makes me feel alone.” 16 year-old girl (Iran)



Transport

Children and young people said that transport is one of the most difficult things about their lives in Australia and that they waste a lot of time getting to school and to other places. Getting a driver's licence is very important but presents significant challenges.

“Transperth, public transport thing, isn't really that nice.” 15 year-old girl (Tanzania)

“Getting driving licence.” 17 year-old boy (Somalia)

“Going to school, because it is far from my house.”
14 year-old boy (Malaysia)

“I think [we should be given] time in school to learn how to drive a car.” 16 year-old boy (Syria)



“Instead of people just supporting you they should really understand you.”

Employment, housing and money

Employment, housing and finances featured strongly in both the best and most difficult things in children and young people’s lives. Some children said they worried about their ability (or their parents’ ability) to find a job and to be able to meet financial commitments.

“Going to work, having a good living, getting a good job.” 16 year-old boy (Zimbabwe)

“Sometimes I just worry about money. Because the school fees are very expensive. Because I don’t want that my parents are living not well, that they are poor, I don’t want that so sometimes I worry about the money. And I try to, I really want to find a job so I can get some money to support myself but it’s very hard to find a job. My English is not very good. So probably the money is the problem I worry about.” 17 year-old girl (China)

“I reckon my whole family is kinda surviving, so ...it’s a struggle, like, paying the bills and food and stuff, it’s kinda hard.” 18 year-old male (Malawi)

“The most difficult thing about living in Australia has been mum getting a job.” 14 year-old boy

“Finding a house.” 15 year-old girl (Uganda)



How could things be improved?

Children and young people were asked how the things they found difficult could be improved. Often they said they did not know but some said they would have liked more support settling in to Australia. Other young people said they wanted more widespread understanding about cultural difference and more culturally appropriate service delivery.

“Instead of people just supporting you they should really understand you.” 17 year-old boy (Thailand)

“Well I think if you’re going to have psychologists, they should probably teach them more on how to approach students from different backgrounds.” 18 year-old female (Zimbabwe)

General welcome and greater settlement assistance were suggested by some children and young people, including support from people of the same, or a similar, culture.

“Community organisations could be more active and create some programs to engage people with Australian culture, history, lifestyle, etc.” 16 year-old boy (Afghanistan)

“There needs to be some system in place that informs people about all the services and potential future services available.” 16 year-old girl (Kenya)

“Have someone from similar cultures take them around and show them how to do things.” 12 year-old girl (Thailand)

“Make a small group of people that speak the person’s language and make a small group for some fun things.” 14 year-old girl (Sudan)

“I need volunteers to help me learn English faster.”

Assistance with education and learning English were also seen as important areas for improvement.

“Maybe need a little bit of more time for English. Need one more year [in the Intensive English Centre].” 16 year-old boy (Burma)

“I need volunteers to help me learn English faster.” 15 year-old girl (Afghanistan)

“Bilingual teachers that can speak my language.” 10 year-old boy (Iran)

“Provide tutoring and help for children that need it.” 15 year-old girl (Burma)

Some children and young people said that things could be improved if they made changes to their behaviour including by working harder in school or making a greater effort to make friends.

“I should read books and do my homework. I should tell my teacher if people bully me.” 10 year-old girl (Uganda)

“I have to work hard to learn the language as soon as possible.” 14 year-old boy (Iran)

“I could concentrate harder and be more confident to open up to new people.”
11 year-old girl (Indonesia)



Racism, bullying, discrimination and stereotyping

Although specific questions about racism or discrimination were not included in the survey, these topics were frequently raised by children and young people during the consultations, including being identified among the things they found most difficult about living in Australia.

During the interview stage of the consultation, many children and young people wanted to share detailed stories of these incidents.

“Racism is probably one of the main things that people face a lot. I’ve seen a lot of racism.” 17 year-old boy (Thailand)

“I think every Muslim girl, every person who comes from other countries, they all experience racism, and being bullied, being different. I think everyone – every Muslim girl or woman – would experience this.” 17 year-old girl (Afghanistan)

“Racism among my peers has been a major contributor in making my life in Australia hard. Not only am I susceptible to racism by my peers, but also by both adults and a majority of primary children.” 16 year-old boy (Botswana)

“Sometimes when you go into a shop the cashier lady looks at you like you’re going to take something just ‘cause you’re different.” 13 year-old girl (Zimbabwe)

“The first thing that everyone sees, even before I talk, they know that I’m a Muslim and they make certain assumptions about me based on that and their attitude changes, some of them. You kind of get offended when someone stereotypes you and makes assumptions about you based on other things that are going on around the world

without having any knowledge, especially with kids because they’re not educated enough to understand the knowledge and have the understanding that not everything is what’s in TV and not everything is what you hear from your parents. It was a bit difficult to do that but I was lucky enough to find a really good group of friends who were around and who supported me through that.” 16 year-old girl (Iran)

“When I came I didn’t know how to speak English. People made fun of me when I was younger, when I didn’t know how to speak English. They used to call me stupid and stuff and I thought I should just give up, I don’t want to do this anymore.” 15 year-old girl (Sudan)



How could this be improved?

Children and young people frequently said that they believe racism can be addressed through education and opportunities for people to learn about different cultures.

Some children and young people said they feel the perpetuation of stereotypes and negative images in the media exacerbates racism and that people should learn not to judge them based on this reporting or on one-off incidents.

“More education to Aussie kids on people from different background.”
17 year-old girl (Afghanistan)

“Allow more opportunities for different cultures to be learnt about and understood.” 17 year-old girl (India)

“To love everyone, no matter their skin colour.” 15 year-old girl
(Zimbabwe)

“They could be improved by teaching them our culture so they learn more and I could learn about theirs.” 13 year-old girl (Uganda)

“Help kids feel more comfortable in their surroundings and educating kids that it’s okay to be different.” 14 year-old girl (Uganda)

“I think Australia should have classes with children from all over the world. They could teach each other about where they come from. And people that could help them translate.” 13 year-old boy (Sudan)

“They should learn to treat people equally and not to judge everyone for one person’s mistakes.” 15 year-old girl (Afghanistan)

Some children and young people view racism as inevitable, something to be endured, while others talked about how their own attitude and actions can reduce its impact on them personally.

“Really isn’t something you can change, but I guess you learn to deal with it easier as time progresses.” 16 year-old boy (Botswana)

“Just as long as I don’t think about it I can move on.” 11 year-old girl (Australia)



“I think my parents are my number one support. They’ve always helped me.”

Accessing help and support

Children and young people said they go to family, friends and school when they need help or support. Many children and young people identified that they have multiple sources of advice and help, both informal and formal, for example police, school representatives and service providers. Some acknowledged that it might be important for the person from whom they seek help to speak or understand English better than they do, or to have lived in Australia for a longer time.

Family, friends and school

“I think my parents are my number one support. They’ve always helped me.” 17 year-old boy (Kuwait)

“I’m a very independent person, but family is great to have and be around. If I ever needed help or support they’d be the first stop.” 16 year-old boy (Botswana)

“My brother’s English is better so I ask him for help and my teachers.” 14 year-old boy (Sudan)

“I most of the time ask my mates or when I’m at school have chat with teacher.” 16 year-old boy (Afghanistan)

“Teachers, and other Burmese who were here longer.” 16 year-old boy (Burma)

“My horses or favourite teachers.” 17 year-old girl (Puerto Rico)

In the community

Some children spoke about religious, sporting and community organisations as sources of support or help.

“Sometimes I need help I go to Fremantle Multicultural Centre.” 18 year-old male (Ethiopia)

“Family friends, Kids Helpline.” 14 year-old girl (Kenya)

“I go to mum or dad or local church pastor.” 13 year-old boy (Sudan)

“Youth centre or school.” 17 year-old girl (New Zealand)

“Ask homestay for help.” 17 year-old boy (China)

Online

A small number of children and young people said they go online for help.

“Computer.” 18 year-old male (China)

“headspace online.” 17 year-old girl (Uganda)



"I don't really ask for help... I just face it myself..."

Difficulty finding support

Other children and young people have difficulty finding support that they feel comfortable accessing. Some do not know what services are available to them. Others prefer to try and solve any difficulties on their own without external help or support.

"I am aware of [sources of support outside my family] but personally I haven't had the confidence to go up to them. I've always been really shy and not confident about myself I guess. I didn't have the confidence so I always asked my parents for help and if I had any issues I'd ask and tell them about it, but I haven't gone to chaplains and stuff."

17 year-old girl (Afghanistan)

"In Australia I've found that sometimes I want to explain my problem or my question to someone or my teacher. I always feel I can't explain very well and if my teacher doesn't understand my question I feel very upset. I've found that it's the hardest thing to explain something."

17 year-old girl (China)

"I don't really ask for help... I just face it myself... I guess I'm afraid that people you know, they may help you out, but sometimes behind you they can laugh at you, they can talk, they can tell other people in bad way, yep."

17 year-old boy (Thailand)

"There's a lot of services out here to help people but I wasn't really exposed to these services except for like the chaplain at school but I never really talked to them 'cause I thought I could manage everything by myself but that didn't turn out so good."

16 year-old boy (Uganda)



The future

When asked how they saw their future, more than 80 per cent of children and young people who completed the question saw their future as a bit or very positive.

How do you feel about your future in Australia?	Number	Per cent
Very positive	115	42.1
A bit positive	109	39.9
Not positive or negative	40	14.7
A bit negative	8	2.9
Very negative	1	0.4
Total	273	100

Many children and young people identified that they and their families feel positive about being in Australia and that they feel grateful for the opportunity to live here.

“Australia is an amazing country and I’m proud to be an Australian.”
11 year-old girl (India)

“It is all very interesting and the experiences I have had in Australia is amazing even though there have been some hard times I have got through them and continued life.” 14 year-old girl (Liberia)

“I feel like I’ve settled really well in Australia, even though my background was really different and I couldn’t really understand anything. Definitely I feel positive about my future. I’m an optimist. Every time I can think back to when I was in Iran it just makes me feel

so lucky that I have the opportunity to go to uni, to pursue whatever study I want to do, to do what I want to do. So I definitely do feel positive about my future and I definitely would like to think that the future has really good things waiting for me.” 16 year-old girl (Iran)

Children and young people identified a variety of career goals, from professional careers to sports and music.

“Join the Australian Navy and work as a technician analysis submariner, e.g. fix weapons systems and sonar.” 15 year-old boy (South Africa)

“Study laboratory medicine at Curtin University and hopefully become a pathologist; be happy.” 17 year-old girl (Uganda)

“I really like sports; my determination is become a personal trainer.”
16 year-old boy (Afghanistan)

“Become a singer, YouTuber, designer, social worker, BUT... mainly someone that is looked up to and a good role model.”
15 year-old girl (Congo)

“World famous dancer (if possible) or own my own company in fashion and beauty salon.” 17 year-old girl (Sudan)



Family feature in some children and young people's ambitions, with some identifying that their future plans differ from what their parents would like them to do.

"Be living with all my family, go to UWA and become a doctor."
14 year-old girl (Sudan)

"Become something that satisfies my family." 14 year-old girl (Congo)

"My parents want me to be a doctor and I'm not very good at that. I want to be a teacher." 18 year-old male (Tanzania)

Many identified wanting a job that would help other people.

"Be able to make a difference in people's life and become a nurse."
18 year-old women (Rwanda)

"I would like to pass my WACE exams and take courses in political science and law in the hope of making the world a better place as a politician." 16 year-old boy (Kenya)

"Be a doctor and help people." 10 year-old girl (Uganda)

"Try and change the lives of others just like me to make it that much better." 13 year-old boy (Sudan)

"I'd really want to become a police officer, why? I've seen lots of friends working in shops where they are putting things on shelf or cashier. My opinion that's not really helping people with anything, I want to become a police officer because I believe in giving people a hand and help them out." 17 year-old boy (Thailand)

Further study was recognised as important to fulfilling their goals.

"In the future I want to focus on my studies more, hopefully become a nurse." 15 year-old girl (Afghanistan)

"I would like to go to university to study law." 17 year-old boy (Italy)



“Try and change the lives of others just like me to make it that much better.”

Conclusion

The children and young people who participated in this consultation shared valuable views and insights about their lives and experiences. Most of them are doing well and feel positive about their future. The majority are happy to be living in Australia and feel grateful for the opportunity to participate in school and live in safety, peace and freedom.

Their families, friends and school are all important positive aspects of their lives. Many also see sporting and other recreational activities as a source of happiness, as well as important for making friends and keeping fit. They identify diverse career and life goals with helping other people a common theme in how they see their future.

Children and young people also identified a range of challenges and barriers that impact on their wellbeing, including difficulty making friends and learning English, being separated from family, and intergenerational conflict. A significant number of children and young people also reported being subject to racism and discrimination.

Learning English was commonly raised as one of the biggest challenges faced when settling in Australia. Being able to communicate effectively is vital to wellbeing. Language proficiency is also closely linked to social participation and making friends. Many identified the support they received at school in Intensive English Centres as critical, others would like more support to learn English both within school and in the community. Particular support is needed for those students during the transition to mainstream classes.

The views of children and young people in this consultation clearly

indicate the importance of building the capacity of families from CALD backgrounds to support their children. This includes providing access to quality, culturally appropriate parenting programs and support services, such as adults access to English classes, health care and stable housing.

Some of the children and young people who participated in the consultation carry significant responsibilities. They feel pressure to do well in school, to care for younger siblings and to contribute to the household budget. Many experience moving house and changing schools relatively frequently, or travelling significant distances on public transport to attend school. These responsibilities and experiences can impact on their education and general wellbeing, including their ability to participate in sport, cultural and social activities.

Most of the children and young people who were consulted said that when they need help they seek support from their parents or other family members. Others have difficulty accessing family support for a range of reasons, including those who are in Australia as unaccompanied minors, who are estranged from their family or whose parents lack the capacity to provide support due to significant pre-migration trauma, cultural beliefs, limited English language skills or limited education.



Those children and young people who seek support outside their family face a range of challenges, including language difficulties, shame, lack of awareness of support services and a shortage of culturally appropriate support.

School was identified as playing a central role as a source of support. Some children and young people were happy with the support they received from school and others clearly struggled to have their needs met. Many children and young people said they want teachers and school staff to have high expectations of them and to support them as they strive to meet these.

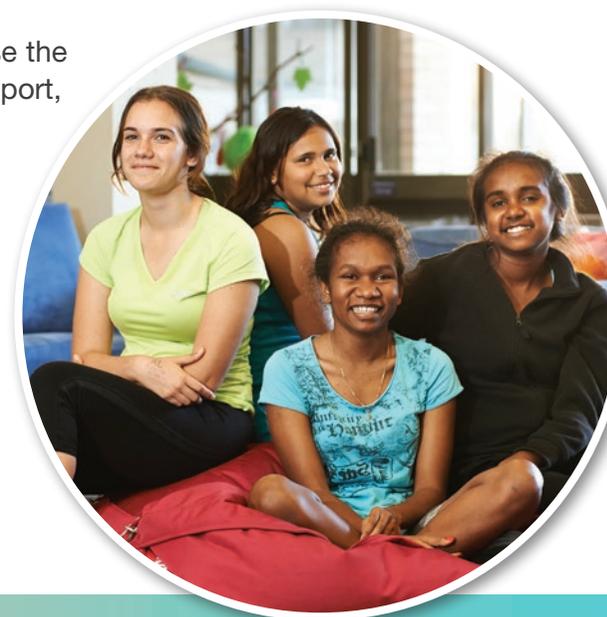
Schools are clearly important places for program and service delivery, particularly for families from CALD backgrounds. It is important to continue to build the capacity of schools to provide or facilitate access to culturally appropriate programs and services to support children and young people's educational development and social and mental wellbeing.

While many children and young people identified cultural diversity as a positive aspect of Australian society, they expressed concern about a significant lack of understanding in the wider community about different cultures and religions. Personal experiences of racism were commonly raised. They identified education and greater opportunities for people to learn about different cultures as important to addressing racism in our community. These views indicate there needs to be greater efforts to address racism with an ongoing focus on building cross-cultural understanding and positive school communities, which affirm multiculturalism and adequately address bullying, discrimination and racism.

Importantly, children and young people from CALD backgrounds are not a homogenous group. In addition to their cultural diversity, they have diverse experiences, needs, interests and opinions. These differences impact on their settlement experience, sense of belonging and overall wellbeing. There is a clear need for service providers to be sensitive to these differences and flexible in terms of what this means for supporting these children and young people's wellbeing.

Many of the findings of this consultation link strongly to other work of the Commissioner such as advocating for increased support for families, recognition of the important role that school plays in supporting the development of children and young people, the need to nurture a sense of belonging and identity for all children and young people, and calling for a greater community focus on children and young people's mental health.

The Commissioner will use the views presented in this report, in combination with other information and research findings, to advocate for the particular needs of children and young people from CALD backgrounds to ensure they are able to thrive and contribute to the Western Australian community with all their abilities and diversity.



Acknowledgements

The Commissioner for Children and Young People would like to thank the 296 children and young people from CALD backgrounds who participated in this consultation, and the families, schools and organisations that support them.

The Commissioner acknowledges the support of the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia in undertaking this consultation, and thanks the consultation peer leaders:

- Mohamed Beyan
- Arianna Huss
- Aisyah Ishak
- Tun Aung Kyaw
- Daniel Matabishi
- Sara Shengeb
- Hafiz Nazari
- Wahida Samim
- Florence Baitio (also a Reference Group member)
- Golda Signal (also a Reference Group a member)
- Gisele Ishimwe (also a Reference Group member)
- Ehsan Warasi (also a Reference Group member)

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- Hodan Ismail, Strategy and Planning Officer, Office of Multicultural Interests
- Tanya Castellanos, Manager North Metro Youth Justice Services, Department of Corrective Services
- Stephen Johnston, Assistant Director, WA Settlement and Multicultural Affairs Section, Department of Social Services (Peter Ryan from May 2015)
- Ibrahim Latheef, Executive Manager, Multicultural Unit, Western Australia Police
- Farida Fozdar, Professor, The University of Western Australia
- James Barrett, Team Leader, Learning for Life, The Smith Family
- Liza Beinart, Regional Manager Perth, Save the Children Australia (until September 2015)
- Christina Ward, Deputy Director, Edmund Rice Centre Mirrabooka
- Eric Imani, Executive Manager, Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre
- Samira Husic, Senior Coordinator, Community Services, Association for Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors (ASeTTS)
- Craig Comrie, CEO, Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia
- Jane Mitchell, Senior Policy Officer, Young People and Education, Department of Culture and the Arts (Marit Kloostera from November 2015)
- Lianda Gibson, MYANWA Project Officer, Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia

Appendix One - survey



Survey of children and young people from CALD backgrounds

1. Age: _____

2. Gender: _____

3. What suburb do you live in? _____

4. What country were you born in? If Australia, go to Question 7 _____

5. Who did you come to Australia with? _____

6. How long have you lived in Australia? _____

7. What language/s do you mainly speak at home? _____

8. Do you speak English at home?

Always Almost Always Sometimes Never

This survey wants to find out about what it is like for young people who come from other countries to live in Australia, including aspects of your life, like family, school, friends, having fun and looking after your health.

9. What are the best things about your life in Australia (up to three things)?

10. How did you find fitting in to Australia?

Very easy Quite easy OK Quite hard Very hard

11. What have you found difficult about living in Australia? _____

12. Thinking about the things you found difficult, how could they be improved? _____

13. Who or where do you go to when you need help or support? _____

We also want to ask you some questions about your future.

14. How do you feel about your future in Australia?

Very positive A bit positive Not positive or negative A bit negative
 Very negative

15. In the future I want to... _____

16. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experiences living in Australia? _____

This survey wants to find out about what life is like for young people who come from other countries and live in Australia.

17. Do you think this survey was a good way to do this? Yes No

18. Do you have any suggestions about a better way we could have done this? _____

We would like to interview some young people for a longer period of time and talk more about their life and experiences. This interview will take about an hour and will take place in September.

19. Are you interested participating in a longer interview? Yes No

20. What language was this survey conducted in? _____



Not all children and young people depicted in this publication took part in this consultation. They are all West Australia children and young people who have provided permission for the Commissioner to use the images.

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