

Submission on Children's rights in Australia

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Summary of World Vision Australia's Recommendations

World Vision Australia recommends that the Australian Government:

1. Implements the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child issued in 2012 to fully align Australia's policies and laws with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

Establish a National Action Plan for Children to address the challenges posed by implementing the CRC in an inconsistent manner across the State and its territories
2. Reorient the education system to cater for different learning capabilities to support the most vulnerable learners and to raise the educational outcomes of Indigenous children
3. Consults with and ensures effective participation and balanced representation of Indigenous people, including children in key decision making platforms that affect them, including monitoring the CRC.

World Vision Australia's **submission on children's rights** **in Australia**

This submission is a response to the call by the National Children's Commissioner Ms Megan Mitchell for contributions from children and their advocates on the status of children's rights in Australia to inform her reports to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (Committee) and to Parliament.

The call comes at a time when the Australian government is reporting to the Committee on the progress it has made in implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its three Optional Protocols. Australia ratified the CRC in 1990 and is obliged to report to the United Nations every 5 years.

World Vision Australia welcomes the National Children's Commissioner's call and the opportunity to have a say on children's rights in Australia.

World Vision is a worldwide community development organisation that provides short-term and long-term assistance to 100 million people worldwide. The organisation was established in Australia in 1966. In Australia World Vision works with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities in early childhood development, youth development, family violence prevention, leadership and governance programmes in the Northern Territory, Western Australia, New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria. We are committed to working with the most vulnerable children and families to achieve lasting change. In partnership with the communities we serve we advise policy makers on how we can create policy change; effect protective laws and influence behaviour change to benefit children and their families.

In this submission we amplify the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and communities that World Vision has built strong relationships with. We support children and their communities to drive their own development in Early Childhood Development and Youth Development often in hard to reach, remote, and most underserved areas of Australia.

Our commentary and recommendations address the following CRC clusters:

- **General Measures of Implementation**
- **Education, leisure and cultural activities**
- **Special Protection Measures**

General Measures of Impementation

Recommendation I That the Australian government implements the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child issued in 2012 and strengthen existing frameworks by establishing a National Action Plan for Children to address the challenges posed by inconsistent implementation of the CRC in a federated system across the State and its territories

There are approximately 5,439,827 children in Australia about 3% of whom are Indigenous children. Of these 2.8% live in urban areas while 41.66% live in remote areas. The government's 5th/6th periodic report on the CRC shows marked improvements in progressing children's rights in Australia.¹ However, some children including Aboriginal and Torres Islander children do not enjoy or fully experience the benefits of their rights as outlined in the CRC.

The Committee cites inconsistent application of the CRC in Australia and its territories.² World Vision considers children's rights to be complex, interwoven and indivisible. We encourage the Australian Government to strengthen child protection by creating a framework that draws together multiple initiatives, programmes and policies into a comprehensive National Action Plan for children whose progressive implementation can be measured based on CRC derived indicators across the Commonwealth, State and territories.

While birth registrations, preschool and school enrolments are improving, as are efforts to improve the mental health of children and young people in Australia, Indigenous children are still over represented in negative statistics. Indigenous children are likely to experience a lower level of academic achievement in school; have poorer health outcomes including higher levels of mental health; are more likely to be imprisoned, unemployed and dependent on government social care than their contemporaries in other ethnicities.

Click this video link to hear firsthand, Indigenous young people talk about their life experiences, [Young mob changing lives](#).

The challenges articulated by the young people in the video above require a holistic approach that is child centred and nationally well-coordinated to result in sustainable change in systems and processes.

Education, leisure and cultural activities

Recommendation 2 Reorient the education system to cater for different learning capabilities and different ways of learning to support the most vulnerable learners and to raise the educational outcomes of Indigenous children

“educational attainment opens pathways to greater economic opportunity and can make an important difference in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.”

The Honourable Malcolm Turnbull the Prime Minister of Australia,
in *Closing the Gap*.

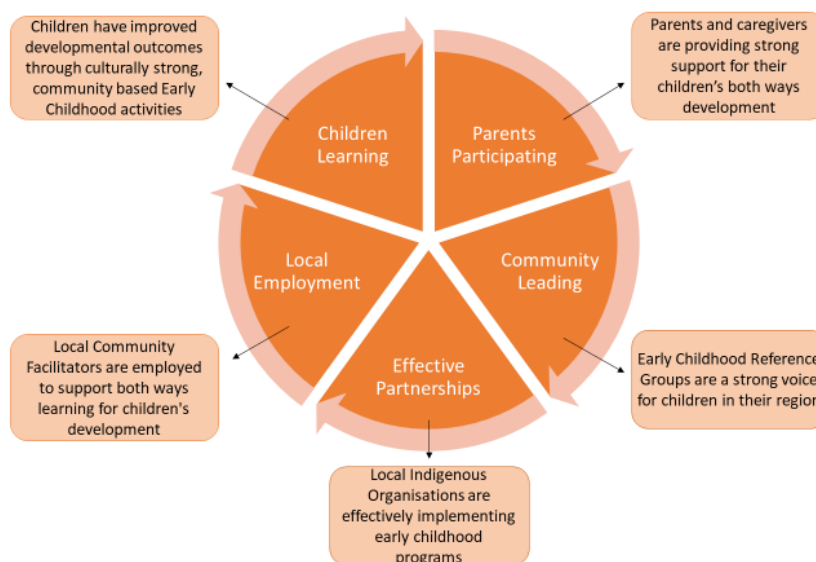
Lack of education or poor education outcomes play a significant part in determining the status of Indigenous children now and in their adult life. *Closing the Gap* (2018) positively reports an increase in the participation in early childhood education by Indigenous children. Approximately 14,700 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are enrolled in early childhood education the year before full-time school. The report records improvement in literacy and numeracy among Indigenous children noting that more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are staying in school through to Year 12.³

However, progress is taking place in an uneven playing field where only 56.8% of Indigenous children are developmentally ready for school compared to 79.1 % of non-Indigenous children.⁴ We know that by the time education achievement levels are measured, the most critical window of opportunity in early child development will have been missed. Brain formation, growth and development is at its optimum in the first 1000 days of life and behaviours are engrained by the age of 5 years.⁵ To this end World Vision supports positive attachment, education and nurturing by partnering with communities on programs that capitalise on the first 1000 days of life.

In Western Australia, World Vision is partnering with 10 remote Indigenous communities to deliver culturally strong Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) projects.

The focus of our work is on collaborating with communities to deliver supported playgroups for children five years and under. Supported playgroups are an important mechanism that can bring about long lasting and profound improvements in children's wellbeing. Parents and caregivers are a child's first provider, protector and play mate. Thus, our approach invests in parents and caregivers to enhance their confidence and capacity to raise happy, healthy children, which can have a lasting impact on later success in school and life. Playgroup also provide opportunities for parents to socialize, increase their confidence with early years' development services and to share and build their knowledge about children's development.

Our approach to strengthening developmental outcomes for young Indigenous children is illustrated below.



The playgroups are a focal point for other services to deliver formal and informal support to families and provide a forum for reinforcing the importance of early years learning, school readiness and education in general. Local women are employed and develop skills and expertise to deliver the playgroups in English and in local language. Cultural elements for children include bush trips, using local language in early literacy books and songs, and engaging in important cultural events. Reference Groups are also established to support this work in community and provide input and guidance into the initiatives being delivered. Representatives from each community come together at the regional level as a strong voice and to advocate for young children in their region. We partner with local Indigenous Organisations throughout the project implementation to ensure sustainability and relevance.

Click this video link to hear directly from the [Punmu community](#)⁶ about the benefits of the Early Childhood project.

The areas we work in have limited access to quality early learning opportunities, despite the high need and demand from the community. We are typically invited by the community to support them establish a quality, culturally strong, early childhood service for their children. Our long-term development objective is to walk with the community through an empowering, strengths-based approach whereby young children are learning, parents are equipped to be their child’s first teacher, local women are trained and employed, and community are coming together to make decisions that affect young children in their community.

Underlying our work is the importance and value of ‘both-ways’ approaches to education where mainstream and Indigenous learning can complement and

strengthen each other, especially given the desire from Aboriginal people to thrive in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal environments. In the education setting this requires long-term partnering, support for systemic change and ensuring that formal and informal opportunities for learning are developed, implemented and advocated for to strengthen learning outcomes.

Table 1: Four Milestones of Educational Attainment by Indigenous Status⁷

Milestone	Attaining the Milestone		Missing the Milestone	
	Non- Indigenous	Indigenous	Non- Indigenous	Indigenous
Early Years Developmentally ready for School	79.1	56.8	20.9	43.2
Middle years Proficient in academic skills	73.5	38.4	29.3	59.0
Senior School Complete Yr 12 attain a Certificate	75.2	43.6	24.8	56.4
Early Adulthood in Training, education or employment by age 24 yrs.	74.4	45.3	25.6	58.9

Evidence shows Indigenous children generally underperforming at school in comparison to other ethnicities. The disadvantage is exacerbated by a market driven educational system intent on assimilating Indigenous children into mainstream structures. Recognising that the one size fits all curriculum will not narrow the disparities between Indigenous children and their counterparts, World Vision is using the Education for Life Technical Approach to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, youth, families and their communities to lead their own development.

Special protection measures

Recommendation 3 Consult, support and ensure effective participation of Indigenous children, their families and communities on matters that affect them

In the Concluding Observations (2012) the Committee called on Australia to ensure fairer representation of Indigenous people in key decision making. World Vision believes that children must know and claim their rights before they can be expected to lead and actively participate in decision making. While the openness of Australia’s curriculum to human rights education; the establishment of the office of the National Children’s Commissioner and the appointment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner are commendable their existence alone does not guarantee children and young people’s awareness and knowledge of their rights neither does it ensure their active participation and interest in policy issues. The Australian government should do more to raise awareness about the CRC and to ensure that children understand their rights, and adults realise their responsibilities to children. Children should be widely consulted and inform the State’s reporting. Child participation should not be left solely to civil society.

World Vision believes that understanding one's culture engenders a sense of belonging, self-appreciation and confidence, elements critical to positive youth development and wellbeing. As a result, World Vision socialises children's rights and their right to culture through a programme for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people called Young Mob. Young Mob is a positive youth development program. It builds leadership and life skills, identity, connection to culture, the environment, religion and use their own language.

Young Mob is currently run in 9 schools in New South Wales (NSW) and 3 in Victoria with plans to pilot the program in juvenile justice institutions in late 2018. Click this video link to [hear from Mark⁸](#) how his participation in the Young Mob helped to change his perspective and bolstered him to lead and to be a role model in his community.

Endnotes

¹ Australia's joint 5th and 6th report under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, period June 2012-15, Jan 2018 available at: http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2fAUS%2f5-6&Lang=en

² Concluding Observations Australia, Committee on the Rights of the Child 2012, p3 available at: http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/co/CRC_C_AUS_CO_4.pdf

³ Closing the gap report 2018 available at: <https://closingthegap.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/ctg-report-2018.pdf?a=1>

⁴ Table 1: Four Milestones of Educational Attainment by Indigenous Status, Ingamells, A. & Sorcha Tormey (2016). Education for Life Landscape Analysis. Page 22 available from World Vision Australia

⁵ Why are the first 1000 days of life important, Early Childhood development, Ana Mitic and Zorica Markovic, Edenic 2016 available at: https://www.unicef.org/serbia/ENG_ECD_UNICEF_and_Nedeljnik_November_2016.pdf

⁶ Punmu Community talks about the benefits of their early childhood education project, video available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vjNlhusj8kk>

⁷ Table 1: Four Milestones of Educational Attainment by Indigenous Status, Ingamells, A. & Sorcha Tormey (2016) Education for Life Landscape Analysis. Page 22 available from World Vision Australia

⁸ Mark talks about his participation in the World Vision Mob project and its impact on his life, video available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZE9wJYm3wvc>