



OUR VOICE

SAVE THE CHILDREN AUSTRALIA YOUTH AMBASSADORS REPORT 2017



Save the Children

Acknowledgements

Save the Children Australia and the Youth Ambassadors acknowledge the traditional owners of country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land and community. We pay our respect to them and their cultures, and to elders past and present.

Save the Children 2017 Youth Ambassadors

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This report was produced by Save the Children Australia's Youth Ambassadors throughout 2017. It is entirely the work of these young people, and does not reflect the official position of Save the Children Australia.

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YOUNG VOICES SPEAKING OUT

At Save the Children, we're doing everything we can to ensure children's rights are recognised and respected. But we can't do it alone. Young people themselves are the best people to create real, lasting change. That's why we run our Youth Ambassadors program.

Every year, our Youth Ambassadors program works with young people to lobby Australian politicians and speak out publicly about issues that affect them.

Our Youth Ambassadors work to uphold, promote and protect children's rights. They speak out on issues that matter to them, and they represent the views of their peers at events, in the media and in Parliament.

This report outlines their thoughts on the key issues in Australia today. It also includes quotations and ideas from other young people who have informed their work in developing this report.

MEET OUR YOUTH AMBASSADORS



MELISSA LI

14, NEW SOUTH WALES

"I migrated from New Zealand to Australia when I was nine. In the first few years, things were difficult for my parents, but they never once sacrificed our education. I am here, where I am today, because of the sacrifices they made, which opened up a store of new possibilities.

I want to see change happen – I want more opportunities presented to disadvantaged children, I want the education gap closed, more equality in gender, more support for marginalised Indigenous communities. I want climate change and environmentalism to be prioritised in parliament, and the needs of our planet placed before the financial profit of big corporations. I want more acceptance and inclusivity of refugees and immigrants, particularly protection for Muslims in the face of counter-terrorism and fear-mongering Islamophobia.

Change isn't going to happen on its own. I want to be a youth ambassador so I can not only vocalise my concerns, but work towards solving them."



CATHERINE ZHOU

16, VICTORIA

"I recently volunteered with a refugee legal centre and it opened my eyes to just how privileged we are – there are so many people out there in the world experiencing atrocities I can't begin to imagine. I don't know what it's like to flee war and persecution. I don't know what's like to fear for my life and my family's.

I want to allow others the same security I have felt most of my life.

Young people are often overlooked, their ideas undervalued. Yet young people are the foundation of our future. They form the opinions and influences that will shape the next generation for decades to come. Save the Children seems a prime opportunity to create impact."



EDWARD COOPER

14, VICTORIA

"My life goal is to play professional basketball in America. I have already planned out the colleges I will apply for. I help my dad coach the younger kids, and I'm in a school student council program, where we listen to kids in our school and try to ensure they get what they want.

I want to be a Youth Ambassador because I want other kids to have the same opportunities that have been offered to me. I wanted a changed society so every kid has equality. I want every person to be treated respectfully and equally, whatever their race, gender or sexuality.

I love to be political and speak up and speak loud because it gives a voice to those who aren't confident. I believe every kid should have the same opportunities as the kid next door, so everyone will walk beside each other equally."



ANNALISE PEARCE

14, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

"I believe education is the most important feature in unlocking people's potential, reducing climate change, helping those in developing countries, closing the gap between non-Indigenous and Indigenous people and giving everyone equal rights.

I believe education could end wars and help shape this world into the place it should be. My idol is Malala Yousafzai. She took a bullet for the sake of education, you could say. She faced such hardship and continues to pursue her dream. At 18, she opened a school for Syrian girls! If that doesn't inspire someone, I don't know what will.

I may be young but I have so much determination! I want to leave this world better than when I came into to it."

BEING ACTIVE CITIZENS

A big part of being a Save the Children Youth Ambassador is about becoming active participants in society.

In 2017, our Youth Ambassadors took on a range of social issues, engaging through media, public events and meetings.

They also visited Save the Children headquarters to meet and talk to staff working to make children's lives better.

“ WE NEED MORE SUSTAINABLE, LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS FOR OUR ENVIRONMENT. BAND-AID SOLUTIONS AND TEMPORARY REGULATIONS WON'T DO ANYTHING FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS. THERE SHOULD BE A LOT MORE DONE TO TRANSITION OUR MAIN INDUSTRIES OUT OF MINING AND TRADITIONAL AGRICULTURE INTO MORE SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC INCOME FOR AUSTRALIA. ”

- SARAH, 17



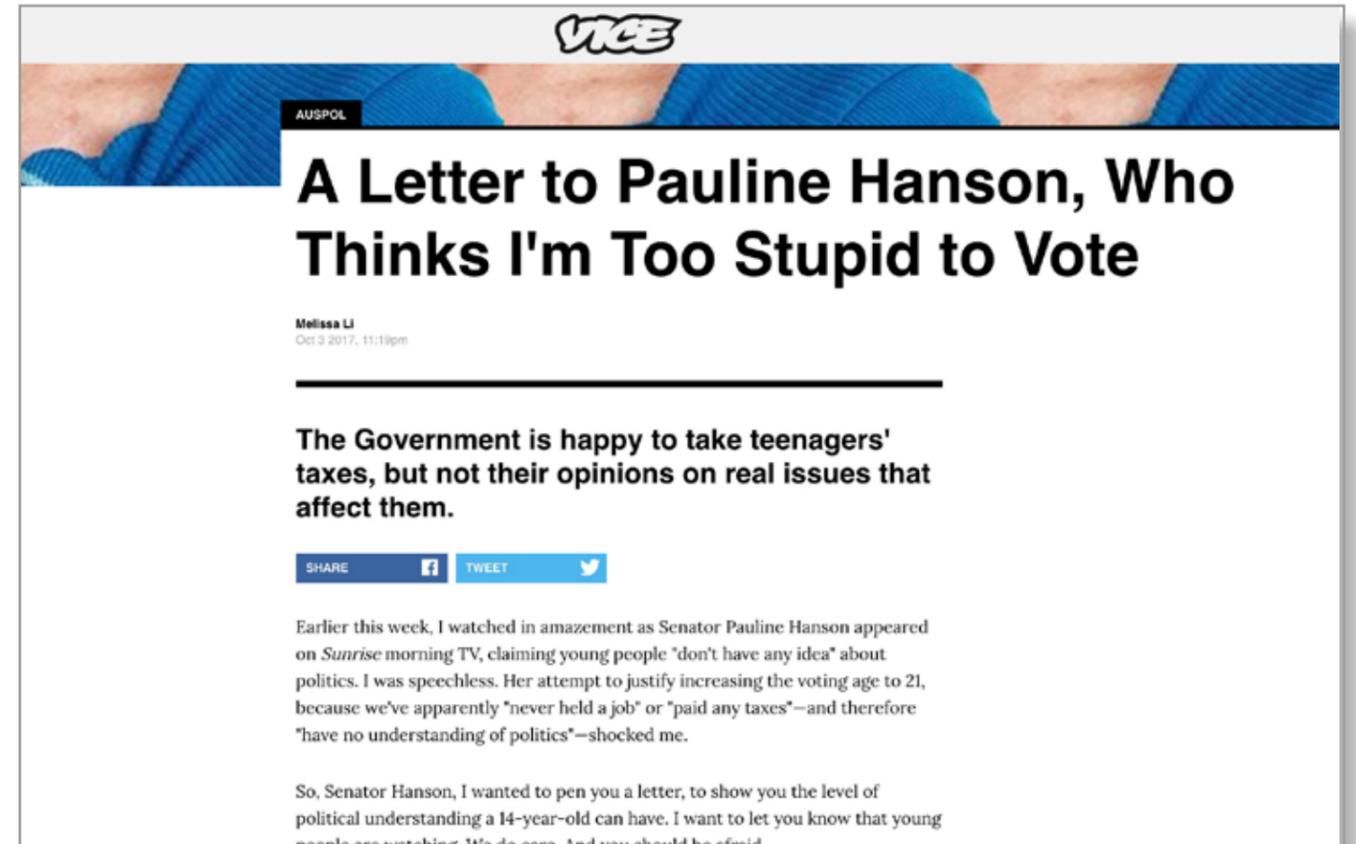
Youth Ambassador Catherine Zhou writes about her work with refugees



Youth Ambassador Annalise Pearce writes about living in remote Western Australia

“ MY FAMILY IS SYRIAN, AND MY SIX YEAR OLD BROTHER CRIES WHEN HE WATCHES THE NEWS AND WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH THE WHOLE REFUGEE CRISIS. WE HAVE FAMILY BACK IN SYRIA TOO. THE REFUGEE CRISIS IS AN ISSUE THAT AFFECTS MY FAMILY AND I VERY PERSONALLY. ”

- ANONYMOUS, 14



Youth Ambassador Melissa Li writing in VICE about youth engagement with politics



Members of the Youth Ambassador team attend the Progress 2017 event.

Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander affairs

There are a broad number of issues that relate to the inequality felt by Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people in Australia. This inequality is the result of ingrained systemic racism and perpetuated by institutions, Government and schools.

Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people aren't given a strong voice to have their experiences heard. Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people see discrimination in a number of areas: in the justice system, in foster care, in access to healthcare and medical services and in the job market.

WHAT THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO DO

- Work to ensure that the Australian Constitution recognises the prior and ongoing sovereignty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and outline a plan for the adoption of a national treaty with Australia's First Peoples.
- Restore funding to the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples.
- Implement the Close the Gap initiatives to tackle the life expectancy gap between Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous Australians.
- Support community-led approaches to tackling high priority medical issues, including specific measures to address diabetes, mental health.
- Offer scholarships and other incentives to encourage more Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people to enter medical professions, including additional Indigenous Liaison officer positions to operate as first port of call for community support.
- Encourage, support and mentor more Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander peoples to stand for political office.
- Ensure that laws, policies and strategies aimed at reducing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander imprisonment are underpinned by a human-rights approach.
- Investigate alternative arrangements for the placement of citizenship ceremonies, to avoid cultural insensitivities in relation to the history of settlement.



“ I FEEL LIKE INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS HAVE NEVER BEEN ADDRESSED DIRECTLY. IT'S ALMOST ALWAYS SOME SORT OF DISCREET COVERUP. THERE'S NEVER ENOUGH CONSULTATION WITH THE COMMUNITIES THAT IS BEING AFFECTED BY THE ISSUE. MONEY DOESN'T SOLVE EVERYTHING. THERE HAS TO BE PROPER ENGAGEMENT AND FOLLOW-UP.

- ELIZABETH, 17

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Photo: Wayne Quilliam/SNAICC

Climate, Energy & Agriculture

The impacts of climate change are being felt right now by the world's most vulnerable people. It is imperative that the world decrease our carbon emissions before it is too late.

We need a change to our energy production model. Currently we use so much coal and yet Australia has the benefit of huge solar potential that is largely untapped. We should harness this opportunity.

We must also ensure that ethical, sustainable practices are encouraged in our agriculture and food production industries.

WHAT THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO DO

- Reduce Australia's carbon footprint through the introduction of a national emissions trading scheme, including a market-led floating price on carbon.
- Increase diplomatic influence to encourage other sovereign nations follow and commit to achieving the targets as set out in the Paris Accord.
- Investigate new models of pioneering and investing in large-scale renewable energy technologies.
- Create more opportunities for vocational training on renewable energy production and maintenance, to skill up future workforces.
- Reduce reliance on animal-based agriculture to better manage existing resources and reduce deforestation and methane emissions.
- Commit to an immediate halt on any government funding towards the operations of Adani within Australian borders.
- Place a national moratorium on coal seam gas mining.
- Minimise foreign investment in energy projects that operate on Australian soil.
- Maintain environmental sustainability of the Murray Darling Basin system, so the river continues to bring life and economy to all who rely upon it.
- Protect the use of arable land to ensure multi-generational sustainability can be achieved.
- Promote, support and invest in sustainable agricultural techniques.
- Support the rollout of a nation-wide ban on single-use plastics, including plastic supermarket bags and drinking straws.
- Encourage consumer goods manufacturers to shift to environmentally sustainable packaging wherever possible.
- Develop a five-star rating system on consumables to indicate overall sustainability of products - including labour, environmental, packaging and locality.
- Encourage and support hyper-local industries and marketplaces, to encourage individuals to purchase their essential goods at the local level, and reduce packaging, transportation and climate impacts.



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MY FAMILY OWNS A FARM, AND I DON'T WANT OVERSEAS COMPANIES TO TAKE MY FARM AWAY FROM US AND FRACK IT. WHEN BIG COMPANIES MINE PURELY FOR MONEY, THEY EXPLOIT THE LAND. I LIVE ON THE LAND, WORK ON IT, AND TAKE CARE OF IT - I DON'T WANT IT TO JUST BE TORN UP.

- FLINDERS, 16

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Photo: Delgermaa Altangerel/Save the Children

Health

All Australians should have the right to a healthy life, regardless of their background, socio-economic situation or location.

Youth people in particular require more preventative care to ensure that issues such as mental health are dealt with early in life before they can have sometimes drastic effects.

Effort should also be made to support families, carers and guardians to be better equipped to support young people dealing with drug or alcohol abuse.

WHAT THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO DO

- Increase funding towards youth-based mental health outreach services, such as Headspace, to provide consistent, inclusive and accessible services, with a focus on regional areas.
- Pilot a youth peer-to-peer mental health service for teens across Australia to build relationships and provide support for each other.
- Fund and implement a national anti-stigma schools-based campaign to support young people dealing with mental health issues.
- Rollout a national trial of sponsored medical use of marijuana.
- Support a nation-wide rollout of Victoria's 'No Jab, No Play' childcare immunisation program.
- Increase the threshold for the national Healthcare card, to ensure that more families are able to access health support when needed.
- Support more vocational training in healthcare in order to increase staff capacity and reduce waiting times.
- Develop support programs for children who have parents/guardians suffering from mental health issues.
- Fund programs that aim to increase awareness of the impact of drug and alcohol abuse in schools.
- Support young people to be aware of and able to access support services when they are impacted by secondary drug and alcohol abuse.



“ THERE NEEDS TO BE MORE AWARENESS ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH, ESPECIALLY IN RURAL AND INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES. TOO MANY PEOPLE ARE SUFFERING AND SLIPPING IN BETWEEN THE CRACKS OF OUR PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM WITHOUT ANYONE NOTICING. EVERYONE NEEDS TO FEEL CARED FOR AND LOVED

- SARAH, 16



Photo: Rik Goverde/Save the Children

Justice & Social Inequality

Paramount in any Government's agenda towards young people and justice should be to keep youth out of the correction system in the first place.

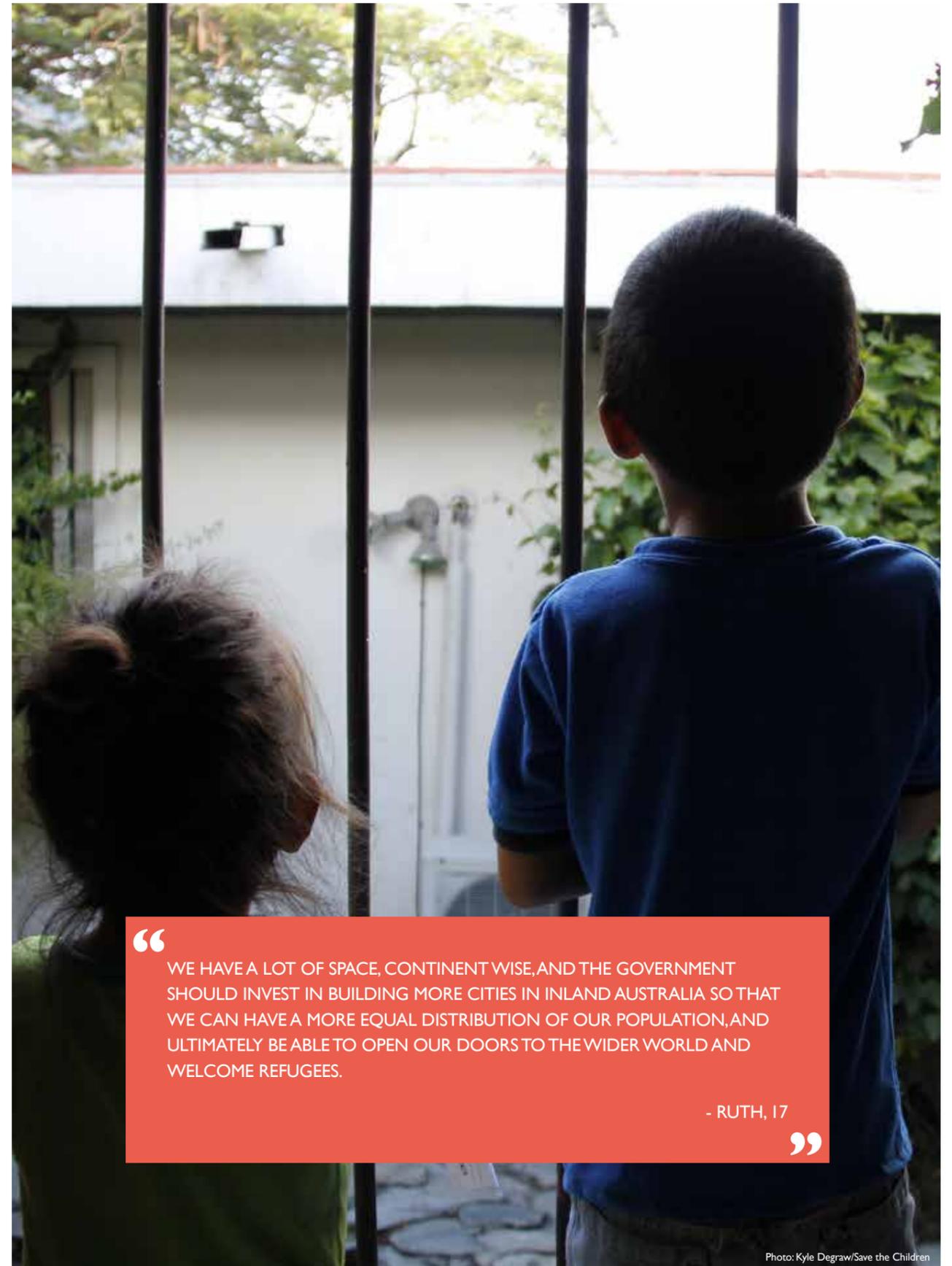
We must ensure that prevention services are prioritised to support young people, as well as diversion programs to set them back on the right track.

We as a society must ensure that the most vulnerable amongst us are adequately cared for. This includes low socio-economic families and young people in need.

The gap between the rich and the poor is growing in Australia - it doesn't have to be this way.

WHAT THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO DO

- Address the crime cycle that often plagues disadvantaged communities through increased access to education, employment and vocational training opportunities.
- Reduce sentences and increase access to diversion programs for petty crimes such as possession of drugs, and ensure that communities are actively involved in sentencing decisions and reviews.
- Create youth hubs for young people to access support services and community engagement activities. Ensure these hubs are culturally appropriate to a wide variety of participants.
- Redirect existing funds away from prisons and remand centres and into rehabilitation and longer term solutions.
- Ensure that children who are required to be removed from their homes are kept within their communities and have strong cultural ties to their heritage.
- Ensure that no child is deprived of access to a high quality education, even when incarcerated.
- Ensure that family violence counselling is fully covered by Medicare.
- Operate cultural awareness training for police officers as mandatory practice, with specific focus on Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander culture.



“ WE HAVE A LOT OF SPACE, CONTINENT WISE, AND THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD INVEST IN BUILDING MORE CITIES IN INLAND AUSTRALIA SO THAT WE CAN HAVE A MORE EQUAL DISTRIBUTION OF OUR POPULATION, AND ULTIMATELY BE ABLE TO OPEN OUR DOORS TO THE WIDER WORLD AND WELCOME REFUGEES. ”

- RUTH, 17



Photo: Kyle Degraw/Save the Children

\$ Healthy Communities & Economies

Our communities deserve to be health, active and inclusive, with opportunities available for everyone to live, work and play.

We must ensure that current and future generations of Australians no longer tolerate domestic violence in any form.

Those suffering homelessness should not be overlooked in the provision of services and support.

WHAT THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO DO

- Increase funding for sport programs to keep youth off streets, implement good preventative health strategy, and ultimately reduce crime rates.
- Increase funding for community grants for sporting clubs, venues and spaces. Ensure that these spaces are accessible to young people at more times, eg after hours.
- Support cultural inclusion in sporting teams/clubs, such as dedicated Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander teams
- Operate workshops and courses designed to give early intervention guidance counselling for secondary students to understand employments options and pathways.
- Apply a working wage to the current PATH internship program.
- Increase public housing supply and ensure wait lists are more effective and efficient, including support for innovative models of building design and operation.
- Ensure that more support and emergency housing is available for those suffering homelessness.
- Increase funding to organisations and support services that provide basic needs to people suffering homelessness, such as food, water and medical needs.
- Operate outreach services to skill up and support people suffering homelessness, such as financial literacy programs and pathways to employment.
- Incentivising investment owners to keep housing on market at lower rates.
- Increase funding for victims of domestic violence, including the operation of refuges as well as support services for in the home, particularly in regional areas.
- Operate more policing in public areas to address domestic violence, as well as harsher penalties for perpetrators.
- Teach respectful behaviour in schools so young people change habits early to offset later risk of domestic violence.
- Increase family & community support, programs, counselling, rehabilitation and other support for young people struggling with violence and suicide
- Pilot flexible funding models to support young people struggling to access social support services, particularly those in remote and regional areas.
- Support the operation of interfaith facilities and spaces for cultural or religious communities to meet, share and build community. Ensure these programs are adapted to meet the specific diversity needs of the local community.



“ COMPANIES SHOULDN'T JUDGE A HOMELESS PERSON BY THEIR LEVEL OF EDUCATION. THEY JUST LOOK AT THE EDUCATION AND SAY "YOU CAN'T COME TO OUR COMPANY BECAUSE YOU'RE TOO DUMB." THAT DOESN'T NECESSARILY MEAN THEY CAN'T COMPLETE THE SAME LEVEL OF WORK. ”

- ISABELLA, 12

Photo: Charlie Forgham Bailey/Save the Children

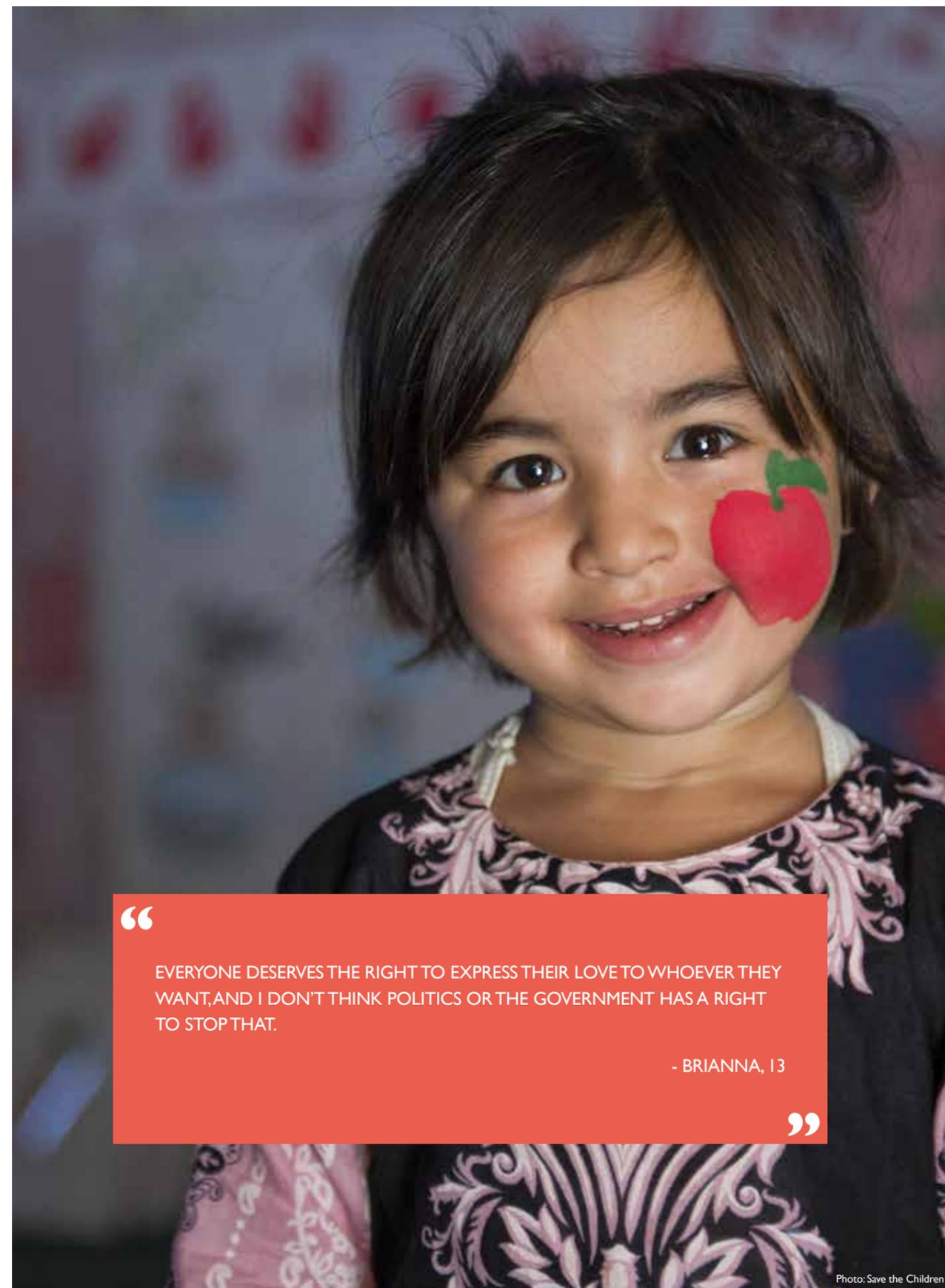
Discrimination & Accessibility

All people should enjoy the same rights, responsibilities and benefits in our society. This means that regardless of sexuality, gender, physical ability or other difference, our Government should afford the same rights to all.

Young LGBTI people suffer social stigma, mental health issues and other disadvantage due to laws that treat them differently from the rest of the population. This needs to change, with leadership from Government.

WHAT THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO DO

- Recognise the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex people to have equality in their communities, workplaces, schools and the whole of Australia.
- Legislate to allow equal marriage for all consenting adults, to ensure that a person's gender or sexuality does not affect their legal rights and responsibilities under Australian marriage law.
- Operate education programs in schools that teach acceptance, understanding and mutual accountability of the rights of LGBTI people.
- Legislate to allow consenting adults to marry in Australia, regardless of their sexual identity.
- Work with the Australian Red Cross Service to allow and encourage homosexual males to donate blood to the national blood service.
- Work with businesses to expand access to parental leave for fathers.
- Champion flexible working arrangement for parents, with particular focus on men taking on more parenting responsibilities.
- Promote and support more girls to enter into the Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths industries, and support their career paths.
- Ensure the current welfare system acts as more than a safety net and includes pathways to contribute to society and break the cycle of inter-generational poverty.
- Ensure adequate support services exist within the health and rehabilitation systems, are accessible to all who require it and operate with a long-term focus in mind.



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EVERYONE DESERVES THE RIGHT TO EXPRESS THEIR LOVE TO WHOEVER THEY WANT, AND I DON'T THINK POLITICS OR THE GOVERNMENT HAS A RIGHT TO STOP THAT.

- BRIANNA, 13

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Photo: Save the Children

Foreign Affairs & Aid

Australia is a generous nation, and yet we now have the lowest budget in history allocated towards our Australian Aid program. This must be drastically increased to support the most vulnerable people around the world.

We also have a very big part to play in the global refugee crisis - both here in our region but also around the world. We can and should do our fair share to support people seeking asylum.

WHAT THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO DO

- Adopt a revised purpose for the Australian aid program that seeks to eliminate extreme poverty, reduce inequality, promote sustainable development and protects humanrights.
- Ensure that Australian Aid is directed towards people most in need, with a particular focus on regions where Australian military operations have previously been active. Put in place mechanisms that ensure this aid does not directly, or inadvertently, fund terrorism.
- Solidify the Global Goals for Sustainable Development as a core framework for the policies, priorities and performance benchmarks of the Australian aid program.
- Establish an independent oversight body for the delivery and effectiveness of Australian Aid, with representatives from government, business and the non-profit sector.
- Immediately close the immigration detention centres on Nauru and Manus Island and allow those people currently held in those facilities to settle permanently in Australia.
- Ensure that safe pathways exist for those seeking asylum, by providing funding and incentives for regional protection and distribution systems, enhancing regional cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region.
- End the practice of indefinite detention, and abolish temporary protection visas.
- Increase Australia's humanitarian refugee intake and investigate opportunities to streamline the process for those seeking asylum.
- Immediately halt all turnback operations within Border Force and instead operate a search and rescue program in the seas to the north of Australia.
- Ensure Australia is providing its fair share of funding commitments to support the Rohingya in Bangladesh after fleeing violence and persecution in Myanmar. This funding commitment must support both immediate and longer term needs.
- Ensure that Australian peace-keeping forces region are supporting countries to combat domestic violence and other social issues. This must include adequate training and resourcess being made available to troops.



“ I CARE ABOUT REFUGEES. I THINK IT'S REALLY UNFAIR HOW THESE PEOPLE THAT ARE SUFFERING FROM SO MUCH HARDSHIP AND WAR IN THEIR OWN HOME COUNTRIES - HOW BAD THEY'RE TREATED WHEN THEY COME TO AUSTRALIA. AUSTRALIA SHOULD BE A WELCOMING COUNTRY, WE'VE GOT SO MANY RESOURCES. ”

- NOOR, 12

Photo: GMB Akash/Panos Pictures/Save the Children

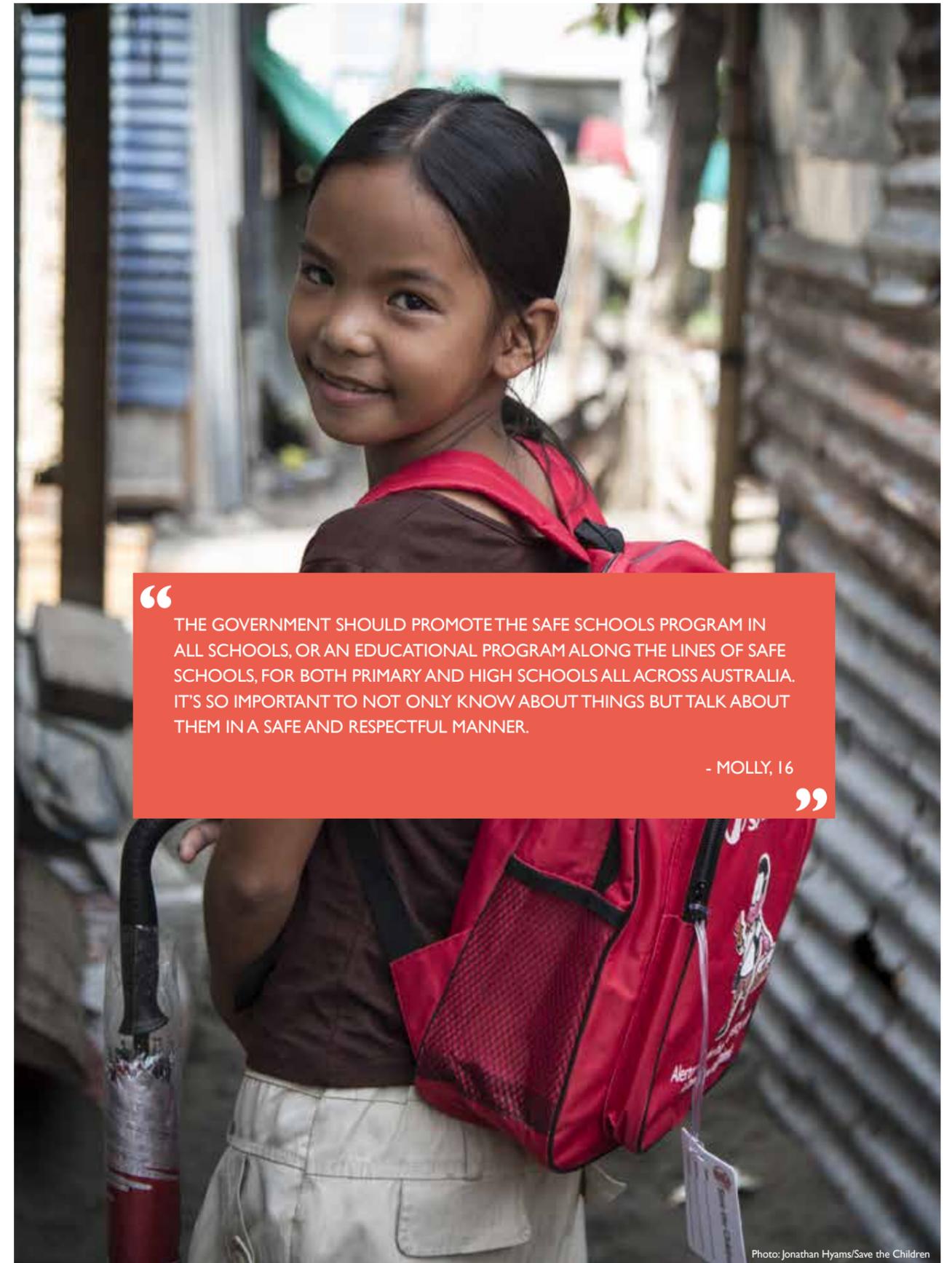
Culture & Education

All children deserve the right to an education, including understanding our culture, art and music.

We must ensure that our teachers are adequately resourced to train generations of Australians to have a deeper understanding of our place in the world.

WHAT THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO DO

- Provide means-tested support and resources so that no child experiences inequities in educational quality including those children living in rural or remote Australia or from low socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Provide training and support for educators to adapt their teaching styles to approach learners genuinely as individuals rather than utilising a 'one size fits all' model, including skills necessary to adapt to changing technology and working environments.
- Ensure that children who are experiencing problems within their homes and communities have support services available for them to attend and excel at school, and develop positive relationships between students and institutions.
- Commit to fully funding and implement Gonski schools funding.
- Pilot a national program to support cultural awareness workshops within schools, to provide better understanding and appreciation for a multicultural society.
- Ensure that Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander culture & history is incorporated into the national curriculum, and involves consultation with Aboriginal elders, leaders and communities.
- Increased scholarships for students to engage in exchange programs with schools and universities in the Asia-Pacific region.
- Ensure that access to tertiary education is available to all, with an equitable fee structure in place that particularly supports students from remote and regional areas.
- Promote and support alternative and non-traditional pathways for education for secondary school leavers.
- Prioritise the needs of young people experiencing disadvantage when considering tertiary education reform to ensure equal access and opportunity.
- Incorporate nationalised and standardised sexual, reproductive and health education in schools.



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THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD PROMOTE THE SAFE SCHOOLS PROGRAM IN ALL SCHOOLS, OR AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM ALONG THE LINES OF SAFE SCHOOLS, FOR BOTH PRIMARY AND HIGH SCHOOLS ALL ACROSS AUSTRALIA. IT'S SO IMPORTANT TO NOT ONLY KNOW ABOUT THINGS BUT TALK ABOUT THEM IN A SAFE AND RESPECTFUL MANNER.

- MOLLY, 16

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Photo: Jonathan Hyams/Save the Children



Front cover photo: Youth delegates from the Progress 2017 conference come together to learn about advocacy, campaigning and social change.

This page: Ayesha*, eight years-old, fled Myanmar with her family when their village was attacked, they are now living in a makeshift camp in Cox's Bazar district, Bangladesh.

Photo: GMB Akash/Panos Pictures/Save the Children

*name has been changed to protect identity



Save the Children