

# **Message from the Commissioner**

## **The situation**

While many Aboriginal children and families are doing well, the disadvantage some Aboriginal children and young people experience on a daily basis should be unacceptable to us all.

Too many Western Australian Aboriginal children and young people do not have the opportunity to experience a happy and healthy childhood, to feel protected and nurtured, or have the opportunities and experiences they need to reach their full potential.

Over decades, substantial investment has been made to overcome this disadvantage but has failed to make a significant difference to the lives of generations of vulnerable children and young people.

A different approach is required.

## **What Aboriginal children and young people say**

Over many years Aboriginal children and young people have told my office about the factors that support their wellbeing and, for those who have experienced disadvantage, what they need to turn their lives around and create a better future.

Many Aboriginal children and young people spoke about the importance of family and communities, their connection with Country and culture, and the innate strengths of many aspects of their lives and culture.

Some Aboriginal children and young people who had experienced disadvantage spoke of their desire for a safe and cohesive community, as well as their need for significant and specific help if they are ever to achieve a happy and productive life.

Almost without exception, given a small amount of time and attention, Aboriginal children and young people opened up and spoke about their lives and what they need. Their insight and earnest desire to change their lives was stark and incredibly valuable and their views need to be heard and acted upon.

Establishing an approach to enable service providers to capture and utilise Aboriginal children and young people's views is critical for the future of people and communities around the State.

## **The toolkit**

The Engaging with Aboriginal Children and Young People Toolkit outlines a process for establishing a long-term, sustainable commitment to working with Aboriginal

children and young people within their community to establish effective initiatives that improve their current wellbeing and future opportunities.

The toolkit supports the development of Aboriginal-led solutions through engaging community Elders and senior leaders, in addition to children and young people, from the beginning to ensure programs are produced with the community and for the community.

This work will be challenging at times. It will take a complete and unyielding commitment through all levels of organisations and agencies to achieve change, but it is achievable, and it is incredibly important.

Improving the lives of Aboriginal children and young people must be seen as core business for all organisations and agencies engaging with Aboriginal people and communities.<sup>1</sup>

We must act. Aboriginal children and young people comprise almost 40 per cent of all Aboriginal people in WA; these young people will be the community leaders of future generations.

Aboriginal children and young people all over the state must have opportunities to be heard and influence decision making, and by doing so provide opportunities to develop their leadership capacity to lead and sustain change into the future.

**Colin Pettit**

**Commissioner for Children and Young People**

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<sup>1</sup> Western Australia Parliament Legislative Assembly Committees *Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People. Report 8*. November 2016 regarding government agencies.