

MID WEST 2024
LISTENING TOUR

Acknowledgement of Country

The Commissioner for Children and Young People proudly acknowledges and pays respect to the Traditional Custodians of the lands across Western Australia.

She acknowledges the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation upon whose lands the Commissioner's office is located and the Nhanta and Amangu people of the Yamatji nation, where this Listening Tour took place.

She recognises the continuing connection to culture, lands, skies and waters, families and communities for all the Aboriginal peoples.

The Commissioner and her team recognise the knowledge, insights and capabilities of Aboriginal people, and pay respect to Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing.

A note about language

For the purposes of this report, the term 'Aboriginal' encompasses Western Australia's diverse language groups and recognises Torres Strait Islanders who live in Western Australia.

The use of the term 'Aboriginal' in this way is not intended to imply equivalence between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, although similarities do exist.

Credit

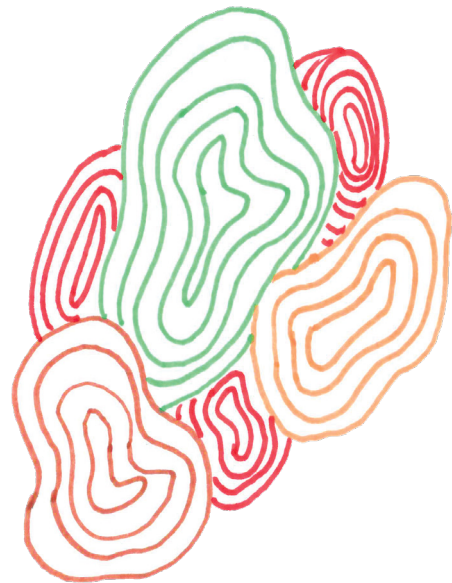
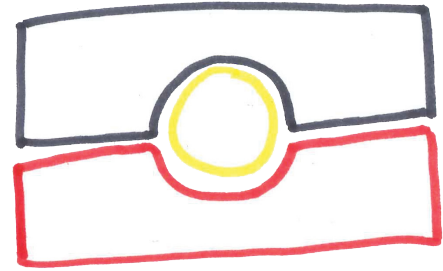
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Disclaimer

This report has been prepared by the Commissioner for Children and Young People and is intended to provide the views of those who participated in the consultations and conversations undertaken on in the Mid-West Listening Tour 2024.

Any errors of omission or commission are the responsibility of the Commissioner for Children and Young People.

A selection of quotations is included in this report on the relevant topics. The quotations are generally unedited to ensure the voice of the child or young person is authentically represented.

Editing has only occurred where necessary for clarity, understanding or for confidentiality. In this instance, any changes or omissions have been marked with square brackets or an ellipsis (...).

To best support our children and young people it's vital that the decisions we make about them and their wellbeing are informed by their views and perspectives.

The Commissioner for Children and Young People WA and her team are focused on promoting the rights, voices and contributions of children and young people across the State and monitoring and advocating to improve their wellbeing.

All Western Australians share a collective responsibility to these children and young people to ensure they are heard, valued, healthy, safe and given every opportunity to reach their full potential.



OVERVIEW

The Commissioner, Jacqueline McGowan-Jones, visited Mid-West WA in September 2024, to meet with and listen to more than 100 children and young people, about what matters most to them.

The program consisted of two types of events - informal 'Meet-Ups' organised in collaboration with community organisations, and the more structured 'Student Forums' with participants drawn from various schools and colleges across the region.

Throughout all events, the children and young people were encouraged to lead conversations, give voice to their concerns and share their opinions on where they live and the lives they lead. Their recommendations are listed at the end of the report.

At the first Meet Up the Commissioner met the **Yamatji Nation Sea Rangers**. They described their responsibilities in caring for Yamatji Sea Country and the positive impact that the Sea Ranger program has on their lives.

In the second Meet-Up event, she met with LGBTQIA+SB youth at **headspace Geraldton**, discussing the challenges they face in their lives, as well as the support and engagement they require.

Within the two Student Forums, the Commissioner met with students from six primary schools and six secondary schools.

Additionally, she met with the Bishop of Geraldton, various school teachers, staff from headspace, Western Australian Aids Council (WAAC), Yamatji Southern Regional Aboriginal Corporation and the Bundiyyarra Aboriginal Corporation, to understand adults' perspectives on life in the Mid-West for children and young people.

During her time in region, the Commissioner participated in and spoke at the **Yamatji On Country** annual meeting.



LOGISTICS AND STATISTICS

Prompt questions

'What is really important to you, that you think I should know about?'

'What is awesome about living in Mid-West WA?'

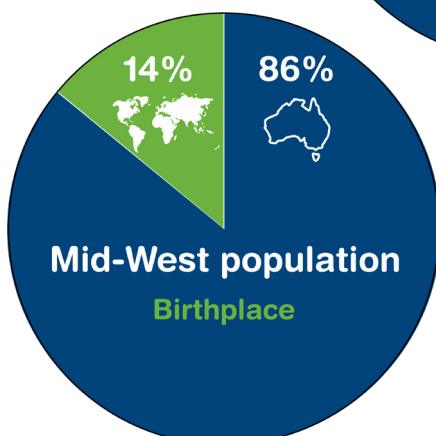
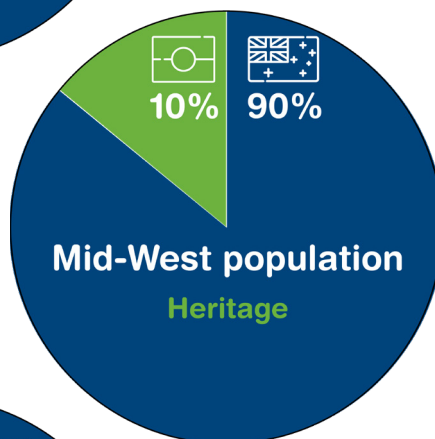
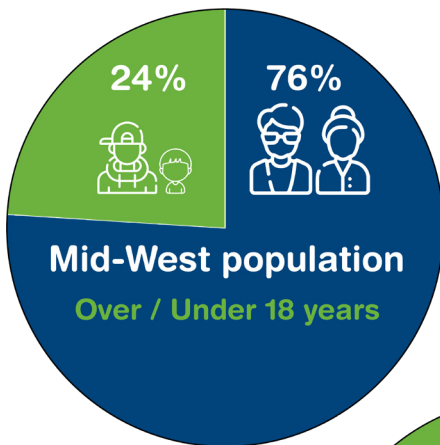
'What would make it even better?'

'What are three big things that you would like to discuss today?'

'How do you make yourself (or others), feel better when you (or they) are sad or anxious?'

'What do you think about the current voting age?'

'If you were to create an advertisement to get adults' attention about an issue, what would it say?'



Schools and Colleges participating

Beachlands Primary School
Champion Bay Senior High School
Dongara District High School
Geraldton Grammar School
Geraldton Senior High School
Mount Tarcoola Primary School
Nagle Catholic College
Northampton District High School
Rangeway Primary School
Saint Francis Xavier Primary School
Waggrakine Primary School
Wandina Primary School

Stakeholders

Association of Independent Schools WA
Catholic Education WA
Department of Education WA
Bundiyarra Aboriginal Corporation
Yamatji Southern Regional Aboriginal Corporation
headspace Geraldton
WAAC
ABC Geraldton
Town of Greater Geraldton

THEIR WORDS

"I love nature,
my friends,
family and
freedom"

"I love the heat
and the
sunshine"

"There's
all different cultures,
beautiful beaches,
great surf spots and
native wildflowers"

"I love the
memories
I have [made]
here"

Recurring themes of discussion

- Mental health, support for those with issues, and education not only for children, but also teachers, school staff, parents, guardians and carers.
- Bullying, gender discrimination, sexism, racism and body shaming.
- Health - access to and the impacts of junk food, vaping and regional isolation.
- Environmental and sustainability concerns.
- Poverty, cost of living, housing and shelter.
- Access to a broader range of affordable sports programs, and safe spaces to play.
- Safety and consequences of social media.
- Prevalence of illicit drugs in the area.
- Cost of education, uniforms, class sizes, one-to-one engagement with teachers, and individualised work for students with different needs.
- Lack of entertainment and youth-centred activities after school hours and on weekends.
- Love of Yamatji Country, Culture and Community.
- Beaches, sunsets, stars, nature, the weather and the wildlife.
- The social support and close connections between people in a small community.

What is great about the mid west

The animals



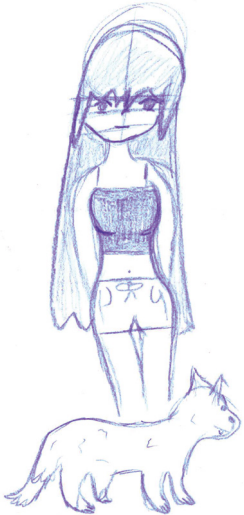


CALL TO LISTEN

Children were asked what grown-ups should listen to them about

They said:

- My mental and physical health
- Racism is making a comeback in schools
- What [really] happens at school
- Our mental health, feelings and opinions
- Adults should take mental health more seriously and need to take action when their child, or another child is struggling



We ALL have voices,
we need to use them
to speak up
against discrimination!!



They want you to remind you of:

- Money's a number, not a lifestyle
- Income doesn't determine value
- Profit < Healthy people
- No-one wins in bullying
- There's no prize for standing by
- Think, then talk
- Kindness is for everyone - even a few small words have a big impact
- Not recycling will lead to our downfall
- Do. not. give. up.
- Just because you're from a small town, it doesn't mean you can't do big things



DISCUSSIONS AND THEMES

When asked about what they liked about living in the Mid-West, children and young people spoke excitedly of the warm weather, beautiful landscapes, community festivals and different cultures that make up the society in which they live.

The nature that surrounds them, favourite fishing spots, camping, hiking, biking, beaches, rivers, wildlife and wildflowers, were also common topics.

There was a strong sense of pride in their community, the strong connections they have with friends and family, and how close everything (shops, friends, school, work) was to travel to.

Responses to the question 'What would make the Mid-West even better?' were numerous and centred upon education, mental health, anti-bullying, anti-racism, safety, environment and sport.

While Minions, Taylor Swift, Bounce and favourite fast foods dominated some talk, many conversations reflected broader societal concerns, including the high cost of living, poverty and sustainability.

There were calls for education campaigns and action on multiple social issues, such as:

- financial management
- free education in schools and university
- comfortable shelter for homeless people
- health impacts of vaping
- recycling/upcycling
- circular economies
- green energy

Mental health

Mental health was a major theme raised in nearly all meetings the Commissioner had in the Mid-West, with a clear message that there were not enough resources provided in the region.

A common feature of discussions with children and young people, was the need for more support in both school and community.

Sadly, an observation made by one child (and supported by others), was that teachers were either not aware of, or not concerned about, their students' struggles.

Participants also talked at length about their parents' limited understanding of mental health.

When children in the primary school forum were asked if teachers were able to help in matters of bullying, their response was unanimously "Not yet".

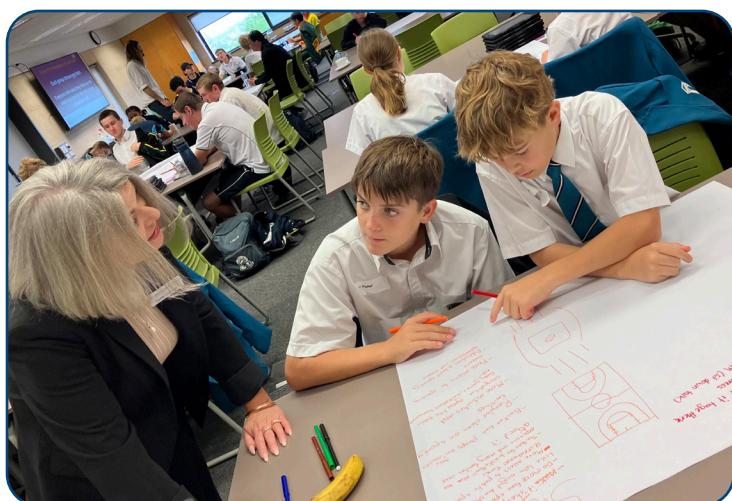
It was heart-warming to hear the optimistic inclusion of the word 'yet' - that they had hope that teachers would eventually have the capacity to help. However, the worrying consensus is that teachers are seen as currently not able to assist.

Concern was also voiced that, given the large number of people in their classes, teachers were unable to support students.

Many suggested that smaller class sizes would enable teachers to have more control in classrooms. This would not only provide students with more 1:1 learning assistance, but making it easier for teachers to see bullying when it happens.

Further to this, a significant number of children asked for more Education Assistants to be employed in classrooms to help students who need extra support.

Individualised work plans for students and support for those with mental health issues was also enthusiastically debated.



Although mental health struggles were seen to be ‘normal’ these days, knowing how to and who to ask for help was a major topic of concern.

Some students were not even aware if they had access to support staff and counselling programs at their school.

An interesting and important point raised by a number of participants, was their reticence to call Kids Helpline, Beyond Blue and 13Yarn.

Rather than speaking with a counsellor, children and young people told us they would be more comfortable texting or messaging.

In contrast, a small group of students said they were happy to call these services. It was interesting to note that they were all from the same school that had been visited by Kids Helpline staff who spoke with them about the service. They felt that the visit had empowered them to use this service if they needed.

In their own words – mental health:

“It would be helpful if teachers made talking about their problems easier, then they [children and young people] might find it easier to call helplines.”

“Teachers and parents should be taught about mental health and how to help us.”

“...Adults treat [mental health] as a joke; educate more parents about mental health.”

“Sometimes kids feel alone because [parents] are always busy.”

“There should be more awareness about mental health through posters and campaigns.”

“Adults tell you not to worry [about racism], but we can’t, because we see it.”

**“Friends are dying
[because of suicide] but there’s
no real news about it; why not?
THIS IS IMPORTANT.”**

**Kids Helpline provide
free online learning sessions
with qualified childrens’
counsellors.**

**They also provide teachers
with classroom resources,
available at
kidshelpline.com.au**

Sport

One of the problems that children and young people were interested in discussing was the high cost of participating in sport.

The consensus was that expenses related to uniforms, event dues, entrance fees and travel, often discouraged families from joining teams or attending events.

Many rated sport facilities within the Mid-West as very good, however stating that they often lacked proper shade, change rooms and rubbish bins around the grounds.

Despite the difficulties that they expressed, young people in the Mid-West were enthusiastic about sport and proud of their involvement in local teams.

They called for more sports subsidy, support for athletes to participate in State-level competitions, and more professional umpires at junior games.

In their own words – sport:

“Sport is too expensive, with travel and fees.”

“There’s not many options of sport, only footy for an adult male or teen.”

“We should lower the cost of sport and give a subsidy for fuel.”

“They [sports grounds] need more shade – people don’t come to watch because it’s too hot.”

“[We] need more government funding for sport. Local Government’s need to put in more money so sporting places don’t have to rely so much on sponsorships and fees.”

“Doing sports is important so people can stay healthy. Sports can burn some energy if you’re angry,... or energise [you if you are] sad.”

“Team sports/clubs help people keep mentally and physically healthy.”

“Sport should require skill and fun, not money.”



Bullying and racism

Concern was shared across all groups the Commissioner spoke with, about the level of racism and bullying around body shaming, cultural background, sexual orientation and gender.

Some suggested that [anti-]racism should be a subject taught in the Australian curriculum and that there should be more mental health services for people of a different heritage, who are being bullied.

LGBTQIA+SB young people also expressed anxiety about bullying and discrimination at school.

Mental health and physical safety were highlighted together with the feeling of helplessness when faced with trying to report bullying.

Many participants believed it to be common that a bully does not get the discipline they should – which reinforces the victim’s feelings of isolation and being unsupported.

It was suggested that there be extra education about anti-racism and more Aboriginal and Islander Education officers on staff at schools.

The need for stronger laws regarding racist behaviour was highlighted, together with better school rules around anti-racism.

Many participants applauded the proposal for cultural festivals in the Mid-West to celebrate diversity and reduce prejudice.

Social media was a common topic of discussion, particularly how it is weaponised by bullies to undermine confidence and self-esteem.

Participants recommended that age limits should be properly reinforced on social media, together with time limits on using the various apps.

It was also suggested that there should be greater education about the dangers of social media for children, young people, their teachers and families.

In their own words – bullying and racism:

“We all bleed red blood. We’re not so different.”

“We’re all the same on the inside.”

“Kindness is for everyone... even a few small words have a big impact.”

“Be vocal against bullies.”

“Teach kids resilience.”

“[There should be] more team sports... [to] bring people together to stop bullying.”

“Netball has a friend for everybody.”

“Respect is a two-way street.”

“Everyone is taken up. You be you.”

“We all have voices, we need to use them to speak up against discrimination.”

CALLS TO ACTION FROM THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Nearly a quarter of the Mid-West population comprises of children and young people.

It is imperative that we listen to what they have to say and understand their perspectives and opinions.

The children and young people who participated in the 2025 Mid-West Listening Tour felt empowered to speak out and were quite vocal about what they need us adults to hear and act upon.

Here are their recommendations:

Recommendations for Schools

- Ensure your students know of the mental health support provided by your school.
- Reassure students that counsellors are there to talk about both big and small problems.
- Consider introducing/extending anti-bullying, anti-racism, cultural inclusion and gender diversity education into learning programs.
- Create anti-bullying campaigns that clearly communicate the responsibility that everyone shares and the process for reporting bullying behaviour.
- Wherever possible, reduce class sizes and employ Aboriginal Education Assistants.
- Ensure children and young people are asked about their views, experiences and ideas to improve the supports, programs, services including education, available to them.
- Ensure children and young people understand their core rights to good health, education, housing and safety.

Recommendations for Government

- Seek ideas from a broad range of children and young people when considering needs such as community services, youth activities, holiday programs, sports etc.
- Provide more resourcing for mental health programs across the Region.
- Subsidise sports programs and ensure diversity of sporting codes.
- Upgrade and maintain sports grounds to provide more shade, bins, change rooms etc.
- Provide more out-of-school-hours activities and entertainment.
- Expand clean energy and environmental sustainability programs.
- Ensure all activities, services and funded organisations are embedding the National Childsafe Principles and have child-friendly complaint systems.
- Pay due regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Recommendations for Parents, Guardians and Carers

- Actively listen to your children and young people. Take the time to understand their perspectives.
- Increase your understanding of mental health, particularly how it relates to children and young people. Learn how you might be able to provide assistance.

Recommendation for counselling services

- Where possible, include text, messaging and web chat channels to services you provide for children and young people.



Only 4 days of school

A boys' school and a girls' school

A corner in each classroom for
children who need to relax

More basketball courts

Mental health recognition and prioritising it

An indoor play centre

A train station for more visitors

A chaplain at schools

Teachers should play music in class

The ability to move classes
if you are being bullied

More play-based work

A pool in Northampton

**People to stop littering
and take care of wildlife**

More choice of languages at school

A bowling alley

More opportunities to do creative stuff

A Bounce facility

Harder maths in primary school

More places to get food

Learn AUSLAN at schools

More activities

Smaller classes

A bike riding club

A giant park

Cheaper sports

More maths

**What
the Children
and
Young People
asked
for**

More cafes

Free mandarins
in class

More free time
at school

iPlay

Gardening club

A say in what they
wear at school

Laser tag

**Basketball pumps
on public courts**

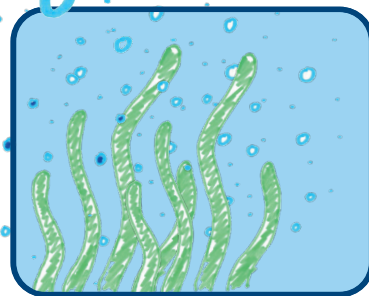
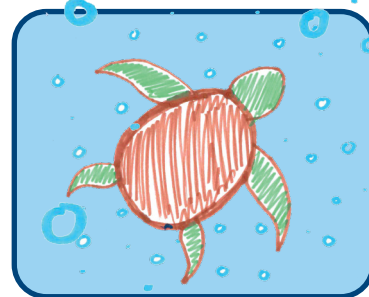
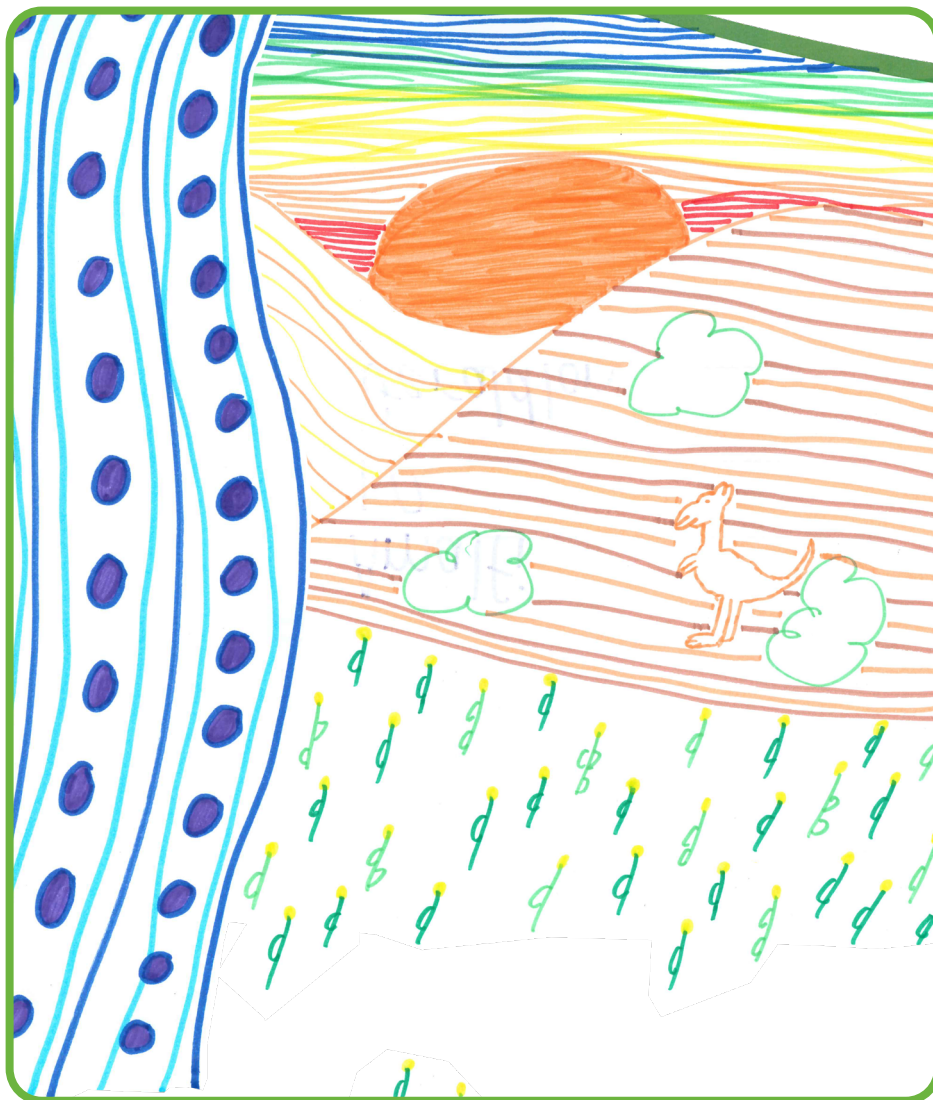
Free clubs around
town once a week

More assistance for those who
have mental disabilities

More education assistants in
class

**School to be
a safe place**

**Better gifted
and talented
programs**



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