

"It's up to EVERYONE to call it out"

**Children and young people's experiences
of racism in the Northern Territory:
Consultation summary report**

Acknowledgement

The Office of the Children’s Commissioner (OCC) respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners and custodians throughout the Northern Territory and their continuing connection to land, water and culture. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and value the role their children and young people play as future community leaders.

The OCC extends our deepest gratitude to the children and young people who participated in consultations on racism. We consider it a significant privilege to have heard from so many children and young people who courageously shared their experiences, thoughts and ideas with us. We see children and young people as experts in their own right.

The OCC acknowledges that racism in Australia is grounded in the ongoing legacy and harmful impact of colonisation.

The OCC stands committed to advocating for the change children and young people want to see in the Northern Territory, to ensure this is a safe place to live where cultural differences are respected and everyone is treated with dignity.

Content warning

The OCC respectfully acknowledges and advises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers that this report contains the name of a deceased person/s.

The OCC acknowledges that the content of this report may cause distress or be triggering for some readers. If reading this report brings up anything for you, support is available at:

- 13 Yarn (13 92 76)
- Lifeline (13 11 14)
- Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800)

The OCC acknowledges that in honouring the voices of young people in this work, this report does include the use of explicit language. We do not intend any offence by the use of this language.

The content in this report includes children and young people’s experiences of racism. In honouring the voices of children and young people who participated in consultations, the OCC has chosen not to change the words or images that participants have used to describe their experiences. All of the images featured in this report were drawn by children and young people who participated in consultations.

Suggested Citation

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Commissioner Foreword

This report is both deeply moving, yet deeply troubling. I am grateful to every child and young person who bravely shared with us their experiences, feelings and insights on racism.

Children and young people told us that racism in the Territory is pervasive and affects many aspects of their lives including their wellbeing, their participation and engagement in daily activities and their connection to members of their community. They told us that the Northern Territory community is both a vibrant, yet complex place for children and young people to grow up in.

Children and young people are acutely aware of how they are perceived by members of the public and what is being said about them. They told us that what they see, hear and witness in the news, in public spaces and on social media, makes them feel unwanted and unwelcome. Racism can be a source of deep shame in the hearts and minds of Aboriginal children and young people.

The experiences of shame caused by racism can have a profound impact on young people's lives, including their self-esteem, their identity and their hopes for the future. Racism undermines the capacity and ability for some young people to create meaningful change in their lives. As one young person described it *"it's like half the time we are just existing"*.



Shahleena Musk

Children's Commissioner

Children and young people generously shared with us their ideas and solutions for addressing racism in the Territory. Young people identified the need for better education in schools for both teachers and students, alongside greater public campaigns about the impact of racism in order to address its prevalence in our communities. Young people identified that specific training on racism is needed for many people in positions of authority and influence, including teachers, journalists, politicians, police, youth justice and child protection staff.

Young people must not carry the responsibility of addressing racism on their own. We all have a duty to prevent racism. We can and must do better by our children and young people. We must listen, we must act and we must work together to call racism out and stamp it out. Racism is harmful and it must be taken seriously.

Pursuant to section 10 of the *Children's Commissioner Act*¹, it is a privilege to publish my first report as the Northern Territory Children's Commissioner, completing important work started by my predecessor. I ask that you read this report with Territory children and young people in your heart and in your mind, and commit to doing what you can, individually and in the systems you work in, to address racism in all forms.

Terminology

The OCC acknowledges individual and the collective understanding of racism are complex and that particular words and language used may have different meanings based on personal and lived experience. We provide our understanding of the below definitions on the words children and young people used to describe their experiences of racism during consultations. We recognise that not everyone in our community uses these terms, and our intention is to respect and honour the voices of those children and young people who are at the heart of this report.

Aboriginal

While this report uses the term 'Aboriginal', we respectfully acknowledge that Torres Strait Islander people are First Nations people living in the Northern Territory. The use of the term 'Aboriginal' should be read to include 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' peoples. Indigenous is used when it is the title of a report, quotation or program.

Anti-racism

As defined by the Australian Human Rights Commission, "Anti-racism is an active process, unlike the passive stance of 'non-racism'. Anti-racism work requires consistent, committed and targeted action and attention. Racism operates at systemic, institutional, interpersonal and individual levels. Typically, individual and interpersonal racism receives more focus than institutional and systemic racism, and as a result deeper, systemic racial injustice continues to flourish. Anti-racism involves focusing on systemic racism."²

Culturally and linguistically diverse

The OCC recognises tensions with the use of 'culturally and linguistically diverse' to describe children and young people who may have been born overseas, have a parent born overseas, or who identify with a culture or religion that is not predominantly represented in Australian society or speaks another language other than English at home. We have respectfully chosen to use this term in our report in line with language children and young people used during consultations to describe their communities.

Informal monitoring visit

The OCC team undertakes regular visits to Don Dale and Alice Springs Youth Detention Centres to meet with children and young people. The purpose of these visits is to check in on the wellbeing of children and young people, and to talk with them about any concerns they may have about their treatment or wellbeing in custody.

Racism

The *Anti-Discrimination Act 1992 (NT)*³ (the Act) establishes protections for all Territorians, including children and young people, against discrimination on the basis of protected attributes including race and language in certain areas of life such as education, accommodation, work, accessing goods, services and facilities and in the administration of Territory laws and government programs.

Section 20 of the Act defines that discrimination includes any distinction, restriction, exclusion or preference made on the basis of an attribute that has the effect of nullifying or impairing equality of opportunity and harassment of the basis of an attribute.

Section 20(A) of the Act says that a person must not engage in offensive behaviour that is reasonably likely to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate another person or group of people or behaviour that is done because of the attribute of a person or group of people. For offensive behaviour to constitute prohibited conduct under the Act it must not occurred in private.

This means in order for offensive behaviour to be established as discriminatory under law, the behaviour must have:

- caused words, sounds, images or writing to be communicated to the public: or
- occurred in a public place: or
- occurred in the sight or hearing of a people who are in a public place.

The Act describes ‘public place’ as any place to which the public have access as a right or by invitation, whether express or implied and whether or not a charge is made for admission to the place.

Introduction

The Northern Territory (NT) Children’s Commissioner is an independent statutory officer appointed in accordance with the *Children’s Commissioner Act 2013*⁴. The Act articulates the functions, powers and responsibilities of the Children’s Commissioner, which include (among others) to promote and advocate for the rights, interests and wellbeing of vulnerable children, and to promote an understanding of and informed public discussion about their rights and best interests.

The Commissioner has as their priority the best interests of children, with a focus on vulnerable children, in all aspects of their work. Most importantly advocating for the voices of children and young people to be heard in all aspects of decision making.

Shahleena Musk was appointed as the Children’s Commissioner in January 2024. Shahleena is a Larrakia woman from Darwin with over two decades experience working in legal, policy and advocacy roles with a focus on child rights and youth justice.

Our vision at the OCC is that children and young people in the NT reach their full potential. Our mission is to ensure the rights and best interests of children and young people are safe guarded and promoted.

Consultation context

As part of functions under the *Children’s Commissioner Act 2013*⁵, the OCC team conduct regular informal monitoring visits to Don Dale Youth Detention Centre (DDYDC) and Alice Springs Youth Detention Centre (ASYDC). The purpose of these visits is to check on the wellbeing, health and safety of children and young people in custody and to hear from young people on any issues or concerns they may have.

During informal monitoring visits, the OCC observed that racism was a consistent theme raised by children and young people in detention. Aboriginal children continue to be overrepresented in all stages of the NT’s youth justice system.

Given the limited evidence and research base that exists about children and young people’s experiences of racism in the Territory, the OCC developed a formal consultation project to understand children and young people’s experiences of racism.⁶

It is intended that the findings of this project will contribute to further research and policy work in the NT on areas related to the wellbeing of children and young people.

Scope of this project

Children and young people who participated in this project were not asked to identify their cultural background for the purpose of statistical analysis. Despite this, the OCC acknowledges that many of the children and young people we spoke with had lived and living experiences of racism. Our intention was to be open and inclusive in this project and to welcome participation from children and young people from all cultural backgrounds.

This project was intended to be exploratory in nature as an initial starting point given the absence of research on children and young people’s experiences of racism in this jurisdiction.

Methodology

The overarching objective of this consultation project was to capture and share children and young people’s experiences of racism through their own words. From the outset, we did not seek to define racism during consultations in order for children and young people to share their own understanding of the topic unhindered.

Given the sensitive and harmful nature of racism, the OCC recognised the need to ensure a child friendly, safe and inclusive process for children and young people who sought to be engaged in the project. The OCC worked with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, schools and non-Government organisations working with children and young people to ensure our methodology was child centred. Representatives from these organisations were invited to be present at all of our consultation sessions.

The OCC team developed consultation questions in partnership with young people with lived experience of racism in accordance with best practice principles of youth participation and co-design. These questions were then tested with young people and their supports to ensure appropriateness and accessibility. Consultation questions were refined during the project to ensure they were easy to understand and engage with from a child’s perspective, developmentally and culturally.

The OCC undertook targeted group consultations held between March - December 2023 with children and young people living in urban and remote areas of the NT including:

- Darwin
- Katherine
- Jilkminggan
- Barunga
- Wugularr
- Mataranka
- Mparntwe (Alice Springs)
- Tennant Creek
- Ltyentye Apurte (Santa Teresa)

Informed consent was obtained from all children and young people who participated in consultations and their support people, including teachers, youth workers and cultural mentors who were invited to be present for each session. Children and young people were informed that participation was voluntary and that consent could be withdrawn at any time.

Consultations opened with either an in person or video presentation from the previous acting Children’s Commissioner introducing herself and her role as Commissioner. The acting Commissioner provided an overview of what racism is, the purpose of the consultations and her experiences of racism as an Aboriginal woman.

Children and young people were then engaged in structured group consultations focused on open ended questions to determine:

- whether participants had either seen or experienced racism before;
- the context of this experience including where it occurred in and who had been involved; and
- how the experience made the participant feel.

Participants were also provided with an opportunity to provide individual written responses to these questions through the use of survey forms. In addition, participants were encouraged to express responses through the use of any creative medium they felt was appropriate for them including the use of writing, drawing and other imagery. Group activities and discussions were also facilitated as part of the consultation process.

Children and young people’s rights against racism

There are well established national and international mechanisms that outline Government’s responsibility to protect children from discrimination. Australia ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1990. The UNCRC articulates the human rights of children which include; their right to freedom from discrimination, enshrining a child’s right to practice their culture, speak in their own language and to have their best interests respected in Government decision making.⁷

“It always feels like because we’re young, we know less. But we already know a lot about racism”

“Let’s all celebrate our differences”

Australia also ratified the United Nation’s International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racism (ICERD) in 1975. Australia’s obligations under the ICERD are enshrined in the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)*⁸ and supported by the *Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 (Cth)*⁹. The *Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)* protects all Australians from unfair treatment on the basis of their race and makes racial vilification illegal. Australia’s Race Discrimination Commissioner has the responsibility for protecting people from unfair treatment under the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)*, driving educational programs to combat racial discrimination and progressing Australia’s National Anti-Racism Framework.¹⁰

The NT’s *Anti-Discrimination Act 1992*¹¹ establishes protections for all Territorians, including children and young people, against discrimination on the basis of protected attributes including race, language, age, gender and sexual orientation in certain areas of life such as work and accessing goods, services and facilities. The Act also establishes parameters for complaints regarding systemic discrimination.¹²

The NT does not have a designated anti-racism strategy. Australia’s first and only national Anti-Racism strategy concluded in 2018 and this work led to the development of the *Racism. It Stops with Me* national campaign.¹³ While work progresses at a national level on a new National Anti-Racism Framework,¹⁴ there remains a significant gap in addressing racism in the NT evidenced through the absence of a Territory specific strategy to reduce the prevalence and impact of its harmful effects.¹⁵

The impact that racism has on children and young people

Racism impacts significantly on the health and wellbeing of children and young people; and it is a well-established public health issue. In the lives of children and young people, the harmful effects of racism can cause mental health issues including depression, anxiety and can increase the risk for suicide.¹⁶

“The younger they are the harder it hits them”

It is known to contribute to other psychological, psychosocial and behavioural concerns including sleep disturbance, hypervigilance and attention based difficulties.¹⁷ Racism impacts on the physical health and wellbeing of children and young people, increasing the risk of chronic disease in adulthood including heart disease, diabetes and obesity.¹⁸

Aboriginal children and young people are particularly vulnerable to the harmful effects of racism and experience ongoing health inequality because of its effects.¹⁹ Aboriginal children who experience early exposure to racism are at an increased risk of negative mental health and behavioural growth throughout their life.²⁰

Exposure to prolonged and frequent racism at an early age can impact on multiple areas of the health and development of Aboriginal children.²¹ It reduces the overall quality of life experienced by Aboriginal children and young people, their educational outcomes and their aspirations and hopes for the future.

Research demonstrates that addressing and reducing racism is central to the development of any effective public health policy that aims to improve the health and wellbeing of Indigenous children, young people and communities.²²

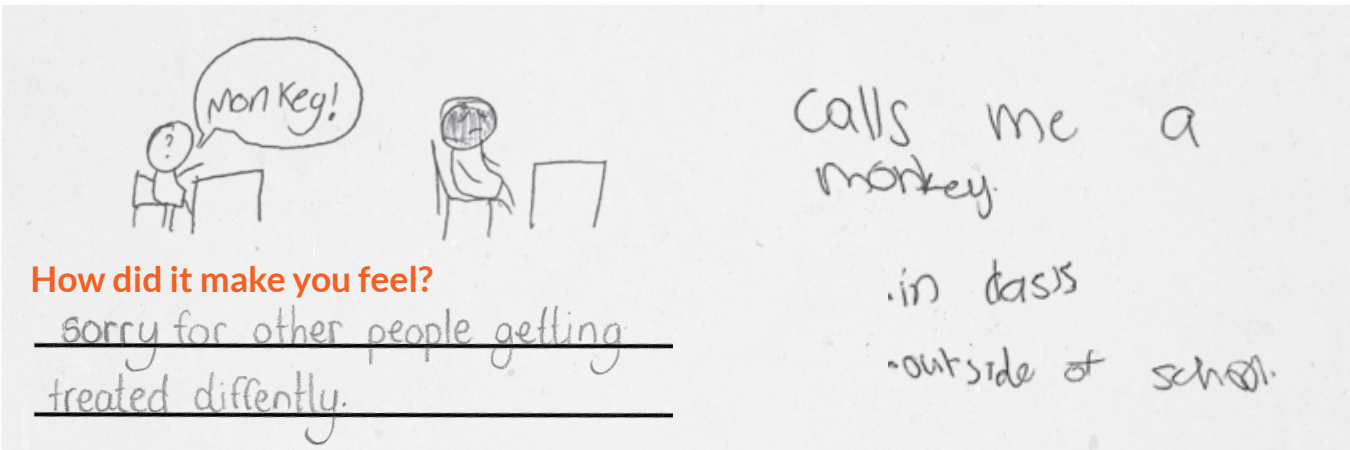
Recent research conducted by the Queensland Family and Child Commission found that experiences of racism and discrimination continue to be risk factors for both offending and re-offending for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people who continue to be overrepresented in the youth justice system.²³

Children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds experience high levels of racism.²⁴ Experiences of racism impacts on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and their social relationships. Racial discrimination towards young people

“All the different races make Darwin a good place to grow up”

in this group is associated with overall poorer physical and mental health outcomes including lower levels of self-esteem and increased likelihood of depression.²⁵

“You get racism every single day. How will you feel? A person can only take as much as you can take”



Understanding the experiences of children and young people living in the Territory

Given the aim of this consultation project was to capture and share children and young people's experiences of racism, this report predominantly focuses on a thematic analysis of issues identified by children and young people during consultations and is supplemented by quantitative statistical analysis where possible.

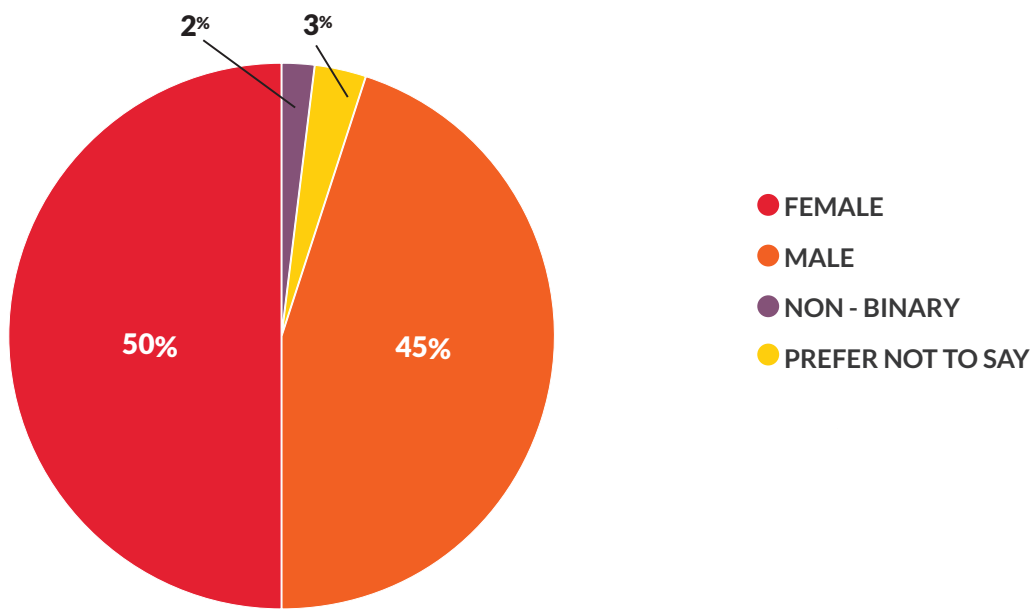
The OCC spoke with **284 people** between the ages of 8 and 19 years across the NT

The median age of people we spoke to was **15 years**

People aged between **13 to 17 years** accounted for **71%** of the total consultation sample

219 children and young people provided a response regarding the identity of their gender

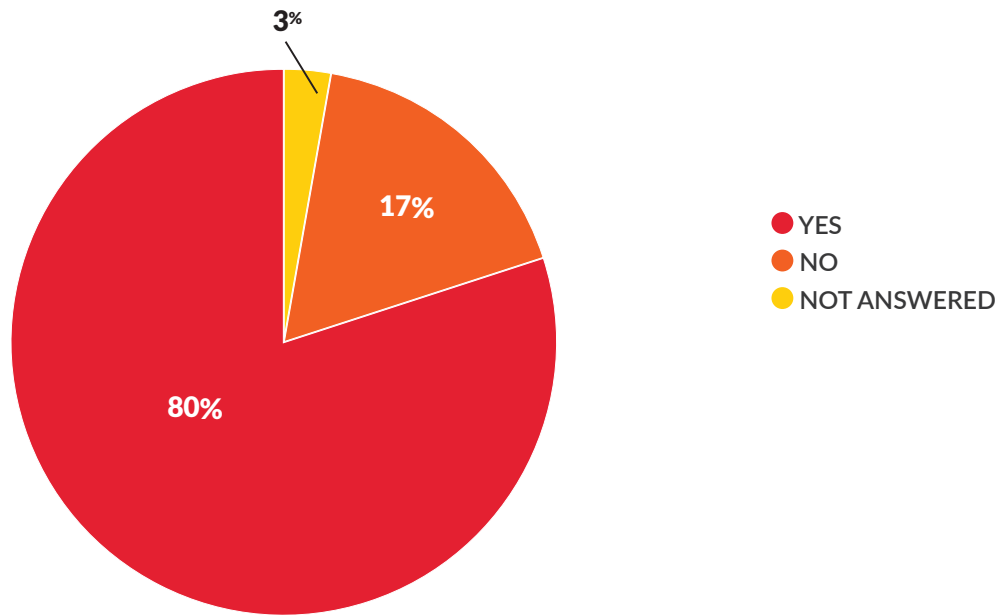
Gender identity of children and young people who participated in consultations



Have children and young people experienced or observed racism?

Out of **284** children and young people consulted during this project, **80 per cent** of children and young people told us that they had experienced or observed racism. **227** individual responses were received to the question of whether children or young people had experienced or observed racism.

How many children and young people have experienced racism?



During consultations, children and young people described frequent and multiple experiences or observations of racism. It was evident that children and young people were acutely aware of the world around them, and reflected back the narrative that exists in the community about community members from diverse cultural backgrounds.



"Australia is a pretty racist country. Just discriminate a lot. Don't know why, lots of cultures here. Don't understand others values"

Where did children and young people experience or observe racism?

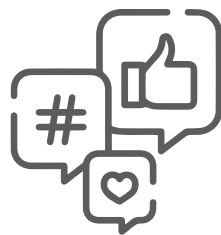
175 individual children and young people told us where they had experienced or observed racism:



31% of responses
identified school as the primary environment



29% of responses
general public settings including urban streets, public pools, libraries and recreation space



11% of responses
identified social media and online



3% of responses
identified work places



2% of responses
identified public transport



22% of responses
identified shops



2% of responses
identified sporting clubs

Racism in schools

In describing their experiences of racism in school environments, children and young people explained:

"Bus driver wouldn't let Aboriginal children on. They had primary school uniforms on"

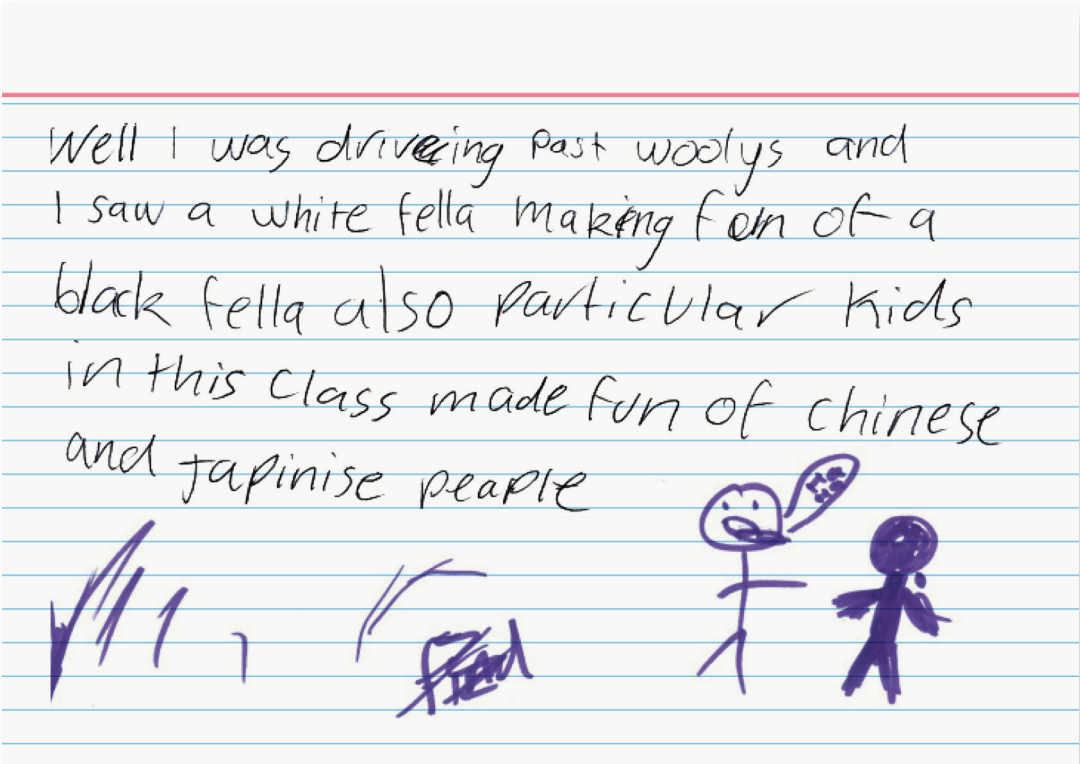
"Students making jokes"

"People using the N word"

"Kids saying Aboriginal kids can't be academic"

"Teacher thinks we had ADHD because of the colour of our skin"

"Making Aboriginal people speak in front of class about our experiences"



Racism in public settings

In describing their experiences or observations of racism in general public settings, children and young people shared:

"We always get asked if we live there when we are swimming in our pool"

"White lady saw me struggling to swim and made a racist comment"

"Most racism comes from adults. People need to let those ideas go"

In describing their experiences or observations in shops, children and young people shared:

"Security target us"

Working around in Kmart in casing with me and my brother and we got followed around the whole Kmart from a security. We asked the security what was the problem then he didn't respond to us then we left. I knew straight away just because of the way we dressed and our skin colour he thought we was gonna steal.

Shop/Kathesine Woolies



"Tourists at Coles said racist slurs to my friend"

darwin
I got bashed for no reason When I was walking home.
Getting kicked out of Shops because I'm black

"A lady snatched me off my dad at the shops because I am white and my dad is brown (sic) he was really mad about it, and is still angry"

a group of Black kids walked in to a store and the worker followed them around the store. And did not follow other kids in store.
* following us in shops, and act like they fixing stuff up but I know watching us.

The interconnectedness of social media, the public narrative and safety

Children and young people who participated in group consultations in Alice Springs identified frequent and serious acts of racism in public settings and online. Children and young identified social media pages as negatively affecting their feelings of safety in their own community.

They gave an example of the Action for Alice page, as a source of racist and harmful comments targeted towards Aboriginal children, young people and community members. Children and young people explained that at times, this page has led to their engagement in anti-social behaviour as they feel unwelcome and as though they don't belong in their community.

When we walk pass every time they all ways gotta follow us and make up some story then they called police on us for no reason And we get dropped off from Alice At Home and some racist ~~dis~~ throw eggs at us and we get angry then we to bad things around town that's why Action for Alice most racist people

"Young fellas feed off the racism and attention. Don't want to act better"

"Show racism to me and I'll show it back"

"Action for Alice – people piling on with racist comments"

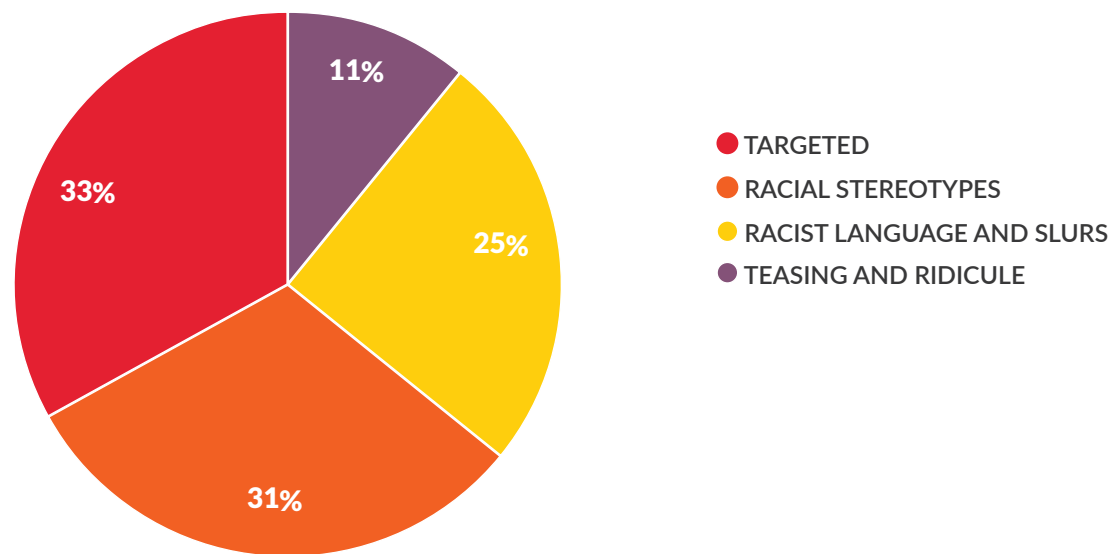
I have seen racism happen in the news and online. In the US during the pandemic, many people from Asia experienced violence fueled by racism.

ACTION FOR ALICE MAKES YOS ANGRY
Police to ACTION RACISM
THEY TREAT YS ROUGH, SWEAR AT YS

"Action for Alice makes things worse. They post stuff with little kids – everyone adds hate comments"

What types of racism were experienced or observed by children and young people?

Children and young people provided **323** responses to types of racism they had either experienced or observed.



Type:

Teasing and ridicule

11% of all children and young people who responded had experienced or observed teasing and ridicule.

Children and young people identified where they or others have been made fun of, picked on or humiliated because of their race or ethnicity. We have distinctly separated this from instances of bullying that children and young people spoke about during consultations.

Type:

Racist language and slurs

25% of all children and young people who responded had experience or observed the use of racist language and slurs.

Children and young people identified where they had either experienced or observed derogatory and harmful comments or remarks targeted towards race or ethnicity.

Type:

Deliberate and targeted instances of racism

33% of all children and young people who responded had experienced or observed deliberate and targeted acts of racism.

Children and young people experienced or observed where the act of racism was intentional and overt in comparison to microaggressions.²⁶

Type:

Racial stereotypes

31% of all children and young people who responded had experienced or observed racial stereotyping.

Children and young people have either experienced or observed a harmful or negative depiction or categorisation of themselves or someone else based on assumptions due to their race or ethnicity.

Recurring themes emerged from consultations with children and young people regarding the use of microaggressions²⁷ and what young people described as ‘casual racism’. The Australian Human Rights Commission defines “casual racism is one form of racism. It refers to conduct involving negative stereotypes or prejudices about people on the basis of race, colour or ethnicity. Examples include jokes, off-handed comments, and exclusion of people from social situations on the basis of race...Casual racism concerns not so much a belief in the superiority of races but negative prejudice or stereotypes concerning race.”²⁸

While targeted and deliberate acts of racism were more strongly identified during consultations, young people explained that microaggressions and the use of ‘casual racism’ is still pervasive and is observed in a range of different settings. These forms of racism are offensive, cause significant harm and are illegal. Young people identified that these forms of racism are often not addressed by either adults or young people when they occur, and that more needs to be done to educate everyone in the community about these forms of racism:

“Jokes from workmates”

“People not understanding light skin people are also Indigenous”

“Stereotypes are a big problem”

“People focus on stereotypes instead of how beautiful different cultures are”

“(Casual racism) gets normalised”

“Spreading misinformation and jokes about you and your culture”

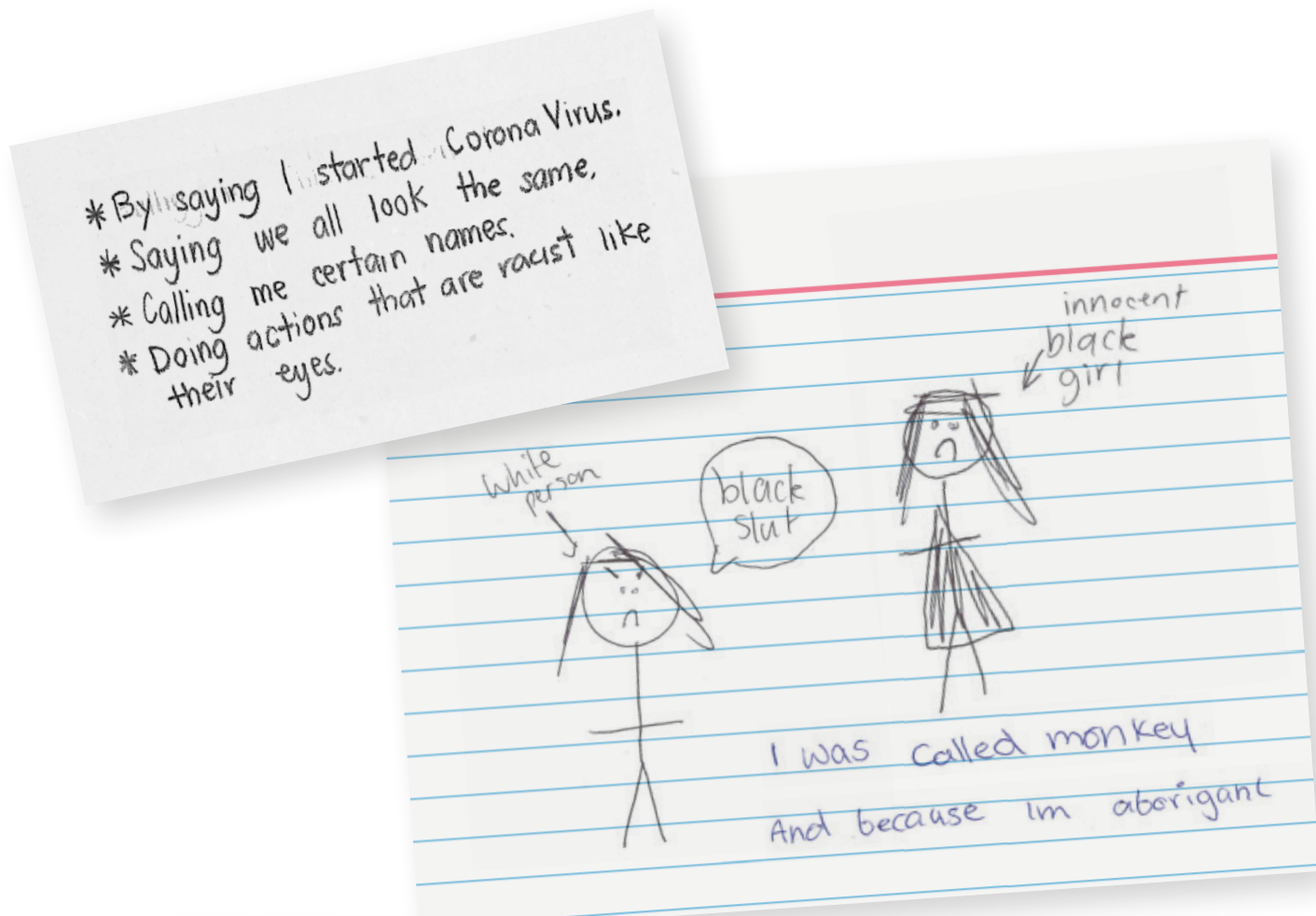
“Action for Alice is racist and terrible. They make it seem like Alice is unsafe”

“As though it (racism) is casual and it’s a joke”

“Stop sharing negative stereotypes”

“People try to define Aboriginal people by their appearance and think you’re not Aboriginal if you don’t fit in”

“I’ve noticed Asian girls get attacked more than my white friends. (They) feel less protected”



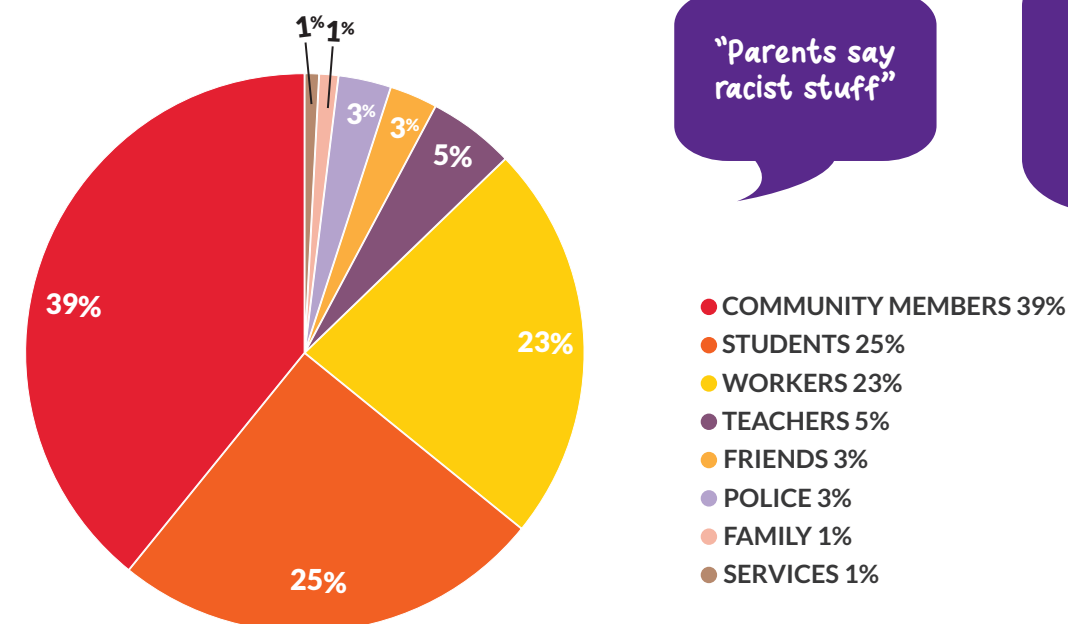
I was playing Black ops online and my profile was the Aboriginal flag. Two people started saying racist things like "petrol sniffer and the N word".

I see white people threatening black people of there skin colour.

Ive seen it on tiktok were black people get treated differently. And when I went to Katherine Ive seen two security guards following black kids.

Where does racism come from?

148 individual responses were received from children and young people on who perpetrates racism. Of the responses, children and young people identified four primary groups as responsible for perpetrating racism.



"Most racism comes from adults. People need to let those ideas go"

"Parents say racist stuff"

"An aboriginal lady came in with a broken arm and was screaming. They told her to leave because she was too loud"

In describing their experiences of racism perpetrated by students, children and young people shared:

"Experiencing racism is not really nice. It's happened in class, outside the school office (by) friends and my classmates"

"2 white girls. They told me I don't belong here and go back to where I came from. Also said I can't do things because I'm black. They also asked me how I'm black if my mum is white and that I'm faking to be black"

"Lots of times it's your friends, you don't want to report them"

"I'm from South Africa and coming to (redacted) makes everything different. Why are you white if you're from South Africa? African bitch go pick cotton etc. No one did anything to protect me, they all laughed. To be honest it hurt. It happens 24/7. Talking to parents is really uncomfortable because of judgement. They (students) also pick on the type of food you eat"

In describing their experiences of racism perpetrated by workers in shops, including security guards, children and young people told us they experienced or observed deliberate targeting based on their race:

"Security follows black kids and it escalates"

"All black kids get treated as criminals"

"Being bag searched when I'm with friends who are people of colour"

"Grown adults accusing children as soon as they come in"

"Co-workers telling you to look out for certain people"

"(Shops) kick out young people for no reason"

"A security guard told an Aboriginal group of people to fuck off. They were just waiting for family"

Children and young people living in all areas of the NT spoke about their concerns regarding the practice of police. In describing their experiences of racism being perpetrated by police, some young people told us:

"Police sling young fellas to the ground"

"(Police) are quick to pull over Indigenous people"

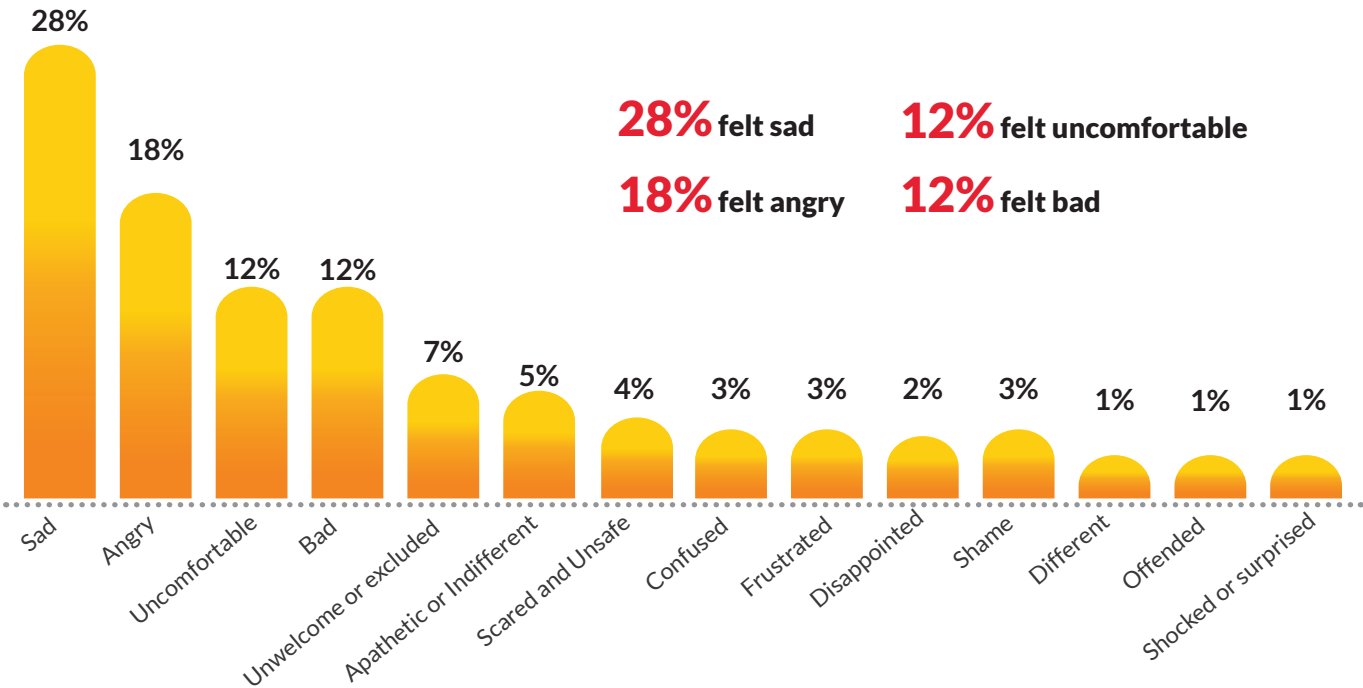
"Police just assume we are doing something wrong"

"Police stereotype"

How does racism make children and young people feel?

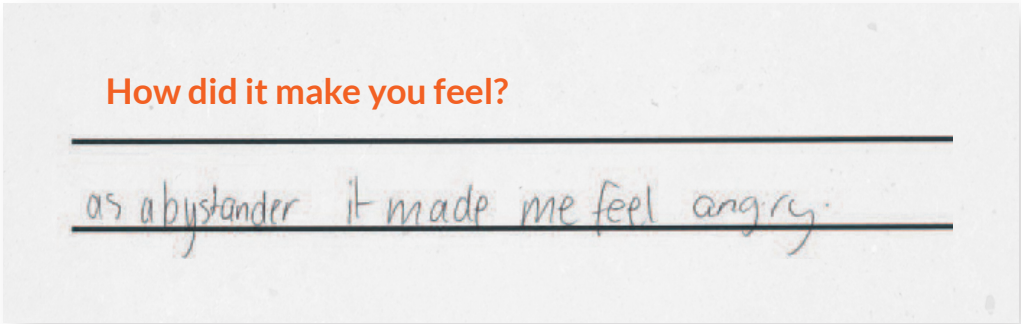
Feelings and emotions

The following data reflects the words used by participants to describe their feelings or emotions associated with experiencing or observing racism. Of the responses, children and young people identified four primary emotions as a result of experiencing or observing racism:



"Racism makes us feel angry, embarrassed and confused"

"People can change because of other people's words"



Shame

Aboriginal children and young people consistently raised the feeling of shame during group consultations for the project. The OCC recognises that the experience of shame is different for each individual and in recognition of this, we have not sought to define shame in the context of this consultation analysis. The OCC does not claim to address how shame is understood or experienced by diverse communities in this report.

Shame can be associated with feelings including guilt, humiliation and embarrassment.²⁹ It can deeply impact on the development of an individual’s identity. Research indicates that the experience of shame for Indigenous people can be attributed to factors including:

- Being singled out from the group
- Not knowing rules or expectations
- Being forced to act in a way that does not confirm to social or spiritual obligations
- Internalised racism
- Response to colonising power dynamics.³⁰

As exemplified through consultation responses, experiences of shame can impact on thoughts, feelings and behaviour of Aboriginal children and young people.³¹ Importantly, shame is also known to be a barrier experienced by Aboriginal young people to accessing wellbeing related supports.³²

Aboriginal children and young people in Alice Springs spoke about how public narrative about them in the community both creates and reinforces feelings of shame. In their view, young people described how the narrative perpetuated by many forms of media drives the ongoing marginalisation of young people, meaning they often seek connection in their peers. Some children and young people are often out at night with their peers in Alice Springs for a range of complex reasons including poverty, family violence and overcrowding.³³ This draws a high level of visibility to children and young people who are out at night and has led to young people feeling deliberately targeted by community members, police and security.

Feelings of shame, influenced by the community narrative and over-surveillance of Aboriginal young people, can lead to conflict. For example, if a young person out at night with no intention of doing anything ‘wrong’, gains the attention of persons in authority and is followed around shops and public places, they may feel more inclined to fulfil the view or narrative that they are hearing from people in the community about them.

“People feel shame, upset and humiliated”

“Wasn’t even stealing, but then I thought you wanna see stealing? I’ll show ya”

“Makes kids think – fuck it”

The impact of the public narrative on the exclusion of young people

During group consultations, young people in Alice Springs talked about how social media and stories in the news effect their feelings of safety.

They said they often see hurtful and racist comments online, especially on a page called Action for Alice. The commentary on this page is unmoderated, and includes racially targeted and derogatory comments.

Young people identified that they believe this page and the broader narrative in Alice Springs about Aboriginal children has lead to increased policing and over surveillance both by police officers and security officers.

The behaviour of adults in positions of power in these roles can make young people feel intimidated and unwelcome.

“Makes me feel not safe, scared”

Many of the young people who spoke about Action for Alice expressed the belief that it contributed to the ongoing harmful and intimidating narrative about Aboriginal children and young people in Alice Springs. This contributes to feelings of shame and embarrassment, and a belief that they don’t belong in the Alice Springs community.

“Racism makes people angry and not want to behave well”

Young people explained that the pain associated with shame and exclusion may lead some young people to engage in offending behaviour, as they fundamentally don’t feel accepted by or welcome in the broader community.

“Everyone is racist here. Young kids do crime, then the white people say all black kids are criminals”

How did it make you feel?
So Sad, Embarrassing, Cry, Shame,

How did it make you feel?
I felt angry and sad.

“People treat you bad you want to treat them bad”



How did it make you feel?

Made me feel disgusted because we have family who are Aboriginal and its offensive

How did it make you feel?

like shit

How did it make you feel?

I felt angry and sad

How did it make you feel?

Sick that anyone but especially kids who can't even move out or have control over their own health care have to deal with this stuff and can't have a chance to be a kid

How did it make you feel?

Scared ashamed

How did it make you feel?

Angry and made me start thinking about what they said and if it's true or even though I know it wasn't. Also made me feel like punching them or getting them bashed for what they said.

How did it make you feel?

Sick that anyone but especially kids who can't even move out or have control over their own health care have to deal with this stuff and can't have a chance to be a kid

The heavy weight of all forms of racism

From the consultations it was clear that many children and young people are exposed to multiple forms of racism across different systems and structures in the Territory. The weight of this cannot be understated – the force of multiple and compounding daily experiences of racism in all its forms impacts significantly on the lives and wellbeing of children and young people.

The following example demonstrates the potential cumulative harm of racism that many young people experience on a daily basis. Our intention is not to simplify the complexity of a child or young person's experience of racism or its impacts, but rather illustrate the heavy weight of racism that many are carrying in their lives every day.

Racist comments and remarks from classmates

EDUCATION

Students disciplined for attempting to exit classroom during school incident

Being followed by security for no reason.

PUBLIC PLACES

Community members are using racial slurs and saying they are not wanted.

Aboriginal children being accused of crime posted on Instagram

MEDIA

Posts online that portray Aboriginal children or young people in a negative light

Friends making racist jokes

FRIENDS

Disrespecting cultural ceremonies, rituals, or holidays.



RACISM IMPACTS EVERY PART OF A CHILD'S LIFE.

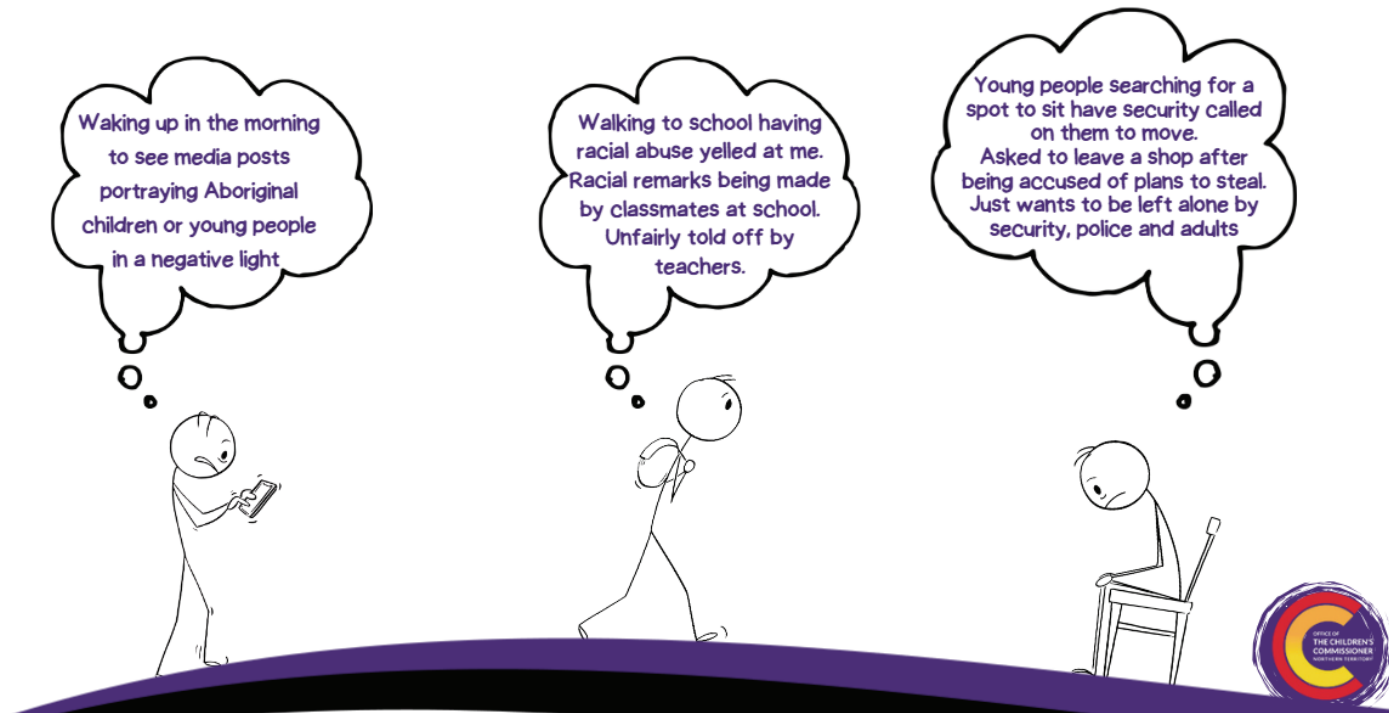
How did it make you feel?

And because I'm light skin people make fun of me & say I have no culture and that I'm not aboriginal

MORNING

EVENING

AFTERNOON



How did it make you feel?

When people call me something that sound like racism
it makes me feel like I'm not apart of anything &
that I have no culter And I feel sad and unhappy!
And like I feel unsafe

How did it make you feel?

• feel f***k up / Angry / stress /

Recommendations from children and young people

Children and young people shared a range of thoughtful ideas and suggestions on how racism can be addressed in the Territory. These recommendations have been thematically categorised based on discussions from the group activities during consultations.

A Whole of Government response is required to adequately address and reduce the prevalence of racism in the lives of the Territory's children and young people.



"Put less power to racism"

"There's no consequences
for being racist"

"Kids get treated worse if
they are black"

"Don't make decisions for
kids. If they make a mistake,
they make a mistake.
Don't yell at them"

Recommendation one: stopping racism in the first place is everyone's responsibility

The need for better education and awareness raising initiatives was the primary recommendation made by children and young people in consultations. Children and young people recommended the school educational curriculum embed the importance of cultural education, local Aboriginal knowledge and languages and provide an accurate account about the impact colonisation has on Australia.

"Instead of
religious education
– why don't
we do cultural
education?"

"Racism makes
people angry
and not want to
behave well"

How did it make you feel?

upset, offended.

Many young people told us that the education curriculum needs to include structured content that equips students with knowledge and understanding of the impact of racism in all of its forms and anti-racism approaches. Children and young people shared:



Children and young people told us that teachers need training on what racism is, its harmful impacts, anti-racism approaches and their role in addressing racism in schools. This includes the need for appropriate policies and mechanisms to be developed in education settings that support both teachers and students on responding to racism.

Children and young people with lived experience of racism should be involved in the design of any future curriculum content, policies and complaints mechanisms aimed at addressing racism in education settings.

"If teachers don't know students is where they start assuming based on race"

"Teacher is
heaps harder on
Aboriginal kids"

Recommendation two: everyone needs to change the narrative about children and young people in the community

The proliferation of negative, intimidating and discriminatory community narratives about children and young people was spoken about consistently throughout consultations in all NT sites. They described that the current narrative undermines the positive and important ways that children and young people contribute to the community. Children and young people were thoughtful when reflecting on the impact of this ongoing narrative on the broader community. They described:



Children and young people shared with us that everyone in the community including the media and politicians need to take responsibility for changing harmful narratives about young people in the community:



Given the harmful effects of racism on the health and wellbeing of children and young people, active efforts must be taken by everyone in our community to talk about children and young people in a respectful way. Everyone in the community has a responsibility to talk about and with children and young people in an ethical way they does not entertain stereotypes, racialised comments or blanket assumptions. Children and young people are important members of our society and deserve to be listened to and respected.

Recommendation three: supporting children and young people to respond to racism safely

"If a kid has reported it (racism) make it matter!"

"In general, there's not much we can do as a kid"

"I don't know who to trust"

"If we say something (to address it), they could stab you"

Throughout consultations, children and young people spoke of feeling unsure about whether and how to respond to racism. Many young people told us about the impact that disempowerment has when children young people don't know what to do or how to respond to acts of racism.

Children and young people told us that while silence around racism is harmful, there is not enough support or education for young people in the community on what they can do, where to go for help and where possible how to action themselves.

This indicates the clear need for wholesale work to be undertaken by Government, the non-Government sector and the business sector to prevent and reduce racism in all of its form across the Territory. This should include appropriate mechanisms and supports that safeguard against racism, and that protect the rights of all community members against its harmful effects.

Feedback from children and young people demonstrates the important need for a targeted Territory wide campaign and strategy aimed at preventing racism. Children and young people made a range of suggestions on responding to racism:

"(Reporting to) teachers doesn't really work"

"If it's safe to report it (at school) you should"

"Friends need to stop friends"

"Good to stand up for others – not bystanding"

"Young people need guidance at home"

"Proper consequences for kids that say stuff"

"Can stand up and say that's not alright"

"Speak to them and ask what did you say that?"

Recommendation four: systemic whole of Government reform that listens to the voices of children and young people with lived experience is urgently required

"Better laws – more done to protect children"

"It always feels like because we're young, we know less. But we already know a lot about racism"

"Justice for Walker, Black Lives Matter, Cassius Turvey"

"The Stolen Generation affects generations (now). It's why young people run amok"

Children and young people told us that change is needed in other systems including child protection and youth justice systems. The commonality of the education, youth justice and child protection systems is that they include adults in position of power and authority who make very important and often life changing decisions about, and often without the input of, children and young people. For some children and young people who participated in consultations, these systems and the people who work within them have a very direct impact on their day-to-day lives, opportunities and experiences.

Children and young people also identified the NT police force as another system that needs meaningful training and reform. During consultations, children and young people identified that police are adults working in positions of authority often with very vulnerable people including young people who might be having a hard time. They discussed how the adults working in the police force need greater training on racism, its harmful effects, anti-racism approaches and cultural awareness training to make sure police do their important jobs safely.

Children and young people explained that the conduct and/or treatment some children and young people experience from adults working in education, youth justice, child protection and with police can disproportionality cause harm in the lives of Aboriginal children and young people.

Staff who work in roles within these systems that have an inherent adult child power imbalance require greater understanding of culture as a strength and important factor in the lives of Aboriginal children and young people. They told us that too often, these systems and the people working within them focus on punitive approaches and targeting of young people and families based on their Aboriginality. To them, this looks like more young people being taken away from their families or going into care or custody.

"Black kids get taken way quicker than white families"

"Community needs to come together – elders and the community"

Children and young people were thoughtful and considerate when making suggestions about improving Government systems to better support young people and families having a hard time:

"Young people need guidance at home"

"Break the cycle – support kids to learn right and wrong"

"Need more resources to solve root problems"

"Support families to get kids back on track"

"Wrap around supports for young people's entire lives"

"Solve violence, drinking, drugs and make sure kids are safe at home"

Recommendation five: creating safer spaces for children and young people

The OCC notes that many of these thoughtful recommendations from children and young people are strongly reflected in the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations.³⁴

The over-surveillance and scrutiny of children and young people, particularly by security guards, must stop. Young people suggested that training in cultural awareness, anti-racism and appropriate communication with young people for security guards is one of the ways to address this:

"Security that talk, listen and are respectfully, actually help the situation"

Education

no education for Black people

til tok

"Security should be trained about racism and racial hate"

"If you get Indigenous security guards kids might listen"

"Security being less rough – talking to kids"

My neighbour in family because we were black he didn't like my kids playing with us or when we came over so he moved out

My friend didn't like to be seen with me in front of her white friends

people was racist in the early 1900 or the 18th centry they also treated African people like they were diffrent and our c

Seeing stuff on tik tok
Racism Fighting

I wont name who, but a certain member in my family makes uncalled for and unneeded comments that are racist.

How did it make you feel?
It made me feel like 'this is not right' and 'It needs to stop'

Conclusion

The OCC were honoured to hear from every child and young person that contributed to this consultation project. Children and young people courageously shared with us their experiences and observations of racism, and what they believe can be done to address racism to make the Territory a safe place for everyone to live. Children and young people’s experiences of racism must be taken seriously.

Children and young people gave us important insights into the drivers of racism, the social and political context in which it operates and what could help to address racism in all of its forms. Children and young people want to be empowered in knowing where they can go for help and how to respond to racism safely when it occurs. Many believe there needs to be better information, education and targeted training for both teachers and students on what is racism, its impacts including the harm it causes, and what can be done to prevent it in our communities.

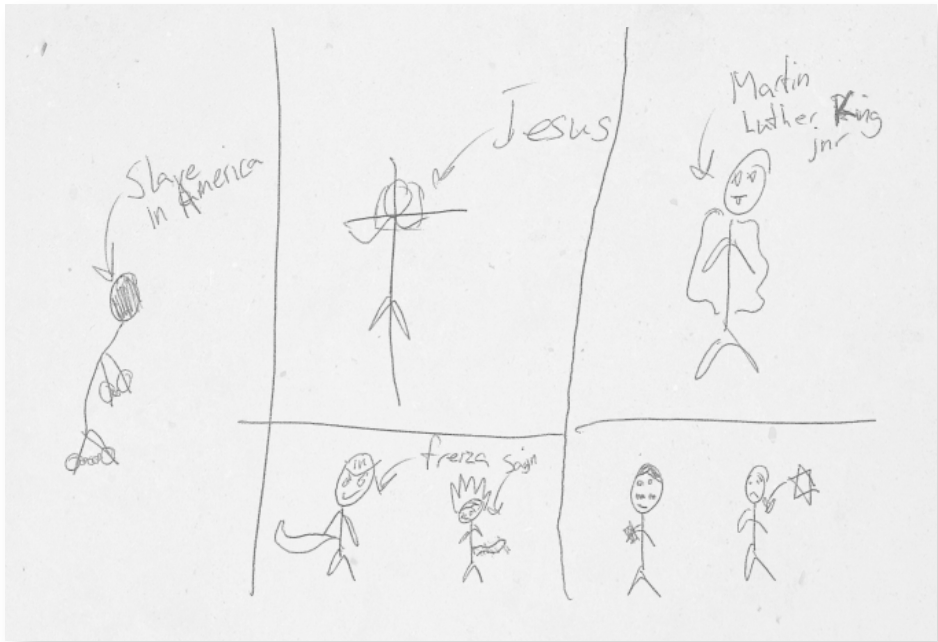
Racism affects people in a multitude of ways and can contribute to feelings of shame in the lives of Aboriginal children and young people. For some children and young people, racism can undermine both their capacity and ability to create the meaningful change in their lives that they deeply desire.

Children and young people want to see meaningful systemic reform. They want to see the adults who work in these systems to receive adequate training that addresses systemic racism so they are afforded every opportunity to grow and thrive.

It is incredibly important for governments, organisations, businesses, schools, communities and individuals to hear what children and young people are telling us about their experiences and to take action. Adults have a responsibility to take children and young people’s views and experiences seriously when designing, changing and implementing policies and decisions that affect them. Child centred policies underpinned by a human rights framework contribute to better outcomes for whole communities.

Children and young people are the future of the Territory - their lives and their rights against racism matter. They must be valued by adults and decision makers as important members of our community. We can no longer allow racism to be met with silence.

We can and must do better by children and young people growing up in the Territory to make active efforts to combat racism in all of its forms.



Endnotes

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