

KOORIE YOUTH SUMMIT

REPORT

14-15 MAY 2015

CONNECT.INSPIRE.EXPRESS.EMPOWER.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2015 Koorie Youth Summit was held at Mantra Bell City, Preston over two days (14-15 May).

Over 140 delegates travelled from all over Victoria to gather, connect with each other, discuss important issues impacting young people and develop ideas to address these issues. As highlighted during the opening of the Summit by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, The Honourable Natalie Hutchins MP, there are not many opportunities for young Koorie people to come to the table and be heard. The Summit offered an invaluable opportunity for representation and self-determination within the young Koorie community in Victoria.

This evaluation is based on observations made throughout the Summit during each session, one-on-one interviews with speakers and delegates, and on social media engagement. It was designed to collect the stories and conversations arising throughout the Summit, rather than to evaluate the efficacy of sessions. Collation of this data has revealed three key areas of discussion throughout the two days: youth representation, understanding family violence and cultural strength. Recommendations from these discussions have been made for the consideration of the Victorian Government and the Victorian Aboriginal community.

“If we can create a better now, then by the time we’re older the young people won’t have the stress on their back to change things because things will already be in place. It will just be about preserving it.”

Lily Graham, Delegate

RECOMMENDATIONS

KEY LEARNING ONE: REPRESENTATION

Visual identity:

1. More emphasis on increasing variety in visual representations of Koorie young people across community, government and media.
2. Further research undertaken on using the concept of living in two worlds to look at the experience of young Koories navigating all social spaces as opposed to just the use of language.

Challenging narrow perceptions of Koorie youth:

3. Advocacy for the elimination of terminology which reduces Koorie youth within policy frameworks to either 'leaders' or 'at-risk' in favour of terminology that is inclusive and encompassing.

Sexualities:

4. Significant emphasis needs to be placed on developing safe spaces for discussion, facilitation and development of resources by and for Koorie LGBTQI people addressing the specifics of the Indigenous experience and providing best practice models for supporting these peoples.
5. Research undertaken on mental health, discrimination and racism within the Koorie LGBTQI community with a particular focus on exploring the experiences of bisexuality and trans/sister-girl/brother-boy/gender diverse people in the community.

KEY LEARNING TWO: UNDERSTANDING FAMILY VIOLENCE

6. Advocacy for increased community based, youth focused discussions around the issue of family violence.
7. That Koorie young people be actively engaged in culturally safe research and program development to contribute to the development of family violence prevention strategies targeting Koorie young people.
8. Advocacy for greater awareness amongst young people of their legal rights and support services in incidences of family violence.

KEY LEARNING THREE: CONNECTION TO CULTURE

9. Development of a central 'hub' for young Koories to access information about culture and activities they can get involved with.
10. Identify opportunities to hold more yarning circles for young people to discuss culture, issues and supports in order to draw strength and resilience from them.
11. Undertake/facilitate projects for young people to capture the stories of Elders in their communities, using recording and film media to be shared more broadly.
12. Advocacy for more traditional language programs to be delivered in schools and also made available to other Koorie young people.

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A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

Family violence

We use the definition provided by the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce in the *Indigenous Family Violence Primary Prevention Framework*: that “Aboriginal definitions of the nature and forms of family violence are broader and more encompassing than those used in the mainstream”. Family violence thus should be seen as “an issue focused around a wide range of physical, emotional, sexual, social, spiritual, cultural, psychological and economic abuses that occur within families, intimate relationships, extended families, kinship networks and communities. It extends to one-on-one fighting, abuse of Indigenous community workers as well as self-harm, injury and suicide”.

Koorie

The Koorie Youth Council acknowledges that Victoria is home to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from many different and diverse traditional areas and language groups. We use the term ‘Koorie’ as inclusive of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people living in Victoria.

LGBTQI

Lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, trans-sexual, queer and intersex.

Living in two worlds

‘Living in two worlds’ is a commonly known concept which is the process of moving seamlessly between cultural spaces and social structures; cognitively, behaviourally and linguistically. This concept is closely

linked to that of ‘code switching’ provided by the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) in the *Wannik 2012-2013* report to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development as being “a person’s ability to move back and forth between two languages or dialects depending on who they are speaking to and in what context”. We suggest that the idea of ‘living in two worlds’ be used to conceptualise the experience of Koorie young people negotiating the spaces between mainstream and Koorie Australia.

Summit

Refers to the Koorie Youth Summit.

Young/youth

This report uses ‘young’ and ‘youth’ to refer to people aged between 12 and 25 years of age. In the context of the Summit demographic, we refer to people between 18 and 28 years of age.

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The Koorie Youth Council (KYC) is the representative body for Koorie young people in Victoria.

Established as the Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council in 2003, the KYC provides a voice to government and community of the views, concerns, ideas and aspirations of Koorie young people in Victoria. The Koorie Youth Summit (Summit) is the annual gathering of the KYC's network of Koorie young people from across Victoria. The Summit is a space where young people can connect, discuss issues that are important, share ideas to address these issues and gain inspiration from each other.

We know that a summit is generally defined as a highly important meeting between heads of state or governments. The Summit positions young Koorie people as equally important. This is in part due to our belief that young people should have the opportunity to influence government and community decisions and have an opportunity to express themselves, but also due to sheer weight of numbers: 55% of the Victorian Koorie population are under 25 years old, and more than one in three Koorie Victorians are under 15 years of age. As the living representations of tens of thousands of years of culture and history, young Koorie people are the children of their ancestors. Through the Summit, Koorie young people are provided with an important opportunity for self-determination: to give voice to their concerns, thoughts, ideas and solutions to those issues that affect us directly.

The first Summit, held in 2014, set the standard for all those to follow. For Wurundjeri Elder Aunty Diane Kerr, taking part in the 2014 event was the “inspiration [she needed] to keep going”. Our 2014 delegates and our wider network shaped the program for this year through our follow up ‘Shaping the Summit’ survey in December. Accordingly, the 2015 Summit was an event both for and by young Koories: a community-driven, self-determined event.

The Koorie Youth Summit 2015 was a place for young people, individuals and collectives. An event designed for young Koories to share, grow and to make change.

Delegate profile

Koorie Youth Summit delegates came from all over Victoria, represented a variety of sectors and were aged between 17 and 28. The Koorie Youth Summit is often considered a leadership conference and a developmental opportunity. While many of our delegates are leaders in their respective fields, we consider it important to identify the multitude of identities represented by Koorie young people and suggest our delegates be considered a relevant sample of these.

Delegates heard from 17 Aboriginal leaders and identities

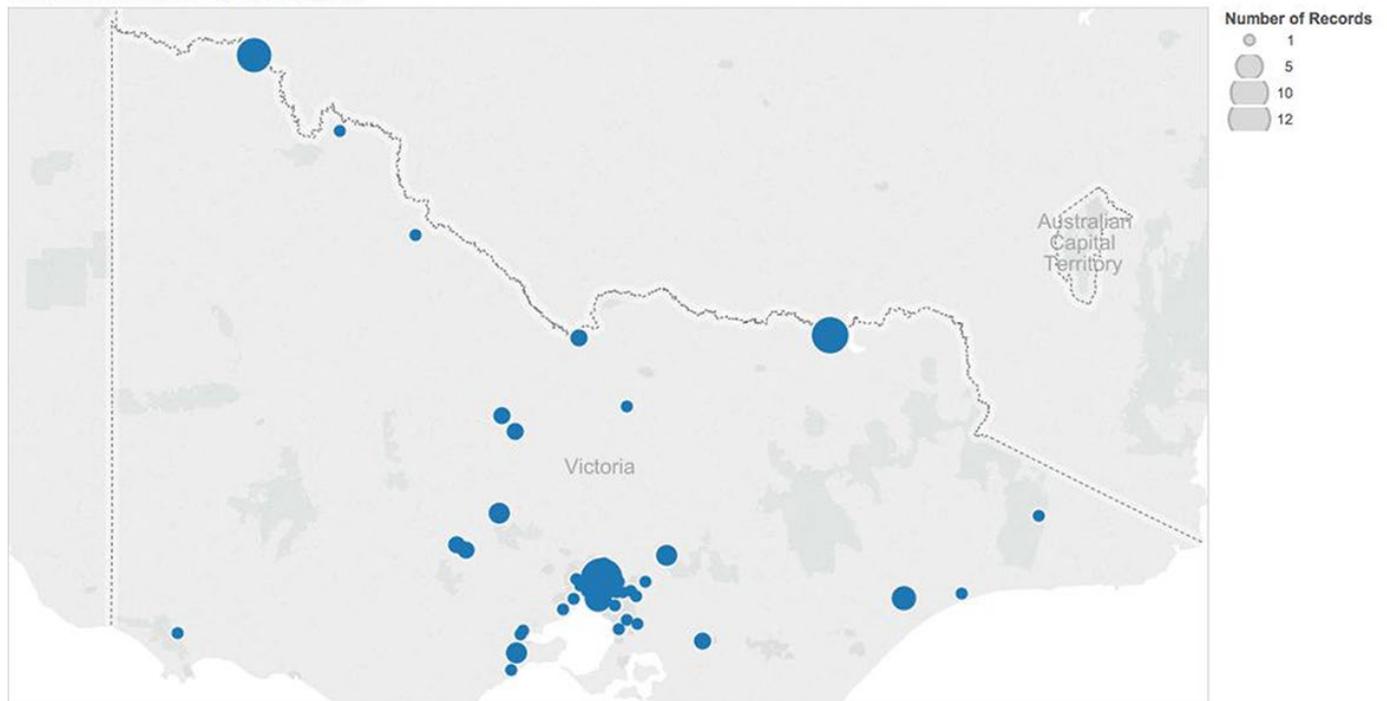
- Aunty Diane Kerr, Wurundjeri Elder
- Ashley Paxton, Facilitator for the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME)
- Pakeri Ruska, Lawyer and activist

- Tim Kanoa, Founding member of The Fighting Gunditjmara
- Amelia Telford, Australian Youth Climate Coalition (AYCC)
- Todd Fernando, PHD student focusing on Indigenous sexualities
- Clayton Murray-Mitchell, Creator of the 3 Rivers Festival
- Aaron Clarke, Family practitioner
- Meriki Onus, Activist and Campaigner
- Nayuka Gorrie, Koorie Youth Council member
- Madee Clarke, PHD student focusing on Indigenous sexualities
- Josh Muir, Renowned artist
- Jack Manning Bancroft, CEO, Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME)
- Kevin Kropinyeri, Comedian and performer
- Will Austin, Koorie Youth Council member
- Hannah Donnelly, Creator of Sovereign Trax
- Uncle Rodney Carter
- Joshua Berwick
- Aunty Fay Carter

Over two days,
143 delegates from across Victoria participated in:
9 yarning circles
5 interactive sessions
4 learning circles
2 whole group discussions
1 keynote address

Our delegates came from the following areas in Victoria:

Geolocational Make Up of Delegates



Map based on Longitude (generated) and Latitude (generated). Size shows sum of Number of Records. Details are shown for Zip (Postal Code). The view is filtered on Zip (Postal Code), which excludes 0832.

THE PROGRAM

Keynote Address

The AIME Story

CEO of the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME), Jack Manning Bancroft, kicked the 2015 Summit off: asking delegates to write down at least one thing they were hoping to get out of the event. Delegates identified a need for inspiration, direction, motivation and connections with other young Koories.

Whole Group Discussions

Keeping Our Culture Strong

Tim Kanoa, founding member of The Fighting Gunditjmarra, conceptualised culture as a fluid entity, capable of strengthening and waning, and varying from one person to another. Tim emphasised the need for young people to 'accept the varying and cyclical nature of culture amongst us', and that 'we all decide how we live that culture'.

My Journey

Meriki Onus, founder of the Warriors for the Aboriginal Resistance, shared her experiences as a young Koorie, from engaging with culture to becoming an activist and the roles other young people can play.

Interactive Sessions

Starting a Community Project

Delivered by Clayton Murray-Mitchell, founder of the Three Rivers Festival, this session explored the tips and ideas for getting an event off the ground. Delegates identified key needs such events could address within their respective communities, particularly around

empowerment, drug and alcohol abuse, mental health, cultural strengthening and family safety initiatives.

Decolonising Our Music Choices

Hannah Donnelly, founder of Sovereign Trax, encouraged delegates to question whether we listen to our own music enough. Delegates engaged with a discussion around supporting young Koorie music makers, and the ways in which music can speak to our collective stories, identities and resistance.

Yarning Circles

Black Queerness Yarning

Facilitated by PHD candidates Todd Fernando and Maddee Clark, this yarning circle was a discussion about questions of Indigenous sexualities and the rights and experiences of LGBTQI diversity within Koorie communities. A collaborative, open and inclusive discussion, this yarning circle discussed the impacts of homophobic and transphobic attitudes within communities, and how we can talk openly and honestly about the role sexualities play in our culture.

Drumbeat and Emotional Wellbeing

Facilitated by Family Practitioner Aaron Clarke, this session worked to promote social understanding and connection through a team drumming experience, combining experiential learning with cognitive behavioural therapy. Delegates discussed community approaches to healing and emotional wellbeing through engaging with a drumbeat session.

Walking with Visionaries

Delivered by Ashley Paxton, facilitator at AIME, this session looked at the way in which Koorie young people are actively and unimaginatively framed as leaders both within and outside community. Delegates were asked to embrace the role of the sidekick—the first key supporters for any great idea—as being equally important.

Young People and Strengthening Culture

Tim Kanoa, founding member of The Fighting Gunditjimara, lead this yarning circle on the role that young Koories can play in strengthening their culture. Delegates conceptualised strong culture as being something that each of us need to sustain and strengthens our spirit, and discussed how we can continue the legacies of our ancestors and Elders in keeping our culture alive.

What Does Caring for Country Mean in Today's Society?

Millie Telford, from Seed, AYCC, delivered a yarning circle about the role young people in standing up for our environmental future. Delegates were asked to consider what caring for country means for us in today's society, and how we can continue the work our ancestors have done in looking after our land sustainably for tens of thousands of years.

Learning from Our Elders

Delegates were provided a space to listen and yarn with both male and female Elders, hearing stories about life on the missions, learning about our civil rights movements and the roles that young Koorie people play today.

Young Women and Understanding Family Violence

Delivered by the Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service, this yarning circle created a safe space for delegates to discuss the issue of family safety within our communities from the perspectives of young Koorie women.

The Roles of Young Koorie Men

A men only yarning circle led by Jamie Thomas from Wayapa Wurrk, delegates discussed the role of young Koorie men in a traditional context, the role of healthy masculinity and what exactly it really means to 'be a man'.

Young People and Aboriginal Resistance

Facilitated by the founders of WAR (Warriors for the Aboriginal Resistance), Meriki Onus and Pekerri Ruska led delegates in a discussion about the role young Koorie people can play in leading the way with activist movements for current social and political issues impacting Aboriginal people.

Understanding Your Power to Create Change

Delegates engaged in conversation with Nayuka Gorrie, Koorie Youth Council member, to discuss the power young Koorie's have to make change, how this can occur, and where and what true power actually is.

Learning Circles

Jim-baa-yer Kul-kun Knul-Du-Rung (Teach youth all together)

Delegates were split into men's and women's making circles to learn, create and share with Uncle Rodney Carter, Aunty Fay Carter, Joshua Berwick and Aunty Wendy Berwick, each leaving with a special memento.



KEY LEARNINGS

KEY LEARNINGS ONE

REPRESENTATION

Appearance and identity

Throughout the Summit, both delegates and speakers raised concepts of Koorie visual identity as a point of discussion. There was a particular focus on not necessarily conforming to the expectations of this appearance, resulting in conflicting self-identity, questions about where you fit-in and taking ownership of culture through what Jack Manning Bancroft referred to as ‘black power’.

Several delegates identified visual expectations coming from both the Victorian Koorie community and mainstream Australia. One delegate discussed their experience of being one of only two Koorie families in a small rural town and the difficulties experienced as a result of having fair skin and not matching the visual stereotype of Indigeneity. Other delegates raised examples of institutionalised racism, particularly in the tertiary education sector, with experiences of barriers to accessing Koorie services based on “not having dark enough skin”. Others supported this, suggesting there is unwillingness amongst young people to actively identify as Koorie within mainstream organisations due to these barriers.

Delegates described visual identity stereotypes as creating a “challenge to navigate between two worlds”. Jack Manning Bancroft referred to this as “playing ball in both worlds”.

Challenging narrow perceptions

Delegates and speakers discussed the ways in which Koorie young people are framed both within our own communities and mainstream Australia and how this is typified by the way we do not hear about those Koorie young people who aren’t ‘artists or athletes’. For others, it is an issue of being conveniently framed as either ‘leaders’ or ‘at risk’ with seemingly no middle ground. Delegates identified significant pressure to embody leadership as a young Koorie person, and pointed to the fact this is often burdensome.

Those attending the *Walking with Visionaries* yarning circle examined the role that sidekicks play—the first key supporters for any important idea—as being equally important to that played by the leader. Many articulated a preference for side-by-side leadership, as opposed to top-down, as a means of overcoming this pressure.

In contrast, a delegate in the *Understanding Your Power to Make Change* yarning circle proposed that despite what mainstream Australia tells us, young Koorie people have power to make change and lead on those issues that directly affect us. Delegates in the *Young People and Strengthening Culture* yarning circle discussed the influence family and community structures have on the ability of young Koories to rightfully participate in culture. Some participants asserted that Elders hold the knowledge and struggle

to pass on the responsibility. A delegate in the *Keeping Culture Strong* yarning circle suggested that the influence of hierarchical family structures and views about who has the right to lead is often times a barrier to young people's rightful participation. This was reiterated by Elders in the *Elders' Yarning Circle*, who admitted there can often be a disconnect between Elders and youth, and this is something that "we need to get over" in order to make improvements.

Delegates over the two days emphasised the importance of having mentors and strong networks in place to support success. Delegates attending the *Walking with Visionaries* yarning circle discussed sustainable leadership, concluding it is achievable only when you are able to rely on the support of those who surround you. Complimentary to this, delegates in *Understanding Your Power to Make Change* emphasised the importance of having a mentor to clarify who you are and what you want to achieve. Elders in attendance discussed their pride and willingness to help in any way possible and emphasized the roles that elders play in nurturing leadership.



Sexualities

The Black Queerness yarning circle attracted interest from delegates with a diverse range of experiences. Many were interested in how they could best support LGBTQI family members and friends, seeking advice and resources to assist in this process. There were in depth conversations about the idea and practice of coming out. This was conceptualised as a lifetime practice as opposed to a one-off event, carrying different weights depending on age, location and access to urban LGBTQI spaces, cultures and services. Delegates noted the connection between the Koorie experience of 'living between two worlds' and the experience

of coming out, suggesting the process of navigating spaces between those who know and those who do not involves creating and inhabiting multiple identities.

Particularly important was the reaction of delegates who described the session as a rare space in which they felt comfortable to discuss their own sexualities and experiences. It is due to this that a key recommendation is more space is made in future for young Koorie people to discuss these issues and experiences as a group.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Visual identity

1. More emphasis on increasing variety in visual representations of Koorie young people across community, government and media.
2. Further research undertaken on using the concept of living in two worlds to look at the experience of young Koories navigating all social spaces as opposed to just the use of language.

Challenging narrow perceptions of Koorie youth

3. Advocacy for the elimination of terminology which reduces Koorie youth within policy frameworks to either 'leaders' or 'at-risk' in favour of terminology that is inclusive and encompassing.

Sexualities

4. Significant emphasis needs to be placed on developing safe spaces for discussion, facilitation and development of resources by and for Koorie LGBTQI people addressing the specifics of the Indigenous experience and providing best practice models for supporting these peoples.
5. Research undertaken on mental health, discrimination and racism within the Koorie LGBTQI community with a particular focus on exploring the experiences of bisexuality and trans/sister-girl/brother-boy/gender diverse people in the community.



KEY LEARNINGS TWO

UNDERSTANDING FAMILY VIOLENCE

The Summit offered two yarning circles focussing especially on the issue of family safety across Koorie communities.

The overwhelming response from delegates was that conversations must occur, and responses need to be driven by the entire community including young people. A delegate in the men's circle suggested as a gendered violence, the perpetrator group should drive the response: "Our men have to stand up. We have to be solid, and have meaningful discussions to change this".

Significant discussion revolved around the barriers to accessing services such as the Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services and others. A common response was a lack of understanding around how the services and legal systems in which they exist actually work. For those with an understanding of services and systems, there was discussion around the under resourcing of these and the effect that this has on provision and client experiences. Delegates in the women's circle identified that under resourcing is not just a lack of financing, but also a lack of cultural awareness, suggesting that culture seems to be perceived by service providers as neglect, rather than the protective factor that it is. As a direct result of this, other delegates argued that there is a dehumanising process within the current service sector and across the mainstream community that promotes Koorie culture as being synonymous with family violence.

Delegates spoke about the rates of Koorie children in out-of-home care without culture care plans, and the obvious connection that this issues has with a lack of cultural awareness in mainstream service providers. Some delegates suggested this is evidence of entrenched racism directly related to the false perception that elements of Koorie culture are synonymous with family violence. Others argued convincingly that family violence is a result of intergenerational community trauma: the breakdown of kinship structures has made it incredibly difficult to support each other compounded by the lack of culturally appropriate service providers and support. Delegates connected the emotional results of family violence— isolation and self-esteem deterioration—as consequences that could be ameliorated by stronger communities and culture. This was emphasised by Tim Kanoa who suggested "engagement with culture creates positive outcomes for community". Delegates in the *Keeping Culture Strong* yarning circle supported this idea, suggesting that communities that have been subjected to immense trauma could use cultural strengthening as a way to heal. It was further suggested that the experience of trauma itself has created significant barriers to meaningful engagement in cultural strengthening.

RECOMMENDATIONS

6. Advocacy for increased community based, youth focused discussions around the issue of family violence.
7. That Koorie young people be actively engaged in culturally safe research and program development to contribute to the development of family violence prevention strategies targeting Koorie young people.
8. Advocacy for greater awareness amongst young people of their legal rights in incidences of family violence.



“Our men have to stand up. We have to be solid, and have meaningful discussion to change this”.

Male delegate

KEY LEARNINGS THREE

CULTURAL STRENGTH

Understanding your connection to culture and maintaining it was the key theme throughout the Summit. Delegates and speakers conceptualised culture as having a fluid understanding, something that can change both during one's lifetime and between individuals.

Delegates described culture with words such as: family, stories, and connection to land, community, pride, identity, evolving, dreaming and spirituality. An important point made by delegates in the *Keeping Culture Strong* yarning circle was that the conversation should not be about traditional versus contemporary culture: young Koories can combine the two in much the same way as they exist between two worlds. Further discussions looked at the Oxford dictionary definition of culture (being about ideas, customs and social behaviour or a particular people or society). Delegates argued that this did not encompass their experiences; suggesting culture is a way of being, rather than behaviour.

Conversations focussed heavily on the role that young people can and should play in strengthening culture, with delegates and speakers continually referencing the importance of reclaiming language in this process. For Meriki Onus, the reclamation of language is an expression of our right to sovereignty and a responsibility of being a young Koorie person. Meriki Onus suggested leaders within the Koorie community are those who are able to teach the language and culture that keeps community strong,

while delegates in the Understanding Your Power to Create Change yarning circle identified a desire to learn how to become those leaders and teach culture to others.

Links were made between activism and the role that reclaiming language plays in this. Delegates during the *Activism and Change Making* session discussed their experiences in mainstream education, of being forced to learn a foreign language instead of their own. Delegates in *Young People and Strengthening Culture* noted the lack of cultural awareness within the mainstream school system is a barrier to participation. Another delegate in this yarning circle encouraged others to speak up about this desire, saying that through doing this, their mother now teaches their language at the school in her hometown.

Particularly important were conversations during scheduled sessions and break times between delegates and speakers around the current opportunities in Victoria to get involved with various cultural activities. Overwhelmingly it appears as though there are many opportunities across the state, due to the lack of a centralised directory, the knowledge remains restricted.

Delegates and speakers throughout the two days also raised a pertinent point: the efforts being made in Victoria by young Koories are the result of a collective starting to make change by working together. Particularly for those based in Melbourne, the experience is that of activism and self-awareness, whereas this is not something that is experienced throughout Australia.

RECOMMENDATIONS

9. Development of a central 'hub' for young Koories to access information about culture and activities they can get involved with.
10. Identify opportunities to hold more yarning circles for young people to discuss culture, issues and supports in order to draw strength and resilience from them.
11. Undertake/facilitate projects for young people to capture the stories of Elders in their communities, using recording and film media to be shared more broadly.
12. Advocacy for more traditional language programs to be delivered in schools and also made available to other Koorie young people.



THE KOORIE YOUTH COUNCIL IS THE VOICE OF YOUNG KOORIES.

Young Koories need a voice in government decisions, an opportunity to express themselves - and an opportunity to get together and have fun.

The Koorie Youth Council is the voice of young Koories. We use the term 'Koorie' as inclusive of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people living in Victoria.

We were established as the Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council in 2003.

Sponsors and partners of the Koorie Youth Summit 2015:



Commission for Children
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Youth Affairs
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