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# Report: The Road to Change

2011 Northern Territory Regional Engagement Road Trip

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Put your hands up for change - St Phillips, Alice Springs

## Message: 2011 Australian Youth Representative

My name is Benson Saulo. I have the amazing opportunity as the 2011 Australian Youth Representative to the United Nations to represent the diverse and optimistic views, hopes and ideas of the youth of Australia. I am the first Indigenous Australian to be appointed into this position and I see this as a positive reflection on the youth of Australia and our passion for promoting an inclusive and equal society.

In order for me to represent Australian youth at a National and International level I will be traveling across Australia attending schools, universities and youth forums to gain a deeper understanding of the issues that Australian youth are passionate about.

I joined four young, inspiring representatives from the UN Youth Association of Australia on the 2011 Northern Territory Regional Engagement Roadtrip. The 10 day road trip took us to Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Elliott, Katherine and Darwin. We attended various schools to discuss local, national and international issues. It was a very rewarding process of consultation and awareness that has greatly enriched my understanding of community and the impact young people can have as individuals.

The consultation process was a heart-warming experience in which students from different backgrounds, races and religions identified issues in their communities that affected them as young leaders. The students displayed maturity and respect as they worked together to provide solutions to overcome these community concerns.



**I can make a positive change in society by influencing those around me in the best way I can, and in turn allowing myself to be influenced by others. This way I can hope to begin change for the better as well as be a part of changes.**

**- Sean, 17yrs, Alice Springs, NT**

As a young Indigenous man from the eastern states my experience of the Northern Territory. As such, my expectations of the outcomes of the road trip were not formed prior to my arrival. I am proud to say that the hope and aspiration of the young people throughout the communities by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth was a contributing factor to the success of our consultations and the information compiled within this report.

I would like to thank the schools, teachers and the students who participated with enthusiasm and honesty. The 2011 Northern Territory Road Trip was truly an eye-opening experience for myself and the representatives of the UN Youth Association of Australia.

Yours Sincerely,

Benson Saulo  
2011 Australian Youth Representative to the United Nations

## Message: Road Trip Convener



My name is Polly Henry and I coordinated the 2011 Northern Territory Regional Engagement Roadtrip. My parents, both teachers, worked in remote communities around Northern Territory and I spent the first three years of my life in Gapuwiyak, a small community near the north-eastern coast of the Northern Territory, before moving to Darwin where I completed my primary and secondary schooling. After 19 years in the Northern Territory, I moved to Canberra in February 2011 to undertake tertiary studies.

Growing up in Darwin, I was very lucky to be raised in a place that embraced its multiculturalism. I've only just begun to realise the large differences between the south and north of Australia, and the diverse assumptions as to what goes on in the two. Having grown up in the Territory, it was interesting to experience the perspective of the UN Youth members who had not been to the Northern Territory. Whilst many do not have a clear understanding of Indigenous cultures, it was encouraging to note that most young people we consulted wished there to be a more concerted effort put into cross-cultural education and communication.

**The message I would like to share with Australia is that alcohol fuels violence and a lot of today's major issues. I would also say be useful, truthful, thoughtful and happy.**

**- Martika, 16yrs, Tennant Creek, NT**

The road trip was an excellent experience for all involved, and we had the rare opportunity to meet and consult with hundreds of young people in some of the most isolated parts of Australia. Opinions were varied, and we were confronted with large, complex issues that directly affect young people, especially themes centred around prejudice and violence. I think all of us were shocked at the levels of violence in the communities visited, and the effects of the perceived threat of this violence on the students. Despite these issues, we were overwhelmed at the openness and honesty of all of the students we met. The Northern Territory is a unique and beautiful place, and in spite of the complex problems we encountered the positive impact on all of the team members was noticeable. It was an honour to be welcomed into the classrooms and communities we visited, and on behalf of the entire road trip team I would like to thank each and every person we encountered for their valued contributions.

Yours Sincerely,

Polly Henry

2011 Northern Territory Regional Engagement Road Trip Convener

## Overview

The UN Youth Association of Australia undertook the annual Northern Territory Regional Engagement Road Trip from Alice Springs to Darwin from the 15th to 25th of May 2011. The road trip is funded by the Grants to Australian Organisations of the Attorney-General's Department. Four members of UN Youth Australia and the Australian UN Youth Representative to the United Nations travelled from Alice Springs to Darwin engaging and consulting young people from a number of communities to identify issues they feel affect them most as young Australians and as future leaders.

Commencing in Alice Springs on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May, the group spent two nights each in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine and Darwin, also visiting the small community of Elliott. A variety of engaged, inspiring and thoughtful students were met, all of which provided a unique insight into the problems they face as young people growing up in their communities. The 2011 Northern Territory Regional Engagement Road Trip team were:

- Benson Saulo; 2011 Australian Youth Representative,
- Polly Henry; 2011 Northern Territory Regional Engagement Road Trip Convenor,
- Simon Drake; UN Youth National Vice-President of Youth Representation,
- Caitlin Burali, Vice-President of UN Youth NT
- George Ober, Member of UN Youth ACT.

Each member brought a different range of background experiences and ideas about what to expect from the road trip. Perceptions were challenged and expectations were more than exceeded. Students' opinions were varied, and each had experienced the topics discussed in many different ways. Common themes emerged, and discussions consistently centred on alcohol, violence, discrimination and youth in their communities.

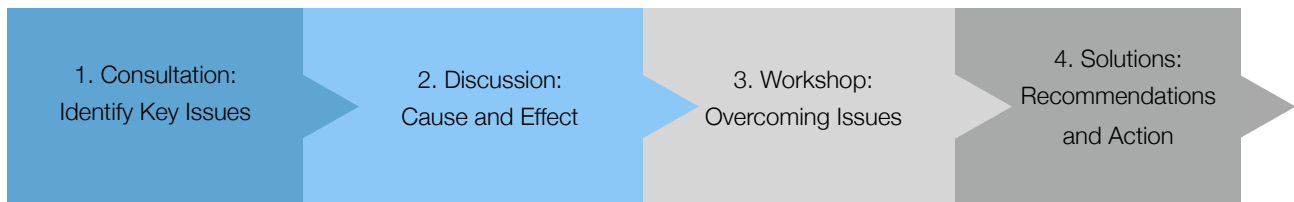
These four issues were recognised by young people within each community we visited. It was recognised by both the students and team that each topic did not exist in isolation and that each was inextricably linked with the others. Activities that students engaged with included: facilitated discussion, group discussion, voting on key themes and issues, activities in opinion making and creative responses. This wide breath of activities allowed all students to voice their individual opinions and promoted an open, friendly and fun environment to encourage honest dialogue. Consultations included the following:

Location	School/Organisation/Activity	Participant Numbers
Alice Springs	Alice Springs Schools Day Forum	40 Students
	Centralian Senior School	30 Students
	Clontarf Academy - Centralian	25 Students
	Larapinta/Tangentyre Land Council	10 Participants
Tennant Creek	Tennant Creek High Day Forum	40 Students
Elliott	Elliott School Visit	60 Students
Katherine	St Joseph's High School Day Forum	40 Students
Darwin	Darwin High School	25 Students
	Casuarina Senior College	20 Students
	Darwin High School Lunch Time Forum	10 Students
	UN Youth General Meeting	10 Participants
	UN Youth & Multicultural Youth NT	20 Participants
	Kormilda College Classes	40 Students
	Clontarf Academy - Kormilda College	50 Students

## Method:

Consultations were conducted in Alice Springs, Tennent Creek, Elliott, Katherine and Darwin at local schools. The consultations were tailored to suit the size, level of education, availability of resources and geographical location of the groups visited.

We utilised a 'Ready, Aim, Fire' approach as an overall framework of conducting engaging workshops with students whose ages ranged from 9 to 20 years old. This framework enabled the identification of key issues in each community, discuss issues with local, national and international context and work together to understand possible solutions.



### 1. Consultation:

A range of activities were conducted to encourage students to express their opinions. Consultation groups ranged from 10 to 30 participants, aged between 9 to 20 years old. Activities consisted of open group discussions to identify key issues, physical surveys in which students created a spectrum of whether they agreed or disagreed on certain issues and voting on important issues. A selection of these techniques were utilised to gain an understanding on the issues unique to students in their communities and secondly to allow the students to consider the issues on a more active and critical level.

### 2. Discussion:

Using the identified Key Issues the students formed small discussion groups with the conversation being facilitated by the members of the UN Youth team. The facilitators guided the students discuss and develop an understanding of the certain identified issues and why these were prevalent within their community.

Larger feedback groups were formed to integrate and further develop the ideas discussed in the small groups. These were written on whiteboards using mind mapping and listing techniques to visually represent the key issues.

Upon identifying the Cause and Effect of the Key Issues within their community and abroad, students were encouraged to discuss overcoming these areas of concern. Open discussions or small groups were the techniques to encourage participants to actively acknowledge changes that can be made by individuals and society to overcome issues. These changes were recognised as clauses that would assist in constructing the solutions and recommendations. The suggested clauses were written on large butchers paper under topic headings of the Identified Issues, i.e. Violence, Alcohol etc...

### 3. Workshop:

- A) Students were then given 5 stickers each, which they were asked to place next to the clauses they felt were most important to them. During this process students were encouraged to further debate and discuss the clauses. The results of the voting were then collated into a list that represented the most important issues to the students. This provided a valuable snapshot of the opinions of students in each town.
- B) Capturing the suggested clauses, solutions and recommendations from the students were completed by facilitating a 'Youth Declaration' system. This entailed coming up with a variety of solutions to issues discussed in the small group activities and writing these on large pieces of paper that were spread around the room. Concurrent to discussion-based activities, creative sessions were run to provide students with a different way of expressing themselves. It is important to provide different outlets for students, and it was evident in some students that did not actively participate in discussions enjoyed being able to represent their opinions visually. The Youth Representative also asked students to participate in an individual two-minute on-camera 'Vox Pop'. Students were asked to consider questions such as "If you could change just one thing in your community, what would you change?" and "If you had a \$5,000.00 to spend on your community, how would you use the money to make a positive change in your community?". These interviews provided students with a tangible representation that their views were being heard and provided feedback for the discussions.

### 4. Solutions:

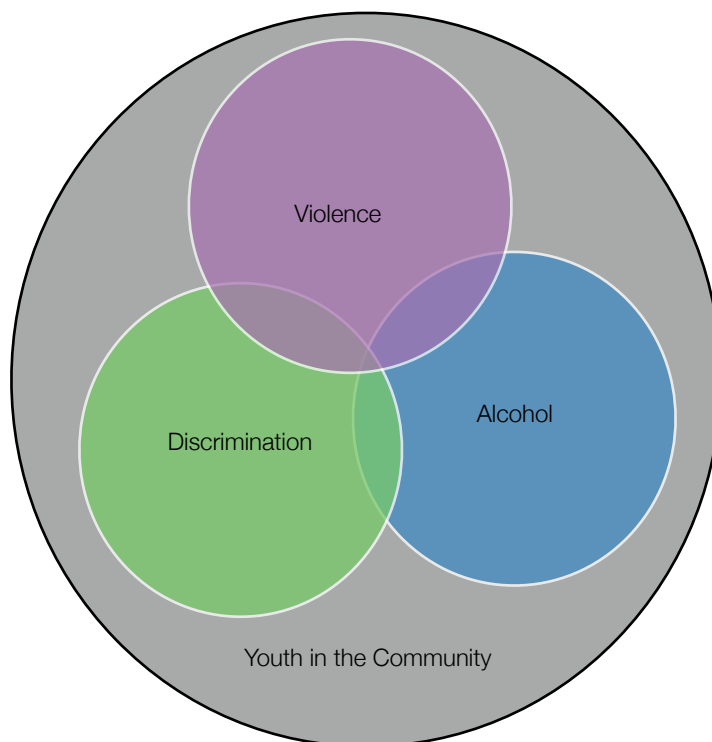
The Road to Change Report is the result of the consultations, observations and recommendations that had been collected over the course of the 2011 Northern Territory Regional Engagement Road Trip. Solutions and clauses that had been identified by students during workshops and discussions make-up the recommendations component of this report. Report recommendations of a best practice model, specific to each community will be presented to each school attended over the course of the Road Trip, local councils and community organisations such as Multi-Cultural Youth Northern Territory.

## Facilitator Observations:

During the Regional Engagement Road Trip each facilitator observed student behaviour towards schools and authority figures, student acknowledgement of reoccurring issues and individual concerns of their communities. The common themes and issues that were identified in each town and school attended were:

- Alcohol
- Violence
- Discrimination
- Youth in the Community

The aim of the consultation structure was to create a friendly, safe environment for students to voice their ideas, concerns and opinions. This freedom of speech allowed for open and honest discussions on a range of topics including Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations and under-age drinking. Understanding the underlying issues within the communities is a complex and inter-generational issue of misinformation and prejudices.



The above model identifies the inter-relatedness of the identified issues. To actively combat concerns in communities a holistic approach needs to be implemented. Addressing one concern will not break the cycle of young people, at an early age falling victim to the above areas of concern.

#### a) Alcohol in the community and its affects on youth

There were two ways that alcohol consistently affected the youth in each community:

- i. The use of alcohol in the general community and the indirect affects this has on youth;
- ii. The direct use of alcohol by young people.

In the first case, youth across the Northern Territory noted a problem with the prevalence of “humbugging” or people pestering others in the street for money to buy alcohol. Students consistently reported that alcoholism in parents was a frequent occurrence in their communities and always resulted in parents not having adequate money to fund their children’s education and well-being. It was frequently expressed that alcoholism in parents leads to parents taking a passive role in the education of their children. Moreover, students recognised a direct correlation between alcoholism in families and domestic violence.

In the second case students recognised that alcohol was a significant problem within the youth community. Students expressed the belief that underage drinking was, to an extent, an inevitable part of life that did not have to be a destructive force. However, throughout the consultations it was consistently identified that excessive binge drinking commonly started at ages as young as 13 and 14.

#### b) Prejudice, inequality and discrimination

At each school aspects of prejudice and discrimination appeared. Within each consultation there was an acknowledgement of the prejudice and discrimination currently occurring in communities throughout the Northern Territory. Some students expressed engrained prejudicial attitudes and unfortunately at times these attitudes defined discussion.

An awareness and appreciation of successful engagement programs can and currently do have positive impacts on youth culture. As an example there was unanimous recognition that the Clontarf Academy Australian Rules Football program has been effective throughout the Northern Territory with increased secondary schooling rates of retention in young Indigenous men.

The youth recognised a lack of cross-cultural engagement in their schools and wider communities, including limited opportunities for Indigenous Studies in the schooling system which was identified as a key factor when creating appreciation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. It was identified that the schools must play a larger role when supporting and promoting cross-cultural activities.

#### c) Violence in the community

Violence in the Northern Territory is endemic and widespread. The greatest discouragement witnessed by all that we consulted with was that violence had become socially normalised. As a direct result of this youth have, by-and-large, become desensitised to the violence and the negative affects evident in the communities.

It was observed that youth do not feel violence is unusual to witness or fall victim to violent acts at night time. Night activities and walking the streets, for many youth particularly in Alice Springs and Tennant Creek, is seen as an unusual act and one that would be met with verbal and physical abuse. This perceived danger creates and begets a paralyzing environment of defensiveness. Adding to this overtly perceived danger is the negative media coverage on youth activities and negative tag lines such as Alice Springs being the 'stabbing capital of the world' these work to disable young people from breaking out of the cyclical nature of violence that most youth from lower socio-economic groups feel that they are trapped in.

We also saw an escalation in violence between communities in the Northern Territory. Darwin youth spoke of an increase in gang violence between recent immigrants and Indigenous Australians and the flow-on resentment that this creates amongst young people.

#### d) Youth in the Community

The consultations consistently found that there is a lack of initiatives aimed at engaging youth across the Territory. The youth we consulted with almost unanimously agreed that the majority of youth issues derived from boredom and an absence of constructive activities. Throughout the towns of Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Elliott and Katherine the consultations clearly recognised a desire for these smaller towns to have a designated community youth officer to organise events like discos, concerts and sports activities in order to provide young people with positive outlets for their time. Students specifically flagged the need for events at night time to provide an alternative to spending their nights on the streets where violence and underage drinking is prevalent.

Students in every locale also called for the creation of safe youth spaces designed for recreational and social purposes. Importantly, they outlined a need for these spaces to be run for youth by youth to create a genuine space that appeals to young people.

### Facilitator Observations Conclusion:

It must be noted that despite young people facing problems centred around violence, alcohol, prejudice and isolation, it was heart-warming to be trusted with the innate positivity that permeated all of our school visits. The Northern Territory is a unique place, and we appreciate the high levels of engagement and openness provided to us by the students and teachers in each town.

The nature of our consultation method led to extreme views expressed by students which characterised the direction and tone of discussions. Overtly prejudiced views throughout the road trip were present in each community which were fuelled by negative experiences, lack of understanding and misinformed views created by parents and media outlets. At times it was difficult and disheartening to know young people would hold such negative opinions but our role as facilitators was not to tell students their beliefs were wrong, but instead to direct the discussions on to possible solutions to overcoming division and issues in their community. Furthermore, we recognise that a large majority of the students were not making entirely informed decisions. Good-intentions lacked the knowledge of past and current government policy, the cycle of disappointment and hurt which continues to contribute to the divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations and the negative impacts that arise from bandaid solutions.

The interconnectedness and cyclical nature of the problems that arose in each town was obvious, but we encouraged students to try to create solutions to the various issues in the hope that they would feel both empowered to make change, and also empowered enough to make sensible and informed decisions about their future.

Whilst the road trip is designed as a youth engagement and consultation program, we also interacted with members of the community who had direct involvement with young people such as teachers and police officers. We recognised the opinions of young people differed to teachers, police officers and youth workers in the community. The hope in the young people that they could effect change in their communities was evident however older generations possessed a sense of hopelessness and identified the toxicity of the negative cycles that young people fall trap to.





Among the facilitators a consensus was met in relation to the desperate need for positive role models and increase education on the negative influences present in communities to empower young people with the tools to avoid and overcome the pitfalls in communities across the Northern Territory.










## Recommendations:














Based on the various consultations and observations throughout the Northern Territory Regional Engagement Road Trip key issues were identified as focus areas in each community.

As such the below community specific recommendations have been compiled to promote a best practice model for approaching, containing and eliminating the key issues facing each community relating to:

Youth in the community	Alcohol	Violence	Discrimination/Equality
			

A best practice model should be approached with a community specific view as a one size fits all approach was identified by both students and UN Youth as having a detrimental affect on individuals and communities.

Alice Springs - Recommendations	Related Issue
Youth in Alice Springs need more constructive activities to do outside of school hours, not solely focussed on sports. Suggested events include youth discos, social outings, and youth groups that appeal to the demographic.	
Systems and mechanisms must be put in place to encourage greater community harmony between residents of Alice Springs and its surrounding town camps. Community events ran by Indigenous and non-Indigenous community organisations need to be supported.	
It is unacceptable that members of the Alice Springs community, and young people specifically, do not feel safe walking around their city centre after dark. It is recommended that that a whole of community, council and legal action-plan be developed to deal with this inherent lack of wellbeing and safety immediately. It is proposed that the action-plan is developed with community organisations, leaders, youth representatives and the police to develop early intervention frameworks and combat anti-social behaviour.	
Community patrols, similar to the Larrakia Night Patrols that operate in Darwin, could also play a valid and intrinsic role in rectifying Alice Springs crime rates.	
Tennant Creek - Recommendations	Related Issue
There should be greater youth engagement headed by a specific Youth Engagement Officer in order to provide young people with alternative activities outside of school hours.	
Community workers, social workers, police officers, teachers and the Tennant Creek Council need to actively engage members of the youth community in a role model style capacity to promote healthy relations with members of community.	
A more concerted effort must be made to reduce the rates of excessive alcohol consumption, including reducing the hours that alcohol is available and limiting the quantity of alcohol available to individuals each day.	

Tennant Creek - Recommendations cont.	Related Issues
There needs to be efforts to limit the impact of domestic violence on young people by creating avenues for young people to report, discuss and avoid violence in the home and community.	
Fixed term contracts for teachers should be implemented in order to increase the rate of retention and offer continuity in students' education and positive relationships with role models.	
Katherine - Recommendations	Related Issue
The council and schools need to continue to educate its young people about the services the Council offers to the youth community, as students felt they lacked knowledge of the services made available to the young people of Katherine.	
Students identified the need of increased frequency of sex- and drug-education sessions and discussions of sexuality and that these programmes should be taught by external, government-sanctioned organisations.	
Darwin - Recommendations	Related Issue
Community implemented early intervention policing methods need to be developed with consultation with Community Leaders, Police and Youth to prevent the formation of youth gangs and street violence.	
In recognising the issue of underage drinking, diversion techniques that discourage the consumption of alcohol for those youth from 12-16 should be expanded. Diversion techniques should involve education and alternative activities.	
Community members and role models from both sides of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous community need to be encouraged to play a more involved role in creating a culture of understanding through speaking at schools.	
An alternative to classroom learning environments to support and encourage a youth based, peer-to-peer sense of community outside the classroom in the form of school camps, sports teams, excursions and cultural exchange programmes must be developed.	
Overall Northern Territory - Recommendations	Related Issue
Systems and mechanisms must be put in place to encourage greater community harmony between residents of communities and its surrounding town camps. Community events ran by Indigenous and non-Indigenous community organisations need to be supported.	
Community workers, social workers, police officers, teachers and the Local Councils need to actively engage members of the youth community in a role model style capacity to promote healthy relations with members of community.	
A more concerted effort must be made to reduce the rates of excessive alcohol consumption, including reducing the hours that alcohol is available and limiting the quantity of alcohol available to individuals each day.	
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