



## Empower Youth Summit

February 2019

# Report



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians of the Land where the Summit was held, the Darkinjung people and to Elders past, present and future.

The Barang Regional Alliance Empower Youth Summit is proudly supported by the Australian Government Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

See full acknowledgements on page 16.

Warm thanks to those who worked tirelessly to ensure the day was a success:  
Staff who attended - Glenda Simpson, Andrew Malloch, Corinne Hodson, Denise Markham and Gary Field

Chair - Kate Kelleher

Facilitators of the youth sessions - Maddison Mohan, Breannon Field, Anthony Freeman, Talara Freeman, Bruce Waia

MC - Neville Williams-Boney

Volunteers - Simone Hudson, Jane Cassidy, Zuleyka Zevallos, Belinda Field, Liz Shaw.





# INTRODUCTION

On Darkinjung Country, surrounded by stunning and serene water, bush, wildlife and rock, the Empower Youth Summit was held on 23rd of February 2019.

The summit was for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living on the Central Coast of NSW. More than 120 young people, four community Elders and 15 adults attended.

The summit was held at Broken Bay Sport and Recreational Centre on the Hawkesbury River. Broken Bay is set in the middle of the Hawkesbury, accessible only by boat. Many rivers and creeks meet in the bay, symbolising the meeting of the young people.

The purpose of the Summit was to begin the conversation with young people about what they need to achieve healthy, happy lives, and to ensure they have a say about their future. This report captures their voices to take to government. Auslan interpreters, involved with the Koori Deaf Mob, ensured it was an inclusive event.

The Summit was hosted by the Barang Regional Alliance in response to annual surveys they conducted, which found that young people aged between 13 and 25 had very distinctive priorities.



everywhere you  
TRAVEL, you've ALWAYS  
got a bed!



# OVERVIEW

The Summit was built around three priorities young people identified through the surveys:

1. Culture and identity
2. Health and wellbeing
3. Education and continual learning

The three main reasons Aboriginal young people said they attended the Summit:

- To connect with other Aboriginal young people from the Central Coast
- To learn more about Culture
- Share their experiences of being Aboriginal on the Central Coast

In small groups the young people had a yarn about each of the priority areas. What was clear is that Culture underpins all other priorities and that similar issues were raised for each priority.

Across each of the three priority areas, the young people identified that they needed:

- Greater access to Culturally appropriate services and supports across the Coast
- Greater awareness of the available services and supports
- Increased Cultural knowledge





# CULTURE AND IDENTITY

The Aboriginal young people expressed that they are so proud to be Aboriginal. It is a core part of their identity and underpins all aspects of their lives.

Their pride stemmed from:

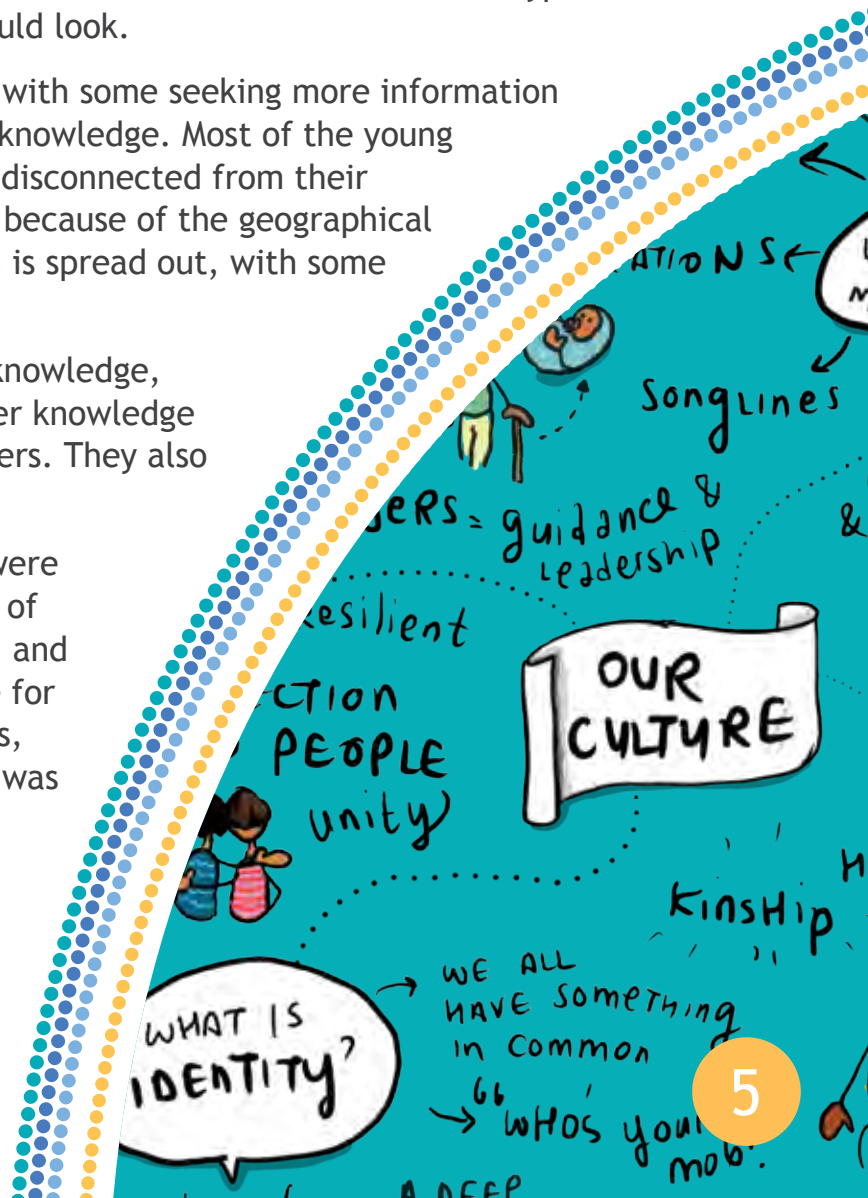
- “Being part of one of the oldest living cultures” in the world
- Being among mob
- Having something deeper that you’re connected to
- “Our way of life”
- Our sense of humour
- “Finding my belonging” in Aboriginal Culture

While the young people were proud to be Aboriginal, many had experienced racism. Their identities were challenged because of their skin colour or stereotypical notions of how Aboriginal people should look.

Their Cultural understanding varied, with some seeking more information about who their mob is and Cultural knowledge. Most of the young people were not Darkinjung and felt disconnected from their Country. They also felt disconnected because of the geographical isolation on the Central Coast, which is spread out, with some areas difficult to access.

When young people sought Cultural knowledge, it was from family members and other knowledge holders in communities including Elders. They also learnt from each other.

For many, opportunities to connect were limited because of isolation and lack of mobility. With little public transport, and the costs of running a car prohibitive for many young people and their families, making and maintaining connections was challenging.



Young people wanted more opportunities to:

- Learn their traditional language(s)
- Access Cultural mentors
- Connect more with other young Aboriginal people and Elders

↓  
HAVING A  
CONNECTION  
THAT YOU FEEL





# HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Young Aboriginal people identified that health and wellbeing means being physically healthy - but also being socially, emotionally and Culturally healthy.

Aboriginal young people want Aboriginal youth-specific services on the Central Coast rather than just mainstream youth services. Services need to include a safe space for young Aboriginal people to meet and talk to each other and people who can support them confidentially.

Young people, while prioritising health, were not aware of or did not have access to local Aboriginal health services. The size of the Central Coast, the lack of public transport and financial challenges of owning a car meant that services were often hard to access, so services needed to come to them. Geography also is a contributing factor affecting access to Aboriginal services.

Health and wellbeing services could be offered:

- As an outreach in their areas
- At schools

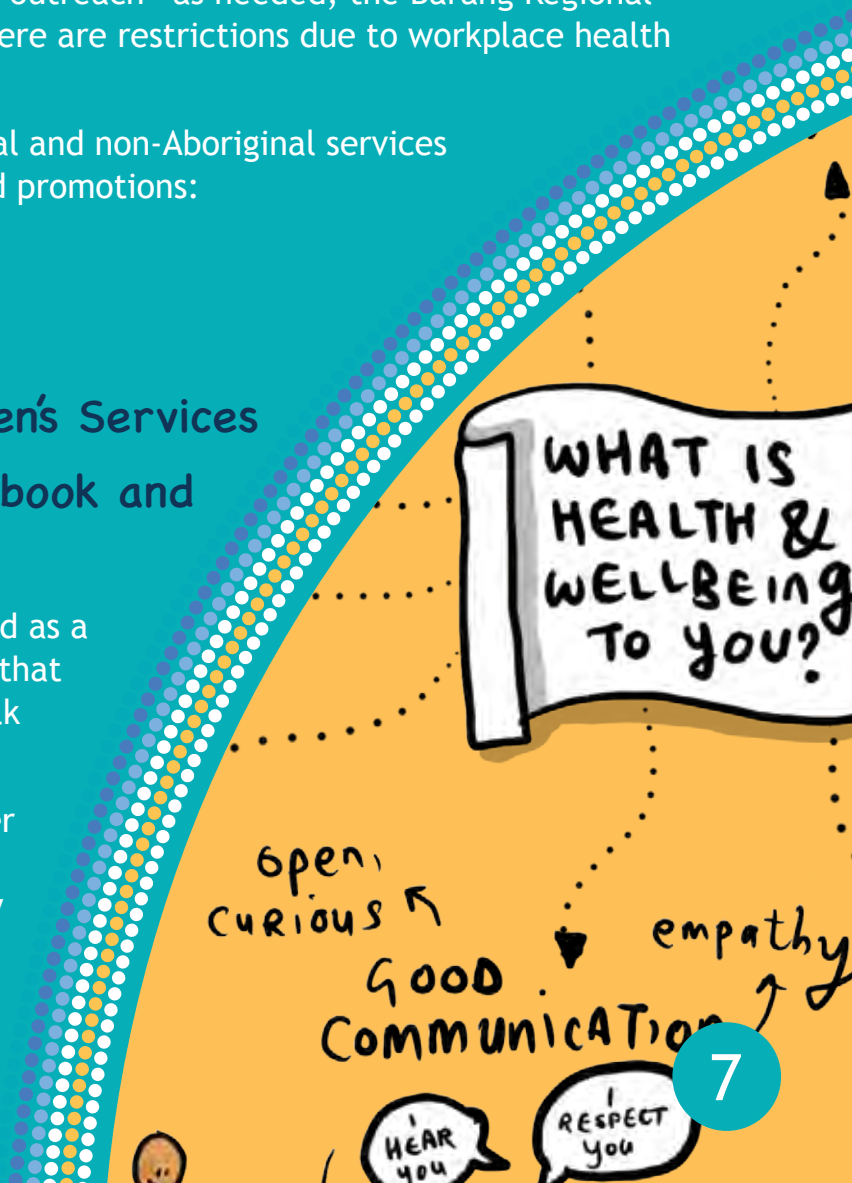
Although the young people identified “outreach” as needed, the Barang Regional Alliance and our partners note that there are restrictions due to workplace health and safety and funding issues.

To increase awareness of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal services available, young people recommended promotions:

- In schools
- On buses
- Via Family and Children's Services
- By Social media (Facebook and Instagram)

Mental health was a key area identified as a priority, yet most participants agreed that they do not have the confidence to talk about mental health.

Young people wanted to have a greater understanding of where they could go for help and also understand how they can support their friends who are not coping.



# EDUCATION AND CONTINUAL LEARNING

Young people talked about the importance of high school and further education. They are aware of the importance of education but identified barriers to completing their education.

Young people felt that the learning approaches in schools were too rigid and wanted to see more flexible learning that catered to a variety of different learning styles. Teachers' racism and negative stereotyping was raised as

a barrier to completing high school and university. One student recalled a teacher telling them they are "too stupid" to go to university.

Cultural responsibilities were not well understood or respected by schools. It was felt that students who participated in competitive sports were excused for missing school but Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who missed school for Cultural reasons, such as sorry business, were not given the same understanding.

For many young people, there were few - if any - other Aboriginal students studying with them. The challenges facing students impact on their ATAR, and makes them anxious about what will happen after leaving school.

Attendees recommended:

- More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers
- Safe communal spaces for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- Aboriginal community being linked into schools and universities to support students
- Aboriginal engagement officers in each school
- Teachers being more supportive of individual student's needs, including those who are gifted and talented
- Non-Aboriginal teachers treating Aboriginal students with respect

WE  
NEED TO  
FOCUS ON  
STRENGTHS!



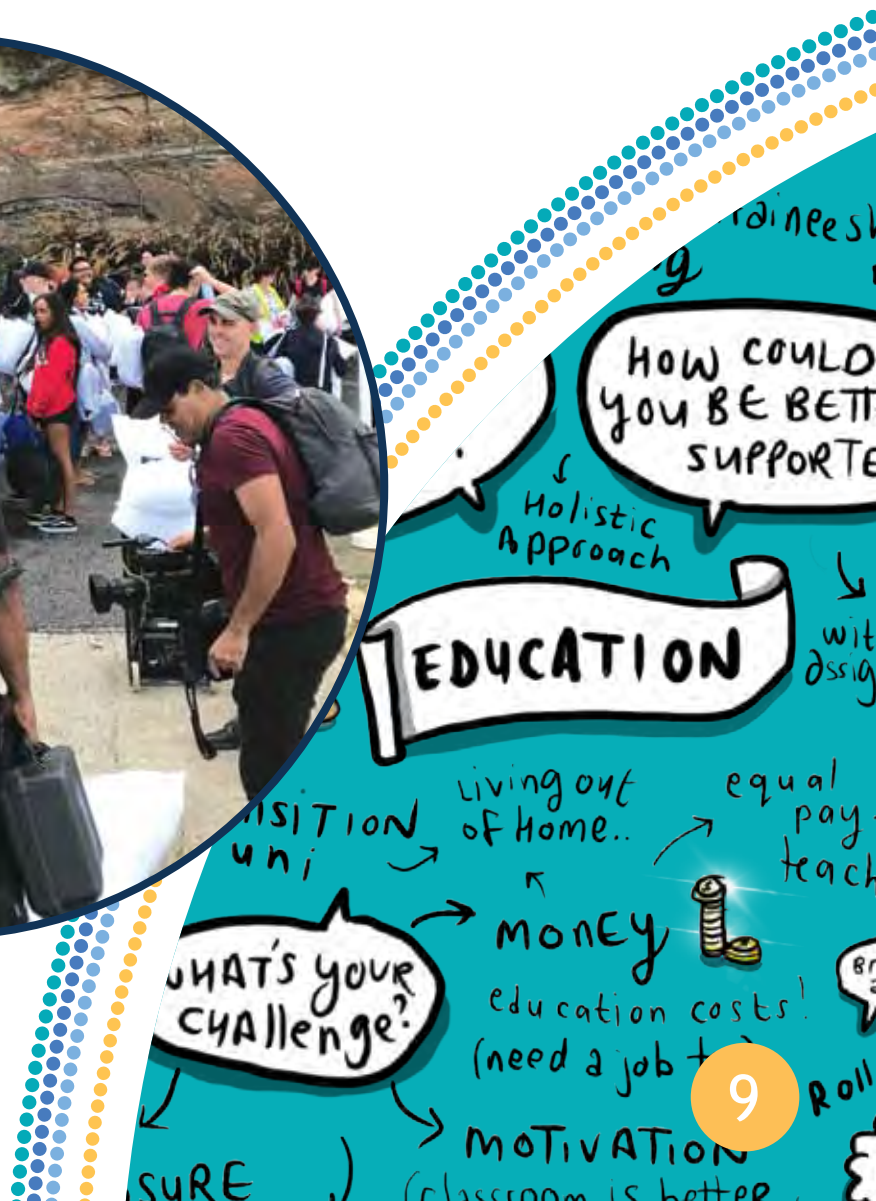


For students who have completed high school, they did not feel like they were aware of all their options; university was prioritised by teachers, limiting their choices.

For those who wanted to attend higher education (university or TAFE), financial stress and family responsibilities were two issues they faced.

For people who have left school, they wanted:

- Assistance to alleviate the financial stress of attending higher education
- Greater promotion through social media of the services and supports available to get a job or attend higher education
- Increased promotion of all options, not just university
- Greater assistance is needed in understanding and accessing scholarships for further education



## CONCLUSION

The summit was described an outstanding success by both attendees and organisers. The young people confirmed that the three priorities identified in the surveys are their priorities. They also were very forthcoming about what would assist them to be connected to Culture, be better educated and be healthy and well.

The young people have said that the summit can't be a one-off event, they want their connections to continue.

They also clearly expressed that the Summit needs to be the start of a conversation that continues with young people, because their needs are complex and may change with successive generations.

## NEXT STEPS

This information will be used to develop a three-year Strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth on the Central Coast.

We will posting regular updates on Social Media.

We want you to stay involved.





The discussions were shared widely on Twitter under the hashtags #BarangYouthSummit and #EYS19.

The Hon Ken Wyatt AM, the Minister for Indigenous Health and the Minister for Senior Australians and Aged Care, followed the conversations.



**Ken Wyatt MP** @KenWyattMP · 6m  
Thanks @SummerMayFinlay - wish I was there and would appreciate a report. There are so many inspiring and amazing young Indigenous people everywhere and we want to hear and spread every one of their incredible stories!

**Summer May Finlay** @SummerMayF...  
@KenWyattMP you would ❤️ being here & listening to all the amazing stuff the young Indigenous ppl from Central Coast NSW are sharing abt health & wellbeing at the Barang Regional Alliance Empowered Youth Summit.

This young ones, know their stuff!

#Barangyouthsummit #EYS19



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P  
Bingo  
Benefits  
- Big family  
- Gatherings  
- Youth Summit  
- uniqueness  
- land













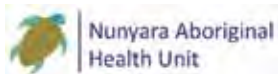


# BARANG

## REGIONAL ALLIANCE

Central Coast

# THANK YOU to our sponsors



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The Barang Regional Alliance Empower Youth Summit is proudly supported by Australian Government Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

We thank the Muloobinba Aboriginal Corporation, Ability Links NSW and Transport NSW for donating merchandise.

Summer May Finlay, a Yorta Yorta woman and health journalist, live-tweeted, photographed, videoed and reported on the [#BarangYouthSummit](#) for [Croakey Professional Services](#).

You can watch interviews with summit participants at this link: [bit.ly/barangyouthsummit](https://bit.ly/barangyouthsummit)

This report was designed by Mitchell Ward and edited by Melissa Sweet.

We thank artist Cath Leach for her comprehensive cartoon reports.