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Benson Saulo is the first Indigenous Australian to be appointed since its inception in 1999. As a vocal representative for young Australians, Benson has travelled throughout Australia engaging young people at schools, universities and youth organisations as well as conferences and engagements in Europe and North America.

In July, Benson delivered an address to the UN General Assembly during the close of the International Year of Youth which was themed Dialogue and Mutual Understanding. During his three month placement at the Australian Permanent Mission in New York Benson delivered his key address to the UN 3rd Committee at the 66th Session of the UN General Assembly.

As an accredited member of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Benson negotiated the omnibus Rights of the Child Resolution with a focus on Children with Disabilities and the Resolution on the Financial and Economic Crisis Impact on Youth. Benson engaged with UN Officials including Ambassadors, Heads of State and Foreign Ministers from various Member States, including Australia’s Foreign Minister, Minister for Youth and Minister for Families, Community and Indigenous Affairs. He also met with senior representatives from UNICEF, UNHabitat and the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

The Executive Summary outlines 2011/12 key objectives, national findings and four key recommendations. Benson’s full report is available online and through the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition and contains a full listing of recommendations relating to Indigenous affairs, education, health and national youth engagement.

### 2011/12 Key Objectives

| Deliver to approximately 6,000 participants at face-to-face forums. | Engage 8,000 to 12,000 participants through social media and online tools. |
| Effect change by influencing key decision makers. | Promote the engagement of young people in the decision making process. |

### Key National Findings

| Education is key: | Students didn’t feel prepared for post-highschool life; whether going into tertiary education or the work force young people didn’t feel equipped for the next step. The school to work/school to further education transition is an important step but students also identified their limited knowledge of social issues and felt school should be providing avenues to gain awareness and an understanding of community, national and international issues. |
| Schools are community builders: | Young peoples knowledge of, and engagement with social issues was limited. Many were eager to gain a deeper understanding but felt they lacked the resources to engage in a meaningful way. Opportunities to volunteer and engage in community events, particularly in regional areas was limited. Schools should provide an avenue to engage, participate and drive positive change in our communities. |
| Cross-Cultural Awareness: | Australia is a very multi-cultural nation however the divide between cultures was apparent throughout regional areas. Preconceived notions were not challenged and subversive racism existed. Cross-cultural interactions and awareness programs were seen to positively break down barriers of cultural divide. |
| Health and well-being: | There was great concern among young people about mental health and well-being. Identified increased stress during high school, high body image concerns and unhealthy lifestyles were major concerns for young people this also included concerning Indigenous suicide rates, particularly among young males. It was identified that a focus on the development of resilience, coping mechanisms and support networks need to be established. |
**National feasibility study of organisations engaging young people:**
Australia has a very strong youth sector that is engaging young people in every state and territory. Unfortunately due to the size and diversity of the organisations engaging young people there is a large overlap in initiatives. A national feasibility study would create an understanding of:

- Where organisations are engaging young people
- How they are sourcing young people
- What programs and initiatives they are using
- The cost of programs and sources of funding
- The organisations aims and outcomes for the young people they are engaging.

Understanding these areas will promote cross-organisational collaboration and provide a snapshot of the youth sector and information on best-practice models currently in place across Australia.

**Develop and promote initiatives supporting young change-makers:**
Young people are enthusiastic about the impact they can have on the direction of Australia. This positive approach to community is growing a large community of change-makers, like-minded thinkers and young people with wonderful ideas for initiatives for their cities, communities and our nation.

Supporting the development of community hubs and accessible social entrepreneur grants will provide a platform for initiative development and funding to turn an idea into reality and turn a young person with an idea into a change-maker who is giving back to the community through positive action. Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane currently have social enterprise hubs based on International models, expanding to other major cities will provide a social entrepreneur and small business culture across Australia.

**Promote schools as community builders:**
Schools must be viewed as community hubs for young people, a safe place for young people to learn, interact and develop. Schools should be considered community builders; a place that develops young people who are aware of social issues and engaged in community initiatives as drivers of positive action.

Education must be viewed beyond numeracy and literacy capabilities; education must involve awareness of local and international social issues, analytical and problem solving skills and the development of social mindedness. This will create a generation of thinkers and action orientated young people. Social awareness must be developed and incorporated in Australia’s national curriculum with clear and tangible outcomes.

**Australian Youth Representative to the Asia-Pacific:**
Australia’s youth sector is diverse, well established and knowledgeable of models and initiatives that work across different demographics and geographical locations within our nation that drive youth participation and advocate on youth related issues. To promote youth participation and representation within the Asia-Pacific region the establishment of an Australian Youth Representative to the Asia-Pacific would support the Asia-Pacific region in collaboration with the Australian youth sector to implement effective channels supporting youth participation, the development of youth led organisations and initiatives to address various issues within our region including youth representation in the decision making process, promotion of the rights of children and young people with disabilities and the development of youth specific policy.

The Australian Youth Representative to the Asia-Pacific will drive collaboration between national youth sectors to ensure best-practice models are shared, developed and implemented across Asia-Pacific region therefore strengthening national partnerships, develop and support our regions future leaders and drive social development goals, post 2015 whereupon the UN Millennium Development Goals expire.
My name is Benson Saulo. I am a descendent of the Wemba Wemba and Gunditjmara Nations of Western Victoria and the New Ireland Province of Papua New Guinea. I was born in Bordertown, South Australia and grew up in Tamworth, New South Wales.

In 2003 at the age of 15 years old I began a school based traineeship with a major Australian bank, which I undertook during grade 11 and 12. I graduated from Peel High School in Tamworth in 2005 with my Higher School Certificate and a Certificate III in Business Services. In 2006 I entered the University of Technology, Sydney through a pathways program with Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning, to study a Bachelor of Business, majoring in Management and Marketing.

I continued my employment within the Bank as a Foreign Currency Service Consultant. In 2008 aged 20 years old I was promoted to Assistant Manager in Business Banking assisting a Relationship Manager with a portfolio of over 90 businesses with funds under management between $300,000 and $7,000,000. Due to the workload, practical application of my business degree and on the job training I withdrew from university to concentrate on work.

In 2009 I relocated to Melbourne, Victoria to pursue my career within the finance sector. Located in Docklands, Melbourne I was promoted to Business Analyst within a Indigenous Employment and Training Team.

In April 2011, aged 23 years old I resigned from my position within the Indigenous Employment and Training Team to undertake the voluntary position as the 2011 Australian Youth Representative to the United Nations.

In January 2012 I completed a ‘Report Back Tour’ which involved 1 month of national travel, consultations and meeting with organisations that supported my year.

I have been appointed Director of the National Indigenous Youth Leadership Academy (NYILA). The Academy is a new organisation with a 3-way partnership between Foundation for Young Australians, Stronger Smarter Institute and the National Centre of Indigenous Excellence. This will commence in March 2012.

“While I am proud and humbled to be the first Indigenous Australian appointed to this position since its inception in 1999 I also feel this is a wonderful reflection on our generation, a generation that support and promote an inclusive and equal society.”

I am very passionate about youth leadership and participation at all levels of society. My National Engagement Tour was inspired by Mick Gooda; the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commission. He delivered a speech to the National Press Club in 2010 called ‘Towards a reconciled nation.’ The theme of my National tour was ‘Towards a unified nation.’ I believe a strong Australia is an inclusive and unified nation that supports multiculturalism and progressive thinking.
“The bravest are surely those with the clearest of vision of what is before them, glory and danger alike, but notwithstanding goes out to meet it” - Thucydides.

This wonderful quote has been an unofficial motto for my journey as Youth Representative. It captures the apprehension of leaving my comfortable job and undertaking this mammoth task. The unknown that comes with taking a risk can often be enough to signal a retreat but it can also be the spark needed to create and grow. The beauty of my year was that the only limitations came from finances, time and required sleep, everything else was there for the taking.

It is rather ironic that such a year is to be summed up in a report, that may never be read, it may sit in an office under other reports or it might be linked to a website that receives less than 30 views a month but nevertheless I do want to share it with you.

How do you sum up a year that has been unlike any other in my life? It’s difficult to capture the highs and lows, the stresses, emotion and the sense of accomplishment. The last 10 months has been an incredible whirlwind of airports, faces, accents, stories and presentations. To begin to explain my year to anyone who hasn’t lived it is an incredibly difficult task or maybe I just lack the ability to describe the journey or maybe it is such a long story others lack the time and concentration to fully appreciate it.

Whatever the case may be, this report does not completely tell the story of my year, it won’t explain the intricacies of 3rd Committee negotiations or how exhausted months of living out of suitcases and hotels can make you. What I hope you will receive from this report are:

- Key recommendations of how to engage young people
- A challenge to become a change maker
- An insight to what drives me
- An understanding of what inspires young people
- A small snapshot of my year as Australian Youth Ambassador

They might not sound like a lot but if you put them all together this report could be quite a remarkable story. However; my story is still not over, so it is towards the unknown that we find ourselves turning these pages.

If it is a story you seek, stories are best told over a coffee, so maybe this report is best left in the office under the numerous other reports. Instead look upon this report as an introduction, an indication of what I experienced and what I would like to see for young people throughout Australia.
The Australian Youth Representative to the United Nations program began in 1999 when it was identified that young people lacked the opportunity to engage in the decision making process at a national and international level. Australia has appointed a Youth Representative for each United Nations’ General Assembly since its inception and is a strong supporter and advocate of this initiative.

The selection of the position is organised and facilitated by UN Youth Australia. A national youth-led organisation that promotes the importance and values of the United Nations through various awareness raising initiatives, high school MUNs (mock United Nations debates) and annual state based and national conferences.

The selection process is currently undergoing a review however in 2011 there was a four-step process which involved:

1. Expression of Interest (self-nomination)
2. Short answer worksheet relating to youth advocacy and international relations.
3. Long answer and strategic engagement proposal
4. Face to face interview with UN Youth Australia.

UN Youth consistently receive over 300 applications each year when applications open in October. The National Executive of UN Youth video record the face-to-face candidate interviews for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to review and make the final decision. The criteria for Youth Delegates includes, but is not limited to:

1. Participants must be between 16 - 24 years old
2. Strong knowledge of the United Nations process and structure
3. Awareness of the Australian Youth Sector
4. Background in media, advocacy and consultation
5. Able to devote 12 months to the Youth Delegates Program.

The appointed Youth Representative is offered an unpaid formal position with DFAT and becomes a fully accredited member of the Australian Delegation to the United Nations General Assembly.

The Youth Delegate is required to undertake a self-funded 5 month consultation tour of all Australian States and Territories with the express task of capturing the local, national and global concerns of young Australians. During the tour the Youth Delegate performs a wide range of educational activities, including educating young people on domestic and international political processes and policies. This includes raising awareness of how young people can convey their views to the Australian Government and the United Nations as well as how young people can assist the United Nations in achieving its goals i.e Millennium Development Goals.
As a fully accredited member of the Australian Delegation to the United Nations General Assembly, the Youth Delegate is based at the Australian Permanent Mission to the United Nations located in New York for the period of 3 months beginning in September. The Youth Delegate is required to deliver an address to the 3rd Committee of the General Assembly on behalf of the Australian Mission, they are also encouraged to organise a ‘side-event’ on youth issues, raise awareness of the United Nations Program on Youth and the Youth Delegate Program.

Upon return to Australia the Youth Delegate completes a ‘Report Back Tour’ and a physical report of the past year to be presented to DFAT, the Office of Youth and UN Youth Australia as well as other relevant organisations.

The Youth Delegate program is currently unfunded. The Youth Delegate is required to seek sponsorship to support the National Engagement Tour. Financial assistance is currently under review with UN Youth Australia, Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, Office of Youth and DFAT to ensure the Youth Representative role is effective and sustainable.

In 2011 there was 31 Youth Delegates representing 22 nations, they were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Australia</th>
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<td>Mexico (2)</td>
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<td>Finland</td>
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<td>Russia</td>
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<td>Japan</td>
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<td>Dominican Republic</td>
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<td>Thailand (2)</td>
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Each national program varies due to government requirements, funding, youth sector and other reasons. The Australian and German Youth Delegate programs are currently the most extensive due to the strong youth sectors, government support and national importance placed on youth participation at all levels.
## 2011 Objectives

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<tr>
<th>Key Objectives</th>
<th>Engage</th>
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<td>Effect change by influencing key decision makers.</td>
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<td>Promote the engagement of young people in the decision making process.</td>
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<td>Deliver National recommendations on addressing key issues facing Australian Youth.</td>
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<td>Deliver articles through print media including national newspapers.</td>
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<td>Promote cross generational communication.</td>
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<td>Support cultural awareness and understanding.</td>
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<td>Promote equality and respect.</td>
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*Objectives identified in ‘Engagement Fact Sheet’ located in ‘Appendix A - Planning’*
National/Government:

National feasibility study of organisations engaging young people:
Australia has a very strong youth sector that is engaging young people in every state and territory. Unfortunately due to the size and diversity of the organisations engaging young people there is often an over-lap in initiatives when collaboration could be sort. A national feasibility study would provide an understanding of:

- Where organisations are engaging young people
- How they are sourcing young people
- What programs and initiatives they are using
- The cost of programs and sources of funding
- The organisations aims and outcomes for the young people they are engaging.

Understanding these areas will promote cross-organisational collaboration and provide a snap-shot of the youth sector and information on best-practice models currently in place across Australia. The feasibility study would also identify excessive overlap between organisations and gaps in the youth sector.

Currently the Federal Government provides a large amount of funding to organisations engaging young people through education, sport and not-for-profit organisations. This is very positive as these are important areas and provide strong outcomes for young people. A feasibility study would provide an understanding of the effectiveness of funding and whether organisations engaging young people through non-traditional channels are being supported. It will also ensure accountability of the organisations receiving government funding for initiatives/projects to ensure the responsible management of funds and the achievement of the organisations outcomes.

Constitutional Recognition promotion and awareness:
The proposed Referendum for Constitutional amendment and the inclusion of acknowledging Indigenous Australians as the first Australians will be the next big step in Australia for reconciliation and recognition between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. In 1967, over 90% of Australians voted in favor for Indigenous Australians to be counted in the consensus as Australian Citizens and for the Australian government to introduce legislation relating to Aboriginal Affairs.

The Referendum is being proposed to take place in 2013. In order for the Referendum to be successful, awareness and understanding of the proposal needs to be high on the agenda for wider Australia. Young people, from all backgrounds, must be at the forefront of this movement and involved in the debate on Recognition at a National level. Peer-to-peer education must be encouraged, with fact based debate and informed opinions the drivers of a positive outcome.

Utilising social media and the strong youth sector within Australia as catalysts for a successful Referendum will ensure cohesion, consistency and effectiveness of messages. It will also create a strong network of likeminded young people who support a progressive and inclusive Australia.

The appointment of Ambassadors, from all background and of voting age to promote positive, fact-based messages in the wider community will be paramount in ensuring the importance of such proposed amendments and additions to our Constitution is understood and supported.
Australian Youth Representative to the Asia-Pacific:
Australia’s youth sector is diverse, well established and knowledgeable of models and initiatives that work across different demographics and geographical locations within our nation that drive youth participation and advocate on youth related issues. To promote youth participation and representation within the Asia-Pacific region the establishment of an Australian Youth Representative to the Asia-Pacific would support the Asia-Pacific region in collaboration with the Australian youth sector to implement effective channels supporting youth participation, the development of youth led organisations and initiatives to address various issues within our region including youth representation in the decision making process, promotion of the rights of children and young people with disabilities and the development of youth specific policy.

The Australian Youth Representative to the Asia-Pacific will drive collaboration between national youth sectors to ensure best-practice models are shared, developed and implemented across Asia-Pacific region therefore strengthening national partnerships, develop and support our regions future leaders and drive social development goals, post 2015 whereupon the UN Millennium Development Goals expire.

Education:

Fact-based social awareness schools program:
Young people form their opinions from three main sources; parents, media and from their peers. This has both positive and negative outcomes depending on the accuracy of the information they receive which is dependent on the agenda, understanding and prejudices of the source.

There is much uninformed and agenda driven information that our young people are hearing and receiving. This perpetuates negative views and opinions in our community on many social issues, including; Refugee and Asylum Seekers, Indigenous Australians and sigma associated with mental health. A fact-based social awareness school program would provide students with access to unbiased information across a range of social areas which will enable young people to develop well informed opinions and encourage the promotion of accurate information.

Develop and promote schools as community builders:
Schools must be viewed upon as community hubs for young people, a safe place for young people to learn, interact and develop. Schools should be considered community builders; a place that develops young people who are aware of social issues and engaged in community initiatives.

Education must be viewed beyond numeracy and literacy capabilities; education must involve awareness of local and international social issues, analytical and problem solving skills and the development of social mindedness. This will create a generation of thinkers and action orientated young people.

Develop and promote initiatives supporting young change-makers:
Young people are enthusiastic about the impact they can have on the direction of Australia. This positive approach to community is growing a large community of change-makers, like-minded thinkers and young people with wonderful ideas for initiatives for their cities, communities and our nation.

Supporting the development of community hubs and accessible social entrepreneur grants will provide a platform for initiative development and funding to turn an idea into reality and turn a young person with an idea into a change-maker who is giving back to the community through positive action. Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane currently have social enterprise hubs based on International models, expanding to other major cities will provide a social entrepreneur and small business culture across Australia.
Indigenous Affairs:

**National Indigenous Youth Advocacy Body:**
Within Australia’s youth sector there are a number of advocacy models including AYAC, Left Right Think Tank and state based youth organisations. An Indigenous specific advocacy organisation operating at a national level does not currently exist. An Indigenous Youth Advocacy organisation would provide a strong youth voice on Indigenous issues, collaborate with existing organisations and provide a strong platform for young, passionate people who want to have an impact and drive change at the high level.

The Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council (VIYAC) would provide a strong model that a national organisation could be developed. The National Centre for Indigenous Excellence (NCIE) currently has, in early stages, a youth advisory board established. The model does not have full capacity to advocate on a number of issues affecting Indigenous young people.

**Indigenous peer-to-peer networks:**
Young Indigenous people are excited to hear of other young Indigenous people doing great things at all levels of community. The support, networks and inspiration they provide each other are tools that are consistently underestimated.

Providing an online hub for young aspiring Indigenous people will promote and support a generation of connected young people to grow together, network strongly and encourage each other to achieve great things together. An online hub will offer a safe space for idea creation, support, mentoring and support the development of change-makers. Online isn’t not restricted by geographical divide, low cost (opposed to direct engagement) and effective at engaging a wider audience.

**Incorporate resilience, role models and respect in all organisations engaging Indigenous Youth:**
Cross-generational impacts of high incarceration rates, high suicide rates particularly among males and low educational outcomes continue to have negative effects the Indigenous communities and Indigenous young people. The perceived generational perpetuation of low-expectations, welfare dependency, excessive use of drugs and alcohol among Indigenous people is a view that is held by fractions of the wider community, this negative stereotype needs to be challenged and changed.

Core to every organisation engaging Indigenous youth must be components attune to building resilience through strengthening cross-generational communication and cultural awareness, utilising strong community role models from various sectors and developing engagement models based on mutual respect.

Incorporating these key components into the core of the business or organisation that are engaging Indigenous youth will promote social development in young Indigenous people, cultural understanding and positive social outcomes throughout wider Australia.
Health:

Address the stigma related to mental health and mental illness:
The negative sigma related to people with mental illness or individuals that identify poor personal mental health is often a barrier for young people seeking help. The sigma is often related to uninformed and ignorant views of:

- What is a mental health illness
- What the implications of being diagnosed with a mental health issue
- What are the signs to be aware of, both personally and in friends/family
- How to maintain positive mental health
- How to address a mental health issue

Mental health and well-being must be a strong focus with awareness campaigns and peer-to-peer education being supported. Peer-to-peer education and support must continue to be promoted and expanded through existing organisations like: Headspace and Spire which engage at a national level and engage young people outside of schools and in the wider community through the use of young ambassadors.

School based education models should be implemented nation wide to engage young people in secondary school and during the tertiary education transition to promote awareness and dispel uninformed stigma. Channels for young people to seek help, through online tools, over the phone and face to face must continue to be supported and expanded to ensure young people feel safe to discuss their concerns of mental health and welfare.

A national taskforce for the development of a communications program for Children with disabilities:
Encouraging and supporting communications skills in children with disabilities at an early age is vital to their development and ability to influence decisions affecting them. Particular among children with autism and other disabilities impacting their physical or intellectual ability to verbally communicate their needs, wants and feelings.

A standard tool for communication, similar to national use of sign language (Auslan) would benefit the Disabilities community by providing a common language of communication throughout Australia. Due to the varying ranges of physical and intellectual disability a one-size-fits-all approach is not encouraged however a standard tool must be developed.

Image charts, tablet and mobile app technologies should be considered as tools for developing communication platforms for people with disabilities. An example of existing image charts is in Cranleigh School in Canberra. The chart was developed in consultation with linguists, teachers and children with disabilities and is widely used within the school with great success. Unfortunately the tool of communication is only available at school and is not used outside in the wider community. A national taskforce for the development of a communications program and tool would ensure people with disabilities are able to communicate through an accessible platform and familiar language.
Promotion and incorporation of two key approaches of drugs and alcohol awareness:

Young peoples awareness of the impacts of legal and illegal drugs and alcohol is limited. The lack of fact-based education and a history of poor implementation of ineffective diversionary programs have lead to the issue of drugs and alcohol being less understood by young people and experimented with and in some cases causing serious harm and death.

While we must not advocate for the use of drugs and alcohol it is important to acknowledge that with or without effective diversionary programs, drugs and alcohol are available to young people in our community. Awareness of the impacts of drugs and alcohol must be approached in two ways:

1. **Fact-based awareness:** How drugs are developed, health issues and social issues associated with use. It is important to dispel the myth that ‘everyone doing it’ by promoting positive facts rather than traditionally promoted facts based on how many people are using drugs.

2. **Understanding of what to do in a situation:** Provide awareness of what steps to take should be taken if an incident does occur involving the use of legal and illegal drugs and alcohol. The promotion of ‘caring for your friends’ and ‘looking out for each other’ should be used through schools, online and other forms of media. Peer driven awareness is essential to the promotion of safety, diversion and informed decisions.

Incorporating these two approaches when addressing drugs and alcohol awareness will encourage safer practices and better informed decisions, not only in direct relation to drugs and alcohol but to the impacts associated with the use of drugs and alcohol.

Human Rights:

**Fact-based awareness of refugees and asylum seekers:**

The view and opinion of refugees and asylum seekers held by fractions of the Australian public are built on prejudices, negative ‘catch cries’ perpetuated by media and the lack of factual information disseminated and accessible through mainstream channels of engagement. Unfortunately negative portrayals of refugees and asylum seekers in Australian media continues to influence views held by young Australians, the use of the terms ‘illegal refugees’, ‘boat people’ and ‘queue jumpers’ create a negative image of people who come to Australia as refugees and asylum seekers.

A factually based awareness campaign must be undertaken and promoted through mainstream media, social media and traditional media as well as integrating positive campaigns into Australian schools.

The ongoing use of the negative terms referring to refugees and asylum seekers by Australian media and some Australian politicians must cease. This is not an issue for political point scoring nor a debate that should be fueled by uninformed views. The opportunity to create an inclusive Australia should be supported and the support of organisations promoting an Inclusive, equal and informed Australia, like Welcome to Australia and Refugee Resource Centres must be supported.
In school human rights education:
Young people have a very limited knowledge of basic human rights, how human rights have been established and how/if Australian policy has been developed with a human rights approach. Understanding basic human rights provides a basic awareness of social issues that impact people in Australia and abroad and social movements that have worked towards human rights and driven change throughout the world.

Human rights education needs to be incorporated within our education system particularly in grade 11 and 12 where students are engaged and preparing to move into further education and the workforce. Education modules need to be developed either by the education system or through an external organisation specialising in the Human Rights such as Amnesty International, UNHCR or UNICEF (examples only).

Young people who have a basic level of understanding of Human Rights maybe more likely to engage with organisations like charities, not-for-profits and other organisations promoting human rights or with Human Rights frameworks. This will encourage social thinkers, change makers and progressive policy developers.

Inclusion of youth perspectives in human rights approach to policy development:
Australia is progressing to include a human rights approach to policy development at a state and federal government level. This is a positive step for Australia as a nation and as a member of the international community. A human rights approach to policy development will ensure international standards are adhered to, internationally agreed human rights will be visible within our policy and Australia will be better placed to implement best practice models for developing policy, bench marking effectiveness and utilising international knowledge for implementing policy at various levels of society.

The Child Rights Taskforce is a coalition of over 100 NGO’s and was the driver behind the development of the 2011 NGO Report on the Rights of the Child ‘Listen to Children’ consultation with over 750 children and young people. The inclusion of youth perspective within this report was effective to representing their best interests and support youth participation in decision that relate to them.

Including youth perspectives in the development of policy inline with a universal human rights approach will ensure policy is applicable to Australia’s young people and that young people’s participation is both supported and appreciated. Youth organisations often have policy officers that develop and implement policy related to their organisations and initiatives, this provides an opportunity of cross-organisational and government collaboration while utilising the experience and expertise held within Australian organisations.

Australian Youth Representative to the United Nations:

Ongoing financial assistance:
The Australian Youth Representative position is an unpaid, full-time voluntary position. Funding for the national engagement tour is sourced through fundraising, grants and personal funds. The youth representative position plays an important position within Australia’s youth sector as it provides a voice for young people at a national and international level.

The youth representative position must have financial support in place to either cover costs incurred during the National Engagement Tour or for the representative to derive a salary from this full-time position. The minimum financial support should be $25,000.00 to cover or partly cover the youth representatives associated and living costs. Additional sourced sponsorship should continue to ensure financial barriers are not involved when delivering an effective and meaningful engagement tour.
SOME OF THE KEY ISSUES. I AM A FIRM BELIEVER THAT ACCESS TO RELEVANT, FORMAL, INFORMAL
To represent the diverse views and opinions of young Australians an understand of what young people felt was important to them, from social issues, school to sport need to be attained. Undertake a 5 month National Engagement Tour of all states and territories provided and understanding of the drivers that influence young peoples views, knowledge and support for change in Australia. The development of workshops and engagement tools were flexible to allow for varying approaches depending on age, education levels and relevant issues.

In April, an online survey (see Appendix A - Planning) posed the question “What do you care about?” The survey was promoted through Facebook and Twitter networks and attracted over 200 respondents.

Health, Education, Indigenous Affairs and Human Rights were the key issues that were identified from the survey as the areas young people cared about.

Due to the geographical size of Australia travel was often limited to major cities and limited finances meant that visiting regional and remote areas was unfortunately restricted. In order to engage a wider audience a strong online presence through social media was maintained.

Below is a diagram of the various engagement tools and description of use, during 2011/12:
A ‘high presence - high impact’ approach was undertaken during the entire tenure. Through social media such as Facebook and Twitter it allowed young people, organisations and interested people to follow progress and interact directly with the Youth Representative.

The ability to receive instant feedback or comments on opinions, articles and comments was vital to creating a sense of ownership to the wider audience as they evolved from bystanders to participants on Youth Representative’s journey. The support from ‘followers’ also helped maintain enthusiasm and purpose during the long five months National Engagement Tour.

In addition to social media as a way of engaging a wider audience an ongoing blog was maintained with 2 posts per month being made. The blog covered a range of topics including: youth participation, Indigenous affairs and personal reflections of my time as the Youth Representative. The blog was a platform to write longer, in-depth articles and opinion pieces.

Youtube is a great engagement tool as it creates a visual representation of the issues identified. 29 Videos were filmed, edited and posted on Youtube, Facebook and Twitter. These videos allowed for a visual engagement of my journey and channels for feedback.

Face-to-face engagements was the most effective form of engagement. These ranged from schools, universities, youth organisations and various events. These personal interactions have had an invaluable impact on the Youth Representative and the knowledge of issues affecting individuals.

While Social Media is a great tool to engaging a wider audience, it must be understood that social media is a tool for engagement. Unless there is worthwhile and meaningful content that is relevant for the targeted audience, the message it is trying to disseminate will be lost or not picked up by the intended parties.

Peer-to-peer engagement and promotion is the most effective channel to engaging a wider audience in a meaningful way. Young people are more likely to engage with an event, discussion or debate if their friends, who they trust, are already engaged.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>Lord Somers Camp</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Young People without Borders</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lady Somers Camp</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>UN Youth Vic + Youth Change</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Headspace</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Foundation for Young Australians</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>One Just World Panel</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>Broome</td>
<td>Work and Careers Expo</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>Rotary Crawley + Perth City</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>UWA and Burswood Complex</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Laing O’Rourke</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Other Meetings</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>Brisbane</td>
<td>2011 Native Title Conference</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Toowoomba</td>
<td>National Sister Cities Conference</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
<td>Road Trip - Alice Springs to Darwin (See Appendix D)</td>
<td>420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>Melaleuca Refugee Centre</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>MyNT</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tiwi Islands</td>
<td>Rock Against Racism</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Xavier Senior College</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>AYAC National Conference</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Inspire</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Other Meetings</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Headspace</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Iftar Dinner: Affinity Inter-Culture</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tamworth</td>
<td>St Josephs Collage</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Peel High School</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tamworth</td>
<td>Tamworth High School</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tamworth Youth Centre</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>Canberra</td>
<td>Canberra Girls Grammar School</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Child Rights Task Force: Listen to Children Report</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Other Meetings</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>Hobart</td>
<td>Various Meetings + Youth Network Workshop</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>Adelaide</td>
<td>UN Youth National Conference</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Other Meetings</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swiss</td>
<td>Zurich</td>
<td>One Young World</td>
<td>1,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>New York City</td>
<td>3rd Committee Address</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>UN High Level Meeting on Youth</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Indigenous Children Panel</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>UN Sustainable Development Side-Event</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>United Nations Student Conference on Human Rights</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Other Meetings</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Harvard Law School - Indigenous Discussion</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>6,010</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Social Media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook: Youth Representative</td>
<td>1177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook: Benson Saulo</td>
<td>1093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>1049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog - Views</td>
<td>12569</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youtube - Video Views</td>
<td>5284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email/Surveys</td>
<td>414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>21,586</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*as of 31st January 2011

### Blog Stats - as of 31st January 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Busiest day</th>
<th>13th April 2011</th>
<th>467 views</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avg. views per month</td>
<td>1188.1 views</td>
<td>Over 10 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Busiest Month</td>
<td>April 2011</td>
<td>1,739 views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average views per day</td>
<td>41 Views</td>
<td>Since 13th March 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search engine item</td>
<td>‘benson saulo’</td>
<td>436 searches and views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most viewed post</td>
<td>“Just the beginning…”</td>
<td>555 views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most viewed page</td>
<td>Homepage</td>
<td>7,415 views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest referrer</td>
<td><a href="http://www.unyouth.org.au">www.unyouth.org.au</a></td>
<td>875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest social media referrer</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest link clicks</td>
<td>Facebook Profile: Youth Rep</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Youtube Stats - as of 31st January 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Busiest Day</th>
<th>13th October 2011</th>
<th>247</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Busiest Month</td>
<td>October</td>
<td>2371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Views</td>
<td>Females: 57.2%</td>
<td>Males: 42.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youtube Playback</td>
<td>63.2%</td>
<td>3294 views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile Devices Playback</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>1115 views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embedded in websites Playback</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>463 views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youtube Channel Page Playback</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>339 views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referrers external to Youtube</td>
<td>1446 views</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referrers through Mobile Apps</td>
<td>2177 views</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Youth Sector:
Australia have a very strong, supported and dynamic youth sector with a number of peak bodies that focus on a number of social issues, youth participation and youth empowerment. It is a sector that benefits from the talented, passionate and professional people of all ages working within these organisations.

Working with many organisations who are engaging young people has been an exercise made easy by the great communication and networks that were provided by the youth organisations. Communication does begin to break down in the discussion of programs and initiatives, this breakdown has lead to an overlap of programs working in specific areas within the youth sector. Better collaboration between programs and understanding of existing programs by organisations is needed to ensure the youth sector is best served with better resourced, informed and funded organisations.

Youth Participation:
The engagement and participation of young people in society has been an evolving debate that has moved young peoples voices out of the classrooms, university halls and from the street corners to channels that can influence, promote and create change within Australia. Youth participation is not about inviting a young people to address a roundtable discussion or to answer questions on what young people want, youth participation is about frameworks that encourage, promote and include young people in the development of programs, initiatives and policy development as all levels.

Tokenism should be discouraged at all levels. Meaningful engagement, consultation and inclusion of young peoples perspectives and expertise must be included from the Federal level to the grassroots level on all issues not only on issues affecting them. Young people are more connected, better educated and have great understanding of engaging wider society than any other generation before them. Their contribution to society needs to be respected, appreciated and encouraged.

Youth Empowerment:
Youth driven initiatives are utilising social media in a focused, professional and effective way when promoting initiatives and engaging wider audiences. The greater access to online tools and social media has provided a strong platform to disseminate information and grow public awareness whilst promoting an online community of likeminded young people.

Social media is ultimately a tool being used very well, in some cases. This tool is empowering young peoples ideas and positive change in Australia. Social media and the development of online hubs is something that must be better supported by organisations, government departments and individuals to better engage and empower our young people. Providing a safe place for idea generation, social problem solving and development of initiatives is imperative to the youth sector and youth culture in Australia.

Social Hubs are great idea incubators for start up social businesses as they provide a dynamic environment with other social business to interact. The creative environment that is created within a Social Hub by being surrounded by young professionals that want to make a positive difference in Australia, is an environment that empowers, inspires and develops young Australian entrepreneurs and change makers.
The theme of the 2011 International year of Youth is; Dialogue and Mutual Understanding. Two very important components in the discussion of acknowledgement of the contribution young people make to society. Dialogue; relating to open channels of communication, promoting cross-generational, cross-cultural discussion. Mutual Understanding; implies a level of understanding with common frames of reference within the context that is known by two parties.

Over the coming months I will be engaging in dialogue with individuals and organisations working and living in various industries with diverse backgrounds and upbringings. For this particular piece I would like to focus on ‘Mutual Understanding’ as a component of the International theme as I believe it is a very strong point of discussion when engaging in dialogue.

My question is related to frames of reference and the context of which an understanding can be achieved.

"Some people think intellect counts; knowing how to solve problems, knowing how to get by, knowing how to identify an advantage and seize it. But the functions of intellect are insufficient without courage, love, friendship, compassion and empathy." - Dean Koontz: American novelist and New York Times Best Seller.

I believe Dean Koontz is correct in the idea that intellect has its limitations without the five components being embraced, I also feel that the key to mutual understanding is empathy. The ability to understand and share the feelings of another. A powerful concept, and in some cases an unfathomable task when reflecting on experiences individuals endure over the courses of their lives.

How can you truly understand a persons experience without experiencing their life and walking in their shoes?

How can we encourage cross-cultural discussion without understanding the culture?

These are very important questions when embarking on a journey of understanding but it is these questions that can become road blocks in the path of compassion and empathy, if you do not posses the courage to seek their answers. Our understanding as human beings and individuals is interrelated with our frames of reference and experience.

Therefore no two people can have the exact same understanding or experience in a situation. I find this concept exciting and challenging at the same time.

Plato Says:
"Human behavior flows from three main sources; desire, emotion and knowledge"

If Plato is right in assuming human behavior comes from desire, emotion and knowledge then it could be considered that one way to achieve Mutual Understanding is through breaking down experience, culture and frames of reference to their basic forms in relation to desire, emotion and knowledge; both of intellect and knowledge of self. If all human behavior come from these three sources than these are the basis for an understanding to be formed before empathy; a key component of Mutual Understanding can truly begin.

In that case, walking a mile in another's shoes, or understanding a persons culture isn't imperative to form a Mutual Understanding. It is the journey which is undertaken by you to understand how these experiences and beliefs are formed. But how do you break down experiences, culture and frames of reference without trivialising and minimising these three areas?

This is where the theme of the International year of Youth becomes fully realised.

Dialogue begins to play the lead role over Mutual Understanding. Courage, Friendship and Love are the key components of Dialogue. The courage to allow yourself to connect with another, be vulnerable and honest, having the strength to test your own beliefs.

Friendship is based on trust and allowing yourself to form an emotional linked through sharing experiences and culture and finally love, not romantic love but rather the love for life, the love of learning, the love that goes beyond race and religion.

I recently met a young mother, aged 19 who has recently undertaken a pre-employment course to enable her the skills to begin working within the hospitality industry. I’ve never met this young woman before but I listened as she shared her story of being a proud young mother who wants to support her child and ensure he is raised knowing the importance of an education and employment.

While I listened it was clear to me that I did not have the same pressures growing up as a 19yr old or even at 23 I could relate to the pride this young woman has for her son and the want for him to have a stable and supportive upbringing because that was the environment I grew-up in with my family. I could understand her want to successfully complete her training and attain a job because I’ve trained and I know the feeling of obtaining that job. It was through her ability to be courageous, show that vulnerability and trust me, a stranger with her struggles and aspirations that allowed me to connect and empathise through my own reflections and experiences. This is where a Mutual Understanding is created.

Dialogue and Mutual Understand; the theme for the International Year of Youth, is just the beginning of an amazing journey, of which no two are the same, so share yours.
Australian Youth Representative to the United Nations

Highlights: Engage

Engagement: Travel and social media
- Undertaking a 5 month engagement tour, visiting all states and territories.
- Engaging over 25,000 people through face-to-face and online tools from various backgrounds and locations.
- Visiting over 27 towns and cities in remote, regional and urban areas.
- Engaging over 400 people through online surveys and a further 3000 through Facebook and Twitter.
- Sharing my journey through photos and video which was posted across social networks.
- Writing an ongoing blog with 20 posts which attracted over 13,000 views.
- Receiving over 70 blog comments that offered great support and positive remarks toward my year, position and issues being discussed.
- Visiting the Tiwi Islands and attending the local school for a day.
- Attending One Young World in Zurich, Switzerland which attracted 1300 participants from over 150 nations.

Engagements: Addresses
- Being selected as 1 of 6 from 300 applicants to delivering an address on leadership at One Young Worlds.
- Addressing the United Nations High Level Meeting on Youth by request of HE Gary Quinlan; Australian Ambassador to the UN in New York.
- The national conference of the UN Association of Australia in Perth, WA.
- The national conference of UN Youth Australia in Adelaide, SA.
- Closing panel address at the 2011 National Native Title Conference in Brisbane, QLD.
- Panel address and discussion on Indigenous Children at the UN with UNICEF.
- Key Address to the UN 3rd Committee in NY.
- Panel address the 2011 UN Student Conference on Human Rights. 450 Students and live streamed to Sierra Leone, Romania, France and to other parts of the US.
- AYAC’s National Youth Conference in Sydney, NSW.

Engagement: The People
- Presenting to, working with and meeting over 6000 people during 10months.
- Meeting the Children’s Commissioner’s from ACT and WA.
- Meeting Mr Peter Garret MP - Minister for Education, Early Childhood and Youth.
- Meeting Ms Jenny Macklin MP - Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Minister for Disability Reform.
- Meeting with Mr Kevin Rudd MP - Former Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister.
- Meeting Australian Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young.
- Meeting Mr Ban Ki Moon - United Nations Secretary General.
- Richard Morgan - Global Director of Policy and Practice at UNICEF.
- Meeting and working with 31 Youth Delegates from around the world.
- Mick Gooda - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner.
- Meeting Melissa Parke MP - Federal Labor Minister for Fremantle.
- Meeting HE Mr Gary Quinlan - Australia Ambassador to the UN.
The inclusion of youth participation and representation in the decision making process, either directly or indirectly affecting the direction of Australia and issues relating to youth, is paramount. Engaging and empowering the voice of the growing youth population will ensure the future leaders of Australia are informed and educated in the importance of effective decision-making.

Based on the 2006 Census and age population projections identified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the total population of Australia in 2010 is 21,991,011 with 11% of the population falling between 18 and 25 years of age. High school leavers and first time voters in 2010, who were born in the 1990’s and who are commonly referred to as Gen Y, are the first Generations of Australians who have never known a world without mobile phones or the internet.

Social norms and ideals have dramatically shifted over the past four decades, increasingly over the past ten years within Australian society. Increased modes of accessing information and engaging networks across cyberspace have bred a generation and subsequent generations who are technologically cultured, well educated and socially minded due to their ability to access information and networks from across the globe. The role of young people in decision-making in today’s society has evolved from being a silent by-stander to becoming an influential voice with calculated, articulated conviction.

Whether in school, the workforce or in everyday life, young people are encouraged to have an opinion and voice their concerns. This ability to communicate and debate should not be limited to the school yards and street corners of society but encouraged to participate at all levels of decision-making. Diversity in decision-making offers differences of perspective, positive debate and outcomes.

Supporting and engaging this young generation is important to the positive growth of society, empowerment through inclusive decision-making but this must be lead from a Federal level.
In June the Youth Representative had the opportunity to visit Canberra Girls Grammar School with the ACT Division of UN Youth who were holding mock United Nations debates. The Youth Representative held a Youth Change event that focused on mental health and involved the students creating a large artwork which was presented to the school. Students also wrote letters to the Honorable Peter Garrett MP, Minister for Education, Early Childhood and Youth andHonorable Julia Gilard MP, Prime Minister of Australia.

“School is meant to prepare us for the world but we know nothing about the world”
- Year 9 Student - Canberra Girls Grammar School

The above quote was from a student in grade 9 during a discussion about social issues and awareness of issues in the community, nationally and internationally. Students awareness of existing social issues within Australian was very limited. While some students were involved in youth organisations there was a clear lack of community engagement but it was an area students identified as something they would like more involvement.

School as Community Builders:

A reoccurring theme during the National Engagement Tour has been the fundamental belief of ‘I am my brothers keeper and I am my sisters keeper’. This is the understanding that we are all connected regardless of geographical location or economic status and we must be thinking outside of ourselves and about our impact on others. Unfortunately this is a lesson that is rarely taught within our education system which has lead it to be an understanding that is overlooked within our society.

If we truly aspire to develop young people who think socially, think beyond themselves and want to promote a socially conscience society then schools are the institutions that must be the drivers for this change. Developing problem solvers, building resilience, inspiring young change makers must be the goal of our education system. What students learn in school must prepare them for society and life beyond the classroom.

The following letter from a grade 9 students at an ACT school shows a clear and concerning lack of understanding of the importance of education, particularly for those from less ‘well-off’ families. This was not a view held by most however it is a view that does exist in our schools.
To

Julia Gillard,

I firmly believe that more money should be put forward to private schools. Those who cannot afford private schools should just not get an education. If they can’t afford it then just go home. Smart people are rich and dumb people are poor. So why bother educating dumb people. Let’s spend the money on people who are actually smart.

Yours Sincerely

[Signature]

Canberra Grammar School
In October 2011 the Youth Delegates to the United Nations organised a panel discussion on ‘Education for Sustainable Development’ which was sponsored by the German Permanent Mission to the United Nations. The event was a wonderful success that encouraged audience participation and fueled positive debate and discussion on a range of topics including youth participation in the Rio +20 agenda and the implementation of sustainable development goals following the expiration of the Millennium Development Goals in 2015.

There were four key points that were raised during the discussion, these were:

1. Green economies begin in the school yard; curriculums need to reflect a strong, sustainable, social focus.
2. All sector collaboration: private, civic, Education, Health and particularly government partnerships need to be strengthened to support students, teachers and organisations in working towards a green economy and sustainable development.
3. The use of social media and technology is a wonderful tool to engage and empower young people to participate in meeting social challenges.
4. Implementation of Education for Sustainable Development must be relevant to regional and local circumstances - “Start local and go global” - in line with needs, social needs and within the labour market.

Understanding of education within Australia needs to shift at all levels from the government to universities who educate the future teachers and to the students in both private and government schools; a shift in how they are learning, what are they learning and how knowledge is being assessed.

A shift towards the development of social change makers will be a positive change that will be felt at all levels of society, from stronger family units to our future leaders of communities, business and government.

Change is often a slow moving process, especially when shifting a large institution like our education system but change can happen in small steps. Suggested starting points were small initiatives driven at the school level, such as:

- Guest speakers from government, organisations or community members.
- Socially conscience themed events or specific days.
- Assignments linked to community service or social issues i.e. Poverty, Conflict.

‘Start local - go global’ is a strong philosophy that should be the underlying belief to creating change in our communities. This must be driven from a federal level, supported by states and ultimately implemented by our principals and teachers.
Ways for a major difference in the world:

- End Poverty!
- Reduce
- Recycle
- Reuse
- Community Service!
There is a story from remote north-western Australia of an old Aboriginal man who was the last man to speak his traditional language fluently. For generations he’d lived on his traditional land, his skin as ragged and ruff as the land itself.

To avoid losing such an important and unique element of Australian life, a group of non-Indigenous scientists and linguists made the long trip north to meet the old man and record his language. In the warm early morning sun, they sat down in the red dirt over a cup of tea, brewed over an open flame on the side of the dirt road.

The conversation was translated through the old man’s daughter using a common dialect. The group would ask a question, the daughter would interpret in the common dialect before the old man would respond, first in his traditional language then repeat it by translating it into the common language before it would then be translated back into English. It was a slow process but one that was so important to the work of the scientists and linguists.

Overcome with curiosity, a linguist asked; “how old are you?” Going through the process of translation and understanding the old man replied via his daughter with the answer: “Ten Thousand”. Looking puzzled the group asked him to explain. After a long conversation between the man and his daughter, the daughter turned to the group and pointed to a giant boab tree while translating his words:

“See this tree, this is a part of my dreaming, my culture, these have been on this land, since the beginning of time. I have seen trees grow tall and strong, dry up and die. I have seen animals come through these lands, produce offspring, I have watched the offspring grow old and pass away. I have seen my own family, live, grow old and return to this earth. This tree stands strong and will continue to stand tall and strong long after my time in this life. But next to these ancient trees I have been the most constant on my land, so if next to these ancient trees I have been the most constant then I must be ten thousand.”

Change is a slow moving process that often takes months, years even generations to achieve a long lasting change. Young people can offer a unique perspective to creating change in Australian society and indeed the world. Our youthful enthusiasm and longitudinal thinking creates a sense that change can be achieved in our life times, that our generation will be the one that can overcome the obstacles that the previous generations could not.

The optimism is balanced with a sense of urgency to address the worlds most pressing issues. The time for positive change is now and our generation is the best placed generation to understand and overcome these issues. We are connected globally, we think globally, we push for global solutions and we continue to be faced with the effects of climate change, the global financial and economic crisis, food crisis and distribution issues and conflict issues.
In June 2011, the Youth Representative attended and delivered an address at the 2011 National Native Title Conference. During the week the Youth Representative also attended a mens talking circle which attracted over 40 men, some who have achieved native title on their traditional lands and others who are still working through the extensive process.

In the circle sat an old Aboriginal man with large broad shoulders and a giant ten gallon Akubra which the wide brim covered his eyes. He spoke of the disconnection between his generation and his children’s generation. He didn’t feel that his children or his grand children shared the same passion for land rights or Indigenous rights as he does. He spoke very slow and solemn.

This generational divide is very real and seems to be increasing. The underlying factor of this generational divide is the lack of communication due to the perceived lack of knowledge of how to engage across generations. As a way to address this communication gap various interviews were filmed, edited and posted on Youtube to create a series of older generations sharing their thoughts on young people, the need for young leaders and their view for Australia.

‘Gen-Talk’ was a series of 5 interviews that were conducted with various community members:

The common message that came out of the ‘Gen-Talk’ series was that older generations believed young people, when provided the support and guidance can have a positive impact on society and the world. Role models and education were identified as keys to success for young people.

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‘Gen-Talk’ interviews can be viewed on Youtube at:
  * [http://www.youtube.com/user/TheoneCapian?feature=mhee](http://www.youtube.com/user/TheoneCapian?feature=mhee)
I have had the amazing pleasure of traveling across Australia, attending schools, youth conferences and universities engaging young people along the way. It has been a great opportunity to meet people that share the same passions, frustrations and drive as me.

On reflection of my past 3 months of travel I realised it has also been the unexpected encounters that have made my journey so memorable and special.

It has been in conversations with older generations that have had the most impact on my journey, not only as the Australian Youth Representative but as a young man.

Whether it be sitting around a table in Tennant Creek listening to the local police officers share their frustrations with the growing sense of institutional mentality in the communities or their ability to list 6-10 young people who have great potential but lack the direction and drive to break the strong pull of the negative cycles. Or whether it be sitting in a mens talking circle at the Native Title Conference listening to elders discuss the growing concern of the disconnection of young people with culture and feeling at a lose of how to rekindle the spark of pride in the next generations. These are the moments that I will remember for years after my role is completed.

These are the moments I’ve sat quietly listening to the tone of disappointment, waining hope and frustration spoken by people who desperately want this generation to take up the flag and fly it for the future of Australia. This frustration is real, this sense of disappointment is real.

I recently spoke at the closing address of the 2011 National Native Title Conference in Brisbane I spoke on the need for older generations to ignite the fire in young people through history, sharing struggles, victories and loses.

If you understand where you come from, who you are, you have a sense of pride and worth. This is where the fire starts.

I’ve listened to old Aboriginal men and women speak of the pride they felt when they cast their vote for the first time, how they dressed up in their best and walked down to the ballot boxes as a family to finally have a say in the direction of their country. Tears surface but the warmth from their smiles express that the tears come from a place of pride and a sense of accomplishment. We marched, we fought, we waited and finally we voted.

These are the stories that offer me strength when faced with challenges and adversity.

They provide me with fortitude, knowing that amongst the struggles and disappointments there is hope and the fire that drives this hope is alive and it flickers under the surface, under the social strains, under the layers of age and time.

I’ve seen and felt it time and time again. Walking into a community, a building, a conversation where the air is so thick that you feel pressure on your chest and each step is an effort.
It is in these situations that the unexpected happens, you feel the warmth of the fire, see it in the eyes of someone or feel the force of their very words moving through you.

This is where the fire starts and I believe the older generations need to drive this and be that spark in our communities, breathing life into the hearts and minds of our generation, creating the understanding that the job isn’t done, progress has happened but we still have many miles to travel on this journey.

It is true that my generation has not lived through the struggles of the 60’s, 70’s and 80’s and our living memory is that of the NT Intervention and the 2008 Apology but this does not limit our ability to become the torchbearers for our generation and cause, this does not stop our ability to take up the flag and fly it for an equal, just and unified Australia.
There are so many people and organisations that I would like to acknowledge for making my year as Australian Youth Representative to the United Nations so special and amazing both during my National Engagement Tour and during my time at the United Nations General Assembly.

Unfortunately I cannot acknowledge everyone who played a part in my year but I would like to acknowledge the support for the many organisations and people who I met and was inspired by throughout the year.

To my family; thank you for the ongoing support, advice and love. You are a source for constant inspiration and determination.

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Tracey Croke; Thank you for your hard work on my media releases, proactive contact with the media and the wonderful blogs, tweets and Facebook messages they have all been very appreciated.

Adrian Williams; Thank you for your ongoing friendship and advise over the year. Your insights have been invaluable.

To my Principle Sponsor Laing O’Rourke; coming onboard as my first sponsor was a great relief for me and showed major daring to support an unknown young person. Your ongoing support has been invaluable. The implementation of your first Reconciliation Action Plan demonstrates your commitment to reconciliation in Australia and support for young people.

To my Principle Sponsor; AYAC and AYF the wonderful work you do for the youth sector does not go unnoticed in communities throughout Australia. Your engagement with young Australians provides a strong avenue for youth voices to be heard at all levels of society on important issues.

To my Support Sponsors; The contributions made to my engagement tour was very much appreciated and ensured that my workshops were well resourced and engagements were effective and diverse during my National Engagement Tour.

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; as program partner for the Youth Representative position I want to thank you for supporting young people at a national and international level. The support and freedom provided during my time at the UNGA was appreciated. The ongoing support of DFAT for this position in imperative and the benefit of such an important role is immeasurable.

UN Youth Australia; As a voluntary organisation I was very impressed by the commitment and professionalism of all members across states and territories. The support from divisions ensured effective consultations and workshops. The success of the initiatives you coordinate and run in schools across Australia are testimony to the hard work and determination young people are willing to put into something they are passionate about.

A huge thank you to; To all the people following me on Facebook and Twitter, YNOT, ACYS, Welcome to Australia, Brad Chilcott, Worldvision, YAPA, GenerationOne, Roni Forrest at Future Footprints, Chris Varney, Samah Hadid, Beth Shaw, Melanie Poole, Spark!, Aaron Tait, UNAA, ANTAR, OYW, Dovetail, Jeff Buckley, BushTV, Richard Fleming, Lord/Lady Somers Camp, FYA, Headspace, Create Foundation, Inspire, Rotary Crawly and Perth City, UWA, Mick Gooda, Mick Dodson, Avon Moyle, Maj. Jon Lotu, Affinity, Child Rights Task Force, Gary Quinlan and staff at the Permanent Mission to the UN, Australian Interns, Youth Delegates and to all other organisations and people I met throughout the year. Thank you.
Thank you!

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