

# Yamatji On-Country

## 2023 Yamatji on Country Youth Statement – Summary



The following Youth Statement reflects the outcome of workshops and discussions by Aboriginal high school students from Geraldton and Carnarvon communities in the lead-up to the 2023 Yamatji on Country meeting at the Bundiyarra Aboriginal Community Aboriginal Corporation on 20 and 21 September 2023.

Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation (YMAC) partnered with the Aboriginal Health Council of WA (AHCWA) to support the student's involvement in the 2023 Yamatji on Country event, through two workshops held in August and September.

The first workshop involved twenty-one students from Geraldton Senior High School, Champion Bay Senior High School, Nagle Catholic College, Geraldton Christian College, and Carnarvon Community College participating in a Young Leaders Program workshop run by the Aboriginal Health Council of WA. The workshop gave the young people an opportunity to not only learn about health topics, but to gain the confidence to present to their peers.

A second workshop involved twenty-seven young people. Thirteen emerging young leaders' that had participated in the first workshop presented activities to the rest of the group that they had learnt from the Young Leaders Program, displaying their new leadership skills and knowledge to the larger group.

The young people then discussed what issues and concerns were affecting them today in their communities. **In addition to a bucket list of actions** (see page 3), **they identified five key issues and concerns and came up with three key messages and slogans they wanted to share with the community at Yamatji on Country.**

To effectively share their messages, they created eight artworks that will become the backdrops of posters and social media tiles created by AHCWA. Following Yamatji on Country, these will be distributed to schools throughout the Yamatji region for sharing with peers, along with short video resources that were also created.

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## Key Issues and Concerns

The young people feel that there needs to be recognised improvement and solutions in the areas of the following five key issues and concerns if there is to be real change in their community:

**1. Youth Substance Use**

Youth substance use is a huge issue currently happening in their community, leading to many concerns, and affecting their health.

**2. Racism**

Racism was brought up at last year's Yamatji on Country and remains a problem. The young people are tired of the judgement and stereotype they often face in both their schools and community.

**3. Lack of Culture**

Lack of culture within their schools and homes, including loss of language and traditions deeply affects the young people.

**4. Intergenerational Trauma leads to Violence.**

Intergenerational trauma that leads to physical and verbal violence and domestic violence is becoming normalised. They are concerned about an increase in violence in their schools and community.

**5. Home environment**

The home environment is once again an issue and concern for some young people affecting several aspects of their lives including their education and mental health and wellbeing.

The main message that the youth of the Yamatji region want to get across is that they do have issues happening and they are trying to highlight these issues and concerns through age-appropriate resources of posters, social media tiles, and videos.

They are hoping that people will see the work that they have put into these resources and assist them to make changes in their community.

## What Can You Do?

One way the community, schools and government can assist the young people is by sharing their resources and supporting them. AHCWA are finalising the print and digital resources in coming months and will distribute to the involved high schools and community.

## Link to Yamatji on Country 2023 Call to Action

Additional to this Youth Statement, the 2023 Yamatji on Country Call-to-Action statement that was decided by the community members present at the Yamatji on Country meeting is also a step in the right direction. It seeks genuine commitment and offers an open invitation for government to work with First Nations people to achieve real change in their communities, through self-determination and taking their rightful place in leading decision-making processes that impact Yamatji First Nations people.

**One of the key outcomes decided by the community for its Yamatji on Country Call to Action is including 'supporting and listening to the young people', calling on government to work with the community to progress their five key issues and concerns to find solutions together.**

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## The Bucket List

At the pre-event workshops the students also made a Bucket List of programs and ideas that they would like to see happen in their region, both in school and their communities.

Following are the Bucket List items, as drawn from workshop materials:

1. **A key item is to have a youth forum or camp, where we can learn about lots of different topics including language and culture. Ideally, they would like to see this forum happen On Country, on a camp. This would give us the opportunity to learn more about different topics to do with young people, while being grounded and connected to Country.**
2. *More single-issue workshops for Aboriginal young people to discuss our issues and concerns further. This can further assist in finding solutions to issues that are important to us.*
3. *We would like to have the opportunity to learn about our culture from a young age, either within our families and community or through a school-based program that includes the opportunity to hear from our Elders and Traditional Owners.*
4. *It would benefit the Aboriginal community to have another GRAMS campus located on the north side of Geraldton near Waggrakine so that the Aboriginal community has easy access to a culturally appropriate health service throughout the whole of Geraldton.*
5. *We would like to see GRAMS run more workshops in schools on health issues affecting today's youth including substance use. We would like to see the workshops include both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, so that we can learn together.*
6. *We would like someone to teach us more about our languages so that our language isn't lost and so we can pass it down to our future generations. This includes in high schools - not just primary schools.*
7. *There needs to be more visible advertising of mental health services in the Geraldton region, for all demographics, not just for youth. Having the knowledge of where and when these services operate means we can not only have access to their services, but we can share this information with our family members.*
8. *Currently the AIEO's in our schools do a fantastic job with what they teach us and with the resources they have, but with the number of Aboriginal students at our schools growing compared to AIEO's, we feel more AIEO's are needed in our schools to achieve better results.*
9. *Participating in after-school sports and activities has significant costs involved. Uniforms, fees, and the right footwear can be expensive, and this often deters young people from participating. After school sports and activities have multiple benefits for a young person, including raising their self-esteem and their mental health wellbeing. Therefore, more funding for afterschool activities would be good.*
10. *Young people are interested in attending higher education, but unless the TAFE and Universities run 'tasters' at our school, we may not know about what they offer. We therefore don't feel confident enough to attend when we finish Year 12. The TAFE and University tasters should also be exciting and interesting, to encourage young people to get a higher education.*

YMAC would like to acknowledge the outstanding commitment and passion shown by the young people throughout the workshops and presentations. They displayed leadership and maturity beyond their years.

We also thank the Aboriginal Health Council of WA, the involved schools, and highly commend the teachers and Aboriginal Islander Education Officers (AIEO's), who contributed their time to attend and assist the young people in this project.