Submission to the NT Department of Education's Education Engagement Strategy

5 August 2021

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The NT Council of Social Service (NTCOSS) is the peak body for the Northern Territory (NT) Community and Social Services Sector and is a voice for people affected by social and economic disadvantage and inequality. NTCOSS membership is made up of community managed, non-government, not for profit organisations, which work in social and community service delivery, sector development and advocacy.

NTCOSS recognises the specific expertise of members and external stakeholders that have a high level of contact with children, young people and their families in the NT. In particular, NTCOSS supports submissions by Aboriginal community-controlled member organisations stakeholders including Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council, the Aboriginal Peaks of the NT, Tangentyere Council and Central Australian Aboriginal Congress.

This submission has been informed by consultations with NTCOSS members, and through NTCOSS' *Youth Voice* project.

The NT Department of Education's 'Strategic Framework 2018-2022' emphasises partnerships, focusing on holistic supports for children, greater community engagement, and providing differentiated support with evidence-based programs to schools. It was a positive step toward engaging vulnerable children and their families in education. The *Indigenous Education Strategy* and *Social Emotional Learning* curriculum, which emphasise the need for culturally safe and appropriate programs as well as trauma and therapeutic-based practices, enforce this commitment.

However, concerns were raised in consultations with NTCOSS members regarding the capacity of education bodies to administer the above strategies. While it was noted that these strategies indicate a move towards better practice regarding working with children and their families who are experiencing disadvantage and vulnerabilities, the autonomous nature of schools may result in a lack of consistency or variances in program delivery. Conversely, the rigidity of national curriculum was identified as locking schools into modes of delivery that are not place-based, community-led and culturally responsive.

Improved transparency and coordination in program delivery and open communication between educational institutions, government departments, non-government organisations and other stakeholders were raised as important needs to be met. Education engagement programs within mainstream schooling models are an avenue to engage children experiencing disadvantage, linking children and families with necessary services/programs to ensure that their needs are met, and that they continue to engage with school.

There is an opportunity for greater and formalised engagement with youth service providers through school-based Student Engagement Officers. Services identified that many young people not attending school attend their services, or have relationships with these services. Partnering with youth service providers can provide the opportunity to better understand and respond to barriers to engagement, and to improve support for young people who are experiencing vulnerabilities.

Recommendations:

- **Improved transparency, communication and coordination between educational institutions, government departments and non-government organisations**
- **Investment in programs that link children and families with support services to ensure that their needs are met**
- **Formalised engagement/partnerships with youth service providers through school-based Student Engagement Officers**

Gaps in provision of school engagement programs for primary school-aged children were also noted, with programs such as Stars/Girl's Academy and Clontarf primarily catering for secondary students and largely in main regional centres. With the exception of Wanta Sports Academy and various AFL-like programs in schools, these opportunities are also limited in regional and remote schools. Flexibility and innovation in service delivery models were identified as key components of success in this area.

In conjunction with the above, greater classroom support within schools is required. Low literacy and numeracy levels and the challenge of engaging in classroom activities are contributing factors to school disengagement and behavioural issues. Many schools do not have adequate resourcing for school wellbeing supports, which negatively impacts on their ability to meet the needs of children experiencing vulnerabilities. It is recommended that measures be introduced by the Department to ensure that wellbeing and engagement strategies are prioritised in all schools, including accountability and evaluation processes to ensure that these strategies are put into practice.

Recommendations:

- **Introduction of school engagement programs for primary school-aged children, including in regional and remote schools**
- **Greater ongoing resourcing for and commitment to school wellbeing support programs, including in regional and remote schools**

Research shows early intervention is particularly important at crucial transition points including at pre-school, the transition from primary to middle/secondary school, and the transition from high school to higher education or the workforce.[1] A strong theme in consultations was the need for more support for children experiencing vulnerability in transitioning between primary school and middle/secondary school. It is recommended that Inclusion Support Assistants 'travel' with children from Year 6 to Year 7 to support their establishment in a new school, to help address this gap. This process could involve both school-based and out-of-school activities with a cohort of transitioning children and their families, to provide students with an extended support network as they transition from primary school. Attribution of costs, staffing availability, continuation of training and development, and funding barriers in schools must be addressed in order to adequately implement a transition model across NT schools.

Adequate resourcing of support for students in transitioning from school to employment, education, and further training is essential and required. All young people should be provided with support to

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[1] Homel R, Cashmore J and Gimore L, 1999, 'Pathways to prevention: Developmental and early intervention approaches to crime in Australia', National Crime Prevention, accessible at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/43493789_Pathways_to_Prevention_Development_and_Early_Intervention_Approaches_to_Crime_in_Australia

access post school options, but stakeholders identified significant gaps in support for young people with Disability and Aboriginal young people. Greater resourcing across the NT (including in remote locations) for relevant programs and preparation to support young people during this transition period, is required.

Recommendations:

- **Greater resourcing of support for students experiencing vulnerabilities at crucial transition points between primary and middle/high school, and between school and employment, education, and further training**
- **Inclusion Support Assistants to work with students across year 6 and year 7 to support their establishment in a new school**

The importance of adopting genuine, trauma-informed approaches were noted throughout consultations. This is supported by research that indicates the significant impact that childhood trauma has on school engagement.[2] Schools have an important role to play in providing stability and a safe space for children and young people who have experienced trauma. Embedding trauma-informed care models within schools will positively benefit engagement outcomes through improved relationships, encouraging self-regulation; increased understanding of trauma and its impacts.[3]

There are good examples of schools in the NT that utilise trauma-informed care and other therapeutic-based training for staff, including an understanding of brain development in children. However, there is a need for ongoing professional development and education for staff in education settings. Stakeholders highlighted the need for a model that embeds trauma-informed, therapeutic practices and an understanding of children's brain development in program development and delivery. The implementation of an evidenced-based approach to delivery and participatory evaluation is considered as a pathway to best practice. Greater opportunities for professional development in such therapeutic areas would have positive impacts on not only program outcomes (and therefore outcomes for children and their families), but staff would be better equipped to work with children and young people in their communities.

The prevalence of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and barriers to accessing diagnosis and support for children with this condition was a common issue raised. The prevalence of FASD, the impact on the individual, and the social and economic impact on families and society are still not adequately understood in Australia.[4] The range of cognitive, social, and behavioural difficulties (including with impulse control and self-regulation) can have negative impacts on children and families engaging with structural systems (such as youth justice, education, and other agencies).[5]

To improve the outcomes for children experiencing such behaviours, better access to therapeutic and medical support is required. This will aid in diagnosis and support for children with disability,

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[2] Bailey B and Brunzell T 2019, 'A new approach to trauma-informed teaching: Teacher practice with the Berry Street Education Model', Australian Government, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 22 August 2019, accessible at https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/2019/08/22/new-approach-trauma-informed-teaching-teacher-practice-berry-street-education-model

[3] Attachment and Trauma Network, 2018, 'Attachment Trauma – Early Childhood Trauma', accessible at https://www.attachmenttraumanetwork.org/attachment/

[4] Blagg H and Tulich T, 2018, 'Diversionary pathways for Aboriginal youth with foetal alcohol spectrum disorder', Australian Government – Australian Institute of Criminology, accessible at https://aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi557

[5] Blagg H and Tulich T, 2018, 'Diversionary pathways for Aboriginal youth with foetal alcohol spectrum disorder', Australian Government – Australian Institute of Criminology, accessible at https://aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi557

particularly FASD. Ensuring early and timely access to neurobiological assessments for young people in schools is of particular importance, which requires effective collaboration between government departments. In conjunction with this, adopting evidence-based approaches to trauma-informed care would provide a high level of understanding and positively influence the implementation of programs for children who may have FASD but are yet to be diagnosed, as similar behaviours are supported and addressed.

Many studies have shown school factors are associated with 'conduct disorder', 'anti-social behaviour', and offending behaviour.[678] In particular, these studies have shown poor academic performance, truancy and 'low commitment' to schooling, frequent school changes, expulsion from school, 'antisocial' peers, and bullying are among the most important risk factors that predict offending behaviour during adolescence. Other important risk factors can include impulsiveness, inadequate or inappropriate parenting practices, punitive or erratic parental discipline, child physical abuse, parental conflict, 'antisocial' parents, large family size, low family income and high crime neighbourhoods. Research has shown the most effective early intervention and prevention programs draw on developmental approaches to crime prevention and target a range of these risk factors.[9] Therefore, it is important that the education system works with other government departments to coordinate implementation and continuous improvement of programs that focus on early support, prevention, and family support.

Recommendations:

- **Embedding evidence-based, trauma-informed care models within schools, including an understanding of children's brain development in program development and delivery**
- **Ongoing professional development for staff in education settings**
- **Department of Education to collaborate with other government departments to coordinate implementation and continuous improvement of programs that focus on early support, prevention, and family support**
- **Appropriate and timely access to early neurobiological assessments for young people in schools**

It is recommended that educational bodies adopt models of best practice involving community and family-centred approaches to addressing children's needs, in safe and culturally appropriate environments. NTCOSS also recommends improved and sustained efforts to train and engage local, professionally qualified Aboriginal teachers and assistant teachers in remote schools. This will provide continuity, support, and cultural safety for children in schools with a high turnover of non-Indigenous staff and principals, and who have varying degrees of cultural understanding and experience. NTCOSS supports NPY Women's Council's call for Aboriginal people to be given the opportunity to lead the classroom; '_Anangu teachers are a vital piece of the puzzle in supporting_

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[6] Murray J and Farrington D P, 2010, 'Risk factors for conduct disorder and delinquency: Key findings from longitudinal studies', Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, accessible at
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/47518744_Risk_Factors_for_Conduct_Disorder_and_Delinquency_Key_Findings_From_Longitudinal_Studies

[7] Savage J, Ellis K S and Kozey K, 2013, 'A selective review of the risk factors for antisocial behavior across the transition to adulthood', Psychology, accessible at
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/269798355_A_Selective_Review_of_the_Risk_Factors_for_Antisocial_Behavior_across_the_Transition_to_Adulthood

[8] McAtamney A and Morgan A, 2009, 'Key issues in antisocial behaviour', Australian Government – Australian Institute of Criminology, accessible at https://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-05/rip05.pdf

[9] ibid

students across language and cultural barriers, understanding the strengths and capacities of individual children. They stand as respected and known members of the child's community. They know, and can teach bilingual learning'.[10]

It is also critical that cultural safety be embedded in support programs for children who experience vulnerability. This reflects evidence that the presence of local language speakers and close and extended family members, both within schools and outside school programs, can provide a protective factor for children at risk of disengagement or 'antisocial behaviour'. Investing in programs that combine language and mentorship, as well as a whole-of-community approach in program delivery, would have a significantly positive impact on children experiencing vulnerability. Stakeholders spoke of the benefit of programs, including through schools, which take children and families on country, positioning local Aboriginal people to lead such programs and pass on knowledge. Placing emphasis on culturally important practices demonstrates a desire to not just seek to engage communities, but that value is being placed on culturally significant practices outside of a Western paradigm.[11]

The NT Government's Indigenous Languages and Cultures (ILC) program provides a strong foundation and clear guidelines for remote communities, Elders, and local Aboriginal teachers to work with non-Indigenous teachers. These guidelines assist the development of culturally appropriate, locally adapted curricula and related activities in schools and on country on a spectrum that can include formal bilingual programs. The ILC guidelines also acknowledge that many students, particularly within the urban schooling context, 'who identify with an Aboriginal language and cultural group while no longer speaking the language', can greatly benefit from their school implementing an ILC program through 'opportunities for recognising, valuing and strengthening cultural identity and sense of self.'[12] However, the guidelines also recognise the limitations of global funding for schools making the decision to pursue an ILC program an often poorly resourced and challenging one.[13]

Despite the ILC program, the lack of bilingual education; the lack of involvement/decision making by local people in the recruitment and appraisals of school principals; and the lack of cultural understanding in many schools persists.

Stakeholders consistently highlighted the importance of bilingual education, with a focus on students learning in their first language first. Research shows that many concepts are best learned in a learner's first language; command of first language supports additional language learning; and that culturally safe, responsive, and positive learning environments lead to better student achievement.[14]

It is also recommended that there is a focus on employing trained English as a second language teachers. This is echoed by Silburn et al; *'(t)he availability of instructionally competent teachers of English as a second or foreign language is critically important to the success of classroom practice and*

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[10] NPY Women's Council 2021, 'Powerful ideas to create relevant schools' June 21, 2021, accessible at https://www.npywc.org.au/news/powerful-ideas-to-create-relevant-schools/?mc_cid=659c19e920&mc_eid=6bbce2cb3c

[11] Blagg H and Tulich T, 2018, 'Diversionary pathways for Aboriginal youth with foetal alcohol spectrum disorder', Australian Government – Australian Institute of Criminology, accessible at https://aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi557

[12] NTG, 2018, 'Guidelines for the Implementation of Indigenous Languages and Cultures Programs in Schools', accessible at https://education.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/471712/indigenous-languages-and-cultures-guidelines.pdf

[13] NTG, 2018, 'Guidelines for the Implementation of Indigenous Languages and Cultures Programs in Schools', accessible at https://education.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/471712/indigenous-languages-and-cultures-guidelines.pdf

[14] p34, Silburn SR, Nutton GD, McKenzie JW and Landrigan M, 2011. *Early years English language acquisition and instructional approaches for Aboriginal students with home languages other than English: A systematic review of the Australian and international literature*. The Centre for Child Development and Education, Menzies School of Health Research, Darwin, NT

student outcomes in bilingual and multilingual communities. It is also important to have sufficient first language speaking teachers and teacher assistants with a thorough understanding of the differentiated instruction required for the success of culturally responsive (English as a second language) practice, particularly when working in a multilingual classroom'.[15]

Stakeholders raised the need for greater cultural understanding across the NT. Lack of understanding and acknowledgement of culturally different practices is a barrier to families building relationships with schools. It is essential to recognise the wider reach of family in an Aboriginal context and provide services that fit around this model. Developing a strong Aboriginal workforce, who can then bring their knowledge and learning to workplaces, will have positive impacts on cultural understanding and change within organisations.

Recommendations:

- **Adopt models of best practice involving community and family-centred approaches to addressing children's needs, in safe and culturally appropriate environments**
- **Improved and sustained efforts to train and engage local, professionally qualified Aboriginal teachers and assistant teachers in remote schools**
- **Cultural safety be embedded in support programs for children who experience vulnerability**
- **Reintroduction of bilingual education, with a focus on students learning in their first language first**
- **Targeted employment of trained English as a second language teachers**
- **Greater cultural understanding across the NT, in both schools and the Department of Education**
- **Targeted and ongoing investment in developing a strong Aboriginal workforce**

Better strategies to respond to bullying in schools is also essential, with feedback suggesting a strong association between young people's experiences of bullying and disengaging from school. In keeping with Mission Australia's recommendations, '(*a)ll schools need to be adequately resourced and equipped to prevent and combat bullying. This includes commitment at a leadership level, scope for a whole of school response, implementation of evidence based anti-bullying programs, training for teachers and wellbeing staff and an ability to intervene in highly traumatic cases where complex needs may arise*'.[16]

Recommendation:

- **Adequate resourcing for schools to prevent and address bullying, including implementation of evidence-based anti-bullying programs, and training for staff, across all schools in the NT**

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[15] p.ix, ibid

[16] p.12 Carlisle E, Fildes J, Hall S, Perrens B, Perdriau A, and Plummer J, 2019, 'Youth Survey Report 2019', Sydney, NSW: Mission Australia, accessible at https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/youth-survey

The voices of children and young people

In previous consultations, young people in the NT have recognised education as an important, valuable, and fundamental building block to the wellbeing and safety of children and young people as they transition into adulthood.[17][18] Similarly, children in the NT have said that school and learning are important to them.[19][20]

When asked about experiences with school, children and young people living in Alice Springs Town Camps identified several reasons why they did not like attending school including that is boring (13.7%), hard (8.22%), too far away (6.85%), scary (1.37%), and that they have no friends (9.59%) or family (2.74%).[21] Another reason identified by children and young people is that school is not taught in language. In the same survey, children and young people identified what they like about school, with responses including sport (32.88%), friends (19.18%), learning (12.33%), fun (9.59%), play (8.22%), art (5.48%), classes (2.74%), food (1.37%), family (1.37%) and language (1.37%).

Similarly, when asked about how to make school better, children from various schools in the Katherine Region put forward a range of ideas that mainly focus on more opportunities for children to be active, creative and have fun.[22] For example, children suggested new play or sports equipment, lunchtime activities and more undercover shade areas. Children also said that they want to see less bullying and fighting at school.[23]

Young people have recognised that low school engagement is often related to the challenges that many young people in the NT face, including poverty and the inability of the education system to meet their complex needs.[24][25] Young people want to reduce barriers and challenges for young people, especially those who are disengaged with school.

In previous consultations, young people have highlighted the importance of strategies that strengthen the engagement of children and young people in school and help them catch up when they fall

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[17] Families Australia, 2019, 'Building the National Child and Family Wellbeing Plan Beyond 2020: Consultation with the Northern Territory Government Office for Youth - Youth Roundtable 21 November 2019', accessible at https://familiesaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Beyond-2020-Youth-Round-Table-summary.pdf
[18] NT Government, 2019, Darwin Youth Action Plan 2019, accessible at https://tfhc.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/786573/Darwin-Youth-Action-Plan.pdf
[19] The Smith Family, 2019, 'Hearing children's voices in the Katherine Region', accessible at https://www.thesmithfamily.com.au/-/media/files/research/reports/hearing-childrens-voices.pdf?la=en&hash=C5BE869E5073B883E78E7A7981451174
[20] Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre, 2017, 'Keeping Strong: Digital technology, participatory research, and young people's wellbeing amongst Alice Springs Town Camp communities', accessible at https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/1229771/Keeping_Strong_report.pdf
[21] Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre, 2017, 'Keeping Strong: Digital technology, participatory research, and young people's wellbeing amongst Alice Springs Town Camp communities', accessible at https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/1229771/Keeping_Strong_report.pdf
[22] The Smith Family, 2019, 'Hearing children's voices in the Katherine Region', accessible at https://www.thesmithfamily.com.au/-/media/files/research/reports/hearing-childrens-voices.pdf?la=en&hash=C5BE869E5073B883E78E7A7981451174
[23] ibid
[24] Australian Government Department of Health, 2019, 'Youth Taskforce Interim Report: Alice Springs consultation', accessible at https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021/05/youth-taskforce-interim-report.pdf
[25] NT Government, 2019, Darwin Youth Action Plan 2019, accessible at https://tfhc.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/786573/Darwin-Youth-Action-Plan.pdf

behind.[26][27] In particular, young people have acknowledged the importance of strategies that increase engagement of Aboriginal young people and those who live in remote locations.[28] It has been recognised that young people in remote locations do not have the same level of access to services and supports as young people in urban areas.[29] For example, young people provided the Clontarf Foundation and Stars Foundation as examples of good strategies that engage young people in school[30]; however, as noted earlier in this submission, young people in remote communities do not have the same level of access to these programs as those in regional centres. Other strategies raised by young people include the importance of providing transitional support to students that move from primary school in neighbouring Aboriginal communities to high school, and the importance of cultural connection and language.[31][32][33] Young people have called for bilingual education provision and for more culturally safe schools/schooling options in communities where there is currently limited access.[34]

Young people have also highlighted the importance of strong school to work pathways.[35][36] Young people have said they want better access to training and employment opportunities in school that create positive career pathways, including more VET programs.[37][38][39] NTCOSS recognises the positive increase in the number of young people completing VET programs in schools within the NT. The number of young people aged 14 years and under who completed a VET program in school within the NT increased from 50 in 2018 to 80 in 2019.[40] Similarly, the number of young people aged 15 to 19 years who completed a VET program in school within the NT increased from 640 in 2018 to 1,160 in 2019.[41] NTCOSS recognises there has also been an increase in the number of young people who are

[26] Families Australia, 2019, 'Building the National Child and Family Wellbeing Plan Beyond 2020: Consultation with the Northern Territory Government Office for Youth - Youth Roundtable 21 November 2019', accessible at
https://familiesaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Beyond-2020-Youth-Round-Table-summary.pdf
[27] NT Government, 2019, Darwin Youth Action Plan 2019, accessible at
https://tfhc.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/786573/Darwin-Youth-Action-Plan.pdf
[28] Families Australia, 2019, 'Building the National Child and Family Wellbeing Plan Beyond 2020: Consultation with the Northern Territory Government Office for Youth - Youth Roundtable 21 November 2019', accessible at
https://familiesaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Beyond-2020-Youth-Round-Table-summary.pdf
[29] Menzies School of Health Research, 2019, 'NT Youth Health Summit 2019', accessible at
https://www.menzies.edu.au/icms_docs/323221_Youth_Health_Summit_Report_2019.pdf
[30] Families Australia, 2019, 'Building the National Child and Family Wellbeing Plan Beyond 2020: Consultation with the Northern Territory Government Office for Youth - Youth Roundtable 21 November 2019', accessible at
https://familiesaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Beyond-2020-Youth-Round-Table-summary.pdf
[31] NT Government, 2019, 'Katherine Youth Action Plan 2019', accessible at
https://youth.nt.gov.au/Documents/Action%20Plans/Katherine%20Youth%20Action%20Plan.pdf
[32] NT Government, 2020, 'Tennant Creek Youth Action Plan 2020-2022', accessible at
https://tfhc.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/909566/tennant-creek-youth-action-plan-2020-2022.pdf
[33] Australian Government Department of Health, 2019, 'Youth Taskforce Interim Report: Alice Springs consultation', accessible at https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021/05/youth-taskforce-interim-report.pdf
[34] Australian Government Department of Health, 2019, 'Youth Taskforce Interim Report: Alice Springs consultation', accessible at https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021/05/youth-taskforce-interim-report.pdf
[35] NT Government, 2019, 'Katherine Youth Action Plan 2019', accessible at
https://youth.nt.gov.au/Documents/Action%20Plans/Katherine%20Youth%20Action%20Plan.pdf
[36] NT Government, 2019, Darwin Youth Action Plan 2019, accessible at
https://tfhc.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/786573/Darwin-Youth-Action-Plan.pdf
[37] NT Government, 2019, Darwin Youth Action Plan 2019, accessible at
https://tfhc.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/786573/Darwin-Youth-Action-Plan.pdf
[38] NT Government, 2019, 'HOLDING THE SPACE: Collaboration with young people in Palmerston 2018-2019'
[39] NT Government, 2020, 'Tennant Creek Youth Action Plan 2020-2022', accessible at
https://tfhc.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/909566/tennant-creek-youth-action-plan-2020-2022.pdf
[40] Source: VOCSTATS https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/vocstats, extracted on 16/07/2021. The data were originally collected by registered training organisations and state training authorities around Australia.
[41] ibid

experiencing marginalisation and disadvantage completing VET programs in school. However, these young people continue to make up a small percentage of all young people who complete VET programs in schools in the NT. NTCOSS supports greater opportunities for Aboriginal young people, young people with disability and young people from remote/very remote locations to complete VET programs in school.

In addition, young people have identified work experience and support to write resumes and prepare for job interviews as important factors in creating future career pathways.[42] Young people have identified ranger programs as a positive example of programs that build their work experience and give them the skills to gain meaningful employment at the end of the program.

Recommendations:

- **Increased investment in training and employment opportunities in schools that create positive career pathways, including more VET programs**
- **Targeted focus on improving opportunities for Aboriginal young people, young people with disability and young people from remote/very remote locations to complete VET programs in schools**

Young people have called for schools to be more engaging and acknowledged that schools and teachers contribute to positive experiences for them.[43] Young people have said they want teachers and schools to get to know students' backgrounds.[44] They also highlighted the importance of mentors, role models and support networks.[45] In addition, young people have recognised that there is a difference in education delivered at each school.[46] Similarly, the youth sector identified that there is a lack of consistency across schools in their responses to young people who are truanting or disengaging from schools. It is recommended that the Department of Education develop a youth engagement protocol to ensure there is consistent, strengths-based messaging with and about young people in schools.

Recommendation:

- **Development of a youth engagement protocol to ensure consistent, strengths-based messaging with and about young people in school**

Finally, young people have stated that alternative learning options are important mechanisms to engage young people in school.[47] NTCOSS supports the Department of Education's work to develop a quality standards framework for alternative education programs in the NT. In line with this work, NTCOSS supports the implementation and continuous evaluation of alternative education programs that are evidence-based and best practice, whilst also recognising the importance of local decision making and placed-based responses. The Palmerston Youth Skills Centre is a promising strategy to

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[42] Mission Australia, 2020, 'Mission Australia Youth Survey 2020', accessible at
https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/youth-survey/1717-mission-australia-youth-survey-report-2020/file
[43] John Guenther, 2019, 'Child Friendly Alice TECHNICAL REPORT: About the children and families of Alice Springs 2019', accessible at http://eprints.batchelor.edu.au/id/eprint/609/2/190926_child_friendly_alice_technical_report.pdf
[44] NT Government, 2019, 'HOLDING THE SPACE: Collaboration with young people in Palmerston 2018-2019'
[45] Australian Government Department of Health, 2019, 'Youth Taskforce Interim Report: Alice Springs consultation', accessible at https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021/05/youth-taskforce-interim-report.pdf
[46] ibid
[47] NT Government, 2019, 'Katherine Youth Action Plan 2019', accessible at
https://youth.nt.gov.au/Documents/Action%20Plans/Katherine%20Youth%20Action%20Plan.pdf

engage secondary school students and youth who have disengaged or are at risk of disengaging from school.

Recommendation:

- **Implementation and continuous evaluation of alternative education programs**