

Possum skin statements

Background

Throughout 2022, more than 3,000 people participated in over 180 Campfire Conversations across Victoria, bringing together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and schools to listen, share and connect about the possibilities and opportunities for strengthening self-determination in education. This included the establishment of a Koorie Young People Advisory Group, who helped ensure that the feedback from the Campfire Conversations centred the experiences and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in education. The group consists of twelve young people from across Victoria, aged 13-25, who met regularly to discuss the initiative and the findings from the Campfire Conversations. Members generously shared their own stories in response to the feedback, and it was evident that young people share many of the same aspirations and challenges in education despite their unique stories and journeys.

Purpose

Group members recognised the strength of yarning with each other and found comfort in connecting with young people who could relate to their experiences. To extend this sense of connectedness with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people across Victoria, the group came up with a list of statements outlining what they want their teachers and schools to know about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The statements were designed to provide teachers with greater insight into the values and principles that strengthen a student's identity and sense of self-determination, while disrupting practice that perpetuates the negative experiences reflected in the feedback.

This possum skin artwork pieces together the stories and experiences that our young people shared through the Campfire Conversations. Each statement represents a key message that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people want schools, teachers and other students to hear and understand, in order to make schools welcoming, safe and empowering.



Artwork by Nakia Cadd, Gunditjmarra, Yorta Yorta, Dja Dja Wurrung, Bunitj

Possum skin cloaks were once an everyday item for Aboriginal communities in parts of Victoria. Each person had their own unique cloak from the time they were born. As they grew older, they would hunt possums and continue to add more pelts to their cloaks. With each new pelt they would add artwork that represented their life and their community. There would be images of the country, totems and other markers of their identity.