



Australian
Children's
Television
Foundation

Submission to inform the development of a National Anti-Racism Framework.

AUSTRALIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

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Introduction

The Australian Children's Television Foundation (ACTF) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this submission process to inform the development of a National Anti-Racism Framework (the "Framework"). The focus of our submission is the production of quality screen content for Australian children, and how this content contributes to an improved youthful understanding of multicultural Australia.

Who We Are

The ACTF is unique in the world; a not-for-profit organisation with a singular purpose to deliver quality screen content about children to children all over Australia, and all over the world. The ACTF has been at the forefront in creating a world class Australian children's screen industry with an enviable reputation.

The ACTF makes Australian children's lives better through screen content that reflects our culture and our values. We provide assistance and support for children's media that delivers on our aspirations for the children's audience. Support is provided by way of:

- Script development funding;
- Capacity building/enabling/nurturing of local producers;
- Production investment (via distribution advance and/or equity investments);
- Promotion, distribution, advocacy;
- Education resource development and scaffolding;
- Education outreach;
- Measuring and reporting on the impact of our funding and other activities.

Why It Matters

Today's children are inundated with screens during their formative years, right at the time when they are developing their values, identity and self-esteem.

When Australian children see their lives reflected on screen, they experience recognition, affirmation, and gain positive role models; the characters and stories help them to imagine all the possibilities for someone who looks and sounds like them. But our nation's kids are not a homogenous group. We need an array of Australian stories, from different producers and from around our country, reflecting the full diversity of children and their lives, on all the platforms children turn to for entertainment. The screen stories we watch influence how we think about others, as well as how we think about ourselves. Quality local content exposes children to a range of faces, backgrounds and voices that is genuinely representative of their community. Becoming engaged in a television drama is an opportunity to try on someone else's shoes and consider what it's like to be them. Australian children's television is building empathy, kindness, social cohesion and shared values and is therefore a useful tool to achieve outcomes under a National Anti-Racism Framework.

Principles guiding the Framework

The ACTF agrees that guiding principles for the Framework should be informed by Australia's Human Rights Obligations. We note that the Commission suggests taking guidance from other national frameworks that were written and developed with children in mind such as the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, which states that children should be able to live in safe and supportive families and communities.¹ We recommend for the Commission also take into consideration the obligations included in the Convention on the Rights of the Child ("CRC").

Relevant Convention on the Rights of the Child Obligations

We are of the view that the Framework should be informed by children's rights obligations because: (1) children are a unique but not very powerful part of Australian society; (2) children form part of all communities and subcultures in Australian society; and (3) children are still learning and developing and looking for guidance, which means that they have a heightened need for quality education and information.

For Australia as a multicultural society including an Indigenous population, and its unique geography and vastness, local quality content for children can be vital to assist with social cohesion, the communication of common values and the shaping of its national identity. Local children's screen content also makes children feel connected with each other across the country.

Under the CRC, relevant commitments to consider for the Framework include:

- a) Article 17 of the CRC: Recognising the important function performed by the mass media as well as ensuring that children have access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of their social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health.² Article 17 of the CRC furthermore encourages that mass media:
 - disseminates information and material of social and cultural benefit to children;
 - produces content that uses information and material from a diversity of cultural, national and international sources; and
 - has regard to the linguistic needs of children belonging to a minority group or who are Indigenous.

This corresponds with Proposed Guiding Principle 1 and 2, National Outcome 8 and related key actions and strategies. Children's television has the ability to achieve the outcomes of Article 17 by providing access to diverse content.

A healthy children's television production sector is supported so that it can continue to produce content with cultural benefit to children. This beneficial screen content enhances children's wellbeing and sense of self, and also offers an education into cultural diversity. With the vastness of Australia, it is important that content is created and shown across the country.

¹ National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children:
https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/child_protection_framework.pdf

² Article 17 of the CRC.

In doing so, children from one corner of Australia are able to access information about the culture and lifestyle of those children on the other side of the country. For example, children from Mornington Island State School, who are yet to visit mainland Australia, are able to learn about children from other cultures whilst watching *Hardball*, a program set in the suburbs of Western Sydney.³ Furthermore, content that has regard to the linguistic needs of children belonging to a minority group or who are Indigenous also supports National Outcomes 6 and 8. The animated children's series, *Little J & Big Cuz*, not only allows Indigenous children to see themselves on screen, but to also hear themselves, as the program has been translated into a number of Indigenous languages. This also provides an opportunity for the sharing of Indigenous culture and its unique languages, with children across Australia.

- b) Article 29 of the CRC: That the education of children is directed to the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious group and persons of Indigenous origin.⁴

The ACTF proposes that this CRC obligation forms part of a new 9th Guiding Principle to include children's rights in the Framework, ensuring that children are a considered part of Australian society in this new Framework.

Proposed draft for the new Guiding Principle 9:

“Acknowledge that education of children is directed to the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious group and persons of Indigenous origin.”

One of the possible strategies and key actions to support such a principle can be the production and distribution of quality children's screen content (and related education resources) that expose children to a variety of ethnicities, abilities and cultural backgrounds that are representative of their community and also pose an opportunity for children to build empathy and recognise shared values.



³ ACTF Annual Report 2019-2020, page 40
<https://actf.com.au/assets/publications/actfannualreport20192020.pdf>.

⁴ Article 29 of the CRC.

- c) Article 30 of the CRC: Children belonging to cultural, religious or linguistic minorities, or who are Indigenous, should have the right, in community with other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, practice their own religion or use their own language.⁵

This obligation would best flow into Proposed Guiding Principles 1 and 2, National Outcome 8 and related key actions and strategies. A key action to support this is to ensure that quality local content not only represents Indigenous children in front of the camera but also nurtures talent and capacity for Indigenous creatives otherwise involved. Furthermore, this kind of children's content provides representation for Indigenous children on Australian screens and at the same time helps to develop a better understanding of Indigenous children for all children across Australia.

- d) Article 31 of the CRC: Recognising the right of a child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.⁶ This obligation would best flow into Proposed Guiding Principle 5, National Outcome 8 and related key actions and strategies. Apart from other benefits, quality local screen content is fun to watch for children and allows them to enjoy and relax. It allows children to encounter characters that will inspire other leisure activities such as role playing or arts and craft activities.
- e) Article 28 of the CRC: Promote and encourage international cooperation in education, with a view to contributing to the elimination of ignorance and illiteracy throughout the world and facilitating access to scientific and technical knowledge and modern teaching methods.⁷

This obligation would best flow into proposed Guiding Principle 9 (see above), National Outcome 8 and related key actions and strategies. Quality children's screen content is complex and inspirational material that allows teachers to combine interesting and engaging content with curriculum-based learnings.

Outcomes that can be assisted by local quality screen content for children

The ACTF supports the principle that actions in the Framework should be built around certain outcome areas and is of the view that local quality screen content for children can assist some of the proposed outcome areas. The ACTF can see strong synergies between the benefits of quality local children's content and some of the key actions and strategies supporting National Outcomes:

National Outcome 1: The nature, prevalence, and incidence of racism in Australia is understood.

Related key actions and strategies include the researching of key drivers for racism in Australia, as well as best practice responses to it. Research specific to children and their experiences and understanding of intersectional discrimination would be important to capture here. The ACTF is currently collaborating with the Australian Children's Television Cultures research group (based at Swinburne University), on a project designed to better understand the role of Australian children's television in people's lives. More research into the impact of Australian children's content on children's ability to understand multicultural Australia would be conducive as a key action and strategy to support National Outcome 1.

⁵ Article 30 of the CRC.

⁶ Article 31 of the CRC.

⁷ Article 28 of the CRC.

National Outcome 6: All sectors of society commit to ensuring communities vulnerable to racism and racial discrimination are adequately represented and have effective participation in all areas of public life.

Children's television has long been a leader in addressing diversity, inclusion and equality. The creation of children's screen content, however, is disadvantaged, because it does not command the levels of investment that content for adults does. It is the clearest example of market failure in the screen sector, but also the greatest example of public value. Currently, most local quality children's content can only be produced because it is supported by all levels of government (Commonwealth as well as States and Territories). This support, however, is not a given and it is therefore vital that governments on all levels continue to support the local production of high-quality children's content to continue its positive impact on children and Australian society as a whole. Due to the benefits of local quality children's screen content, the ACTF recommends that its continued support and production be considered one of the key strategies for the Framework.

National Outcome 8: Measures to address racism, racial discrimination and racial inequality complement measures to strengthen multiculturalism, social inclusion, and Indigenous reconciliation.

Australian children's television has a history of programs that are proactive and progressive and assist with strengthening multiculturalism, social inclusion and Indigenous representation.

Programs that represent Indigenous children on screen include *Thalu* and *Red Dirt Riders* from Weerianna Street Media. Both these series are set in a remote Indigenous community, featuring Indigenous producers, writers and cast. The Emmy winning series *Hardball* is a great example of children's television showcasing multicultural Australia. It features diverse characters and is set in multicultural Western Sydney. The live action-drama series *Maverix*, from Indigenous production company Brindle Films, is set in the Northern Territory, and the creative team includes a co-creator living with a disability. Children's programs that champion social inclusion are the Emmy winning children's series *First Day* (featuring a transgender main character) and the *DisRupted* series (three short films celebrating children living with a disability that were also produced by young creatives living with a disability).

Children are not a homogenous group and therefore require a variety of Australian stories told by different producers from around Australia, reflecting the full diversity of children's lives. The ACTF recommends that this forms one of the key strategies to support national Outcome 8.

Recommendations

- Include a child specific Guiding Principle 9, informed by Australia's international obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 29).
- Support a sustainable Australian children's film production industry so that the benefits of local quality children's screen content, which reflects the diversity of Australian children, can support National Outcomes 6 and 8.
- Include research and data around the impact of local quality children's screen content in the national data framework.