

This is your story too



Indigenous advocate, author and signatory to the Uluru Statement from the Heart, **Thomas Mayo**, discusses his children's book *Finding Our Heart*, and describes how the inspiring response of children across the nation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage reflects their innate support for an Indigenous Voice in the Australian Constitution.

In 2017, soon after the political feat that was the creation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart (the Statement), I was entrusted to carry the sacred canvas to Australians from many different backgrounds throughout the country.

The Statement was a political feat because it contains a set of proposals for the advancement of Indigenous people and the nation, reached by consensus. Like any other human group, we have different perspectives and experiences, but we carry the unique burden of traumas from the impact of brutal colonisation. The endorsement of the Statement's words and the invitation to the nation to walk with us for Voice, Treaty and Truth-Telling was signified by raucous, standing acclamation.

I visited schools and early childhood centres with the Uluru Statement, and I soon realised just how much children love learning about and sharing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. They are always eager to tell me they recognise the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island flags. They proudly acknowledge Country.

The children around the nation confirmed for me what I had learnt from my own children: children have an innate understanding that what makes us truly unique as Australians is our Indigenous heritage and culture—the oldest in the world. To them, it is a no-brainer.

Children, who we are always teaching to be fair, think a Voice for Indigenous people is a no-brainer as well. When I read them my children's book, *Finding Our Heart*, and when they hear the question at the end, 'Will you help find the heart of the nation?', it is obvious to them by then that the book is referring to granting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

people a Voice in the Constitution—a kind of 'rule book'. The children sometimes ask, in differing ways, 'Why haven't we granted Indigenous people this fairness before?'

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have worked hard to re-establish a voice—a representative body—so Indigenous people have the means to advise the government on how they can begin to make policies and laws that will close the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, particularly in terms of life expectancy, education, employment and rates of incarceration. We have established representative bodies before, but what is established by one government has always been destroyed by the next. That is why this time we propose that our Voice be established in the Constitution.

Our hard work has been done so you will have the opportunity, in a referendum, to answer the invitation that we sent you in the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

It is a simple proposition—not confusing, as the 'No' side has been saying. The referendum, which will be held in the second half of this year, is only asking if you, the Australian people, support this principle:

Should our unique and continuing Indigenous culture and heritage be recognised by Indigenous peoples being granted the fairness of being consulted when decisions are made about them?

One thing is for certain: our children expect we will vote 'Yes'.

Order your copy of *Finding Our Heart* from the ECA Shop: <https://shop.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/product/sund859/?v=f719d57e3882>