

CHILDREN'S VOICES IN A CHANGING WORLD

unicef 
AUSTRALIA
for every child

CHILDREN'S REPORT



INTRODUCTION

This is a child-friendly version of the UNICEF Australia Young Ambassador Report *Children's Voices in a Changing World*. It has been written so we can keep our promise to the children and young people we talked to by providing a report that everyone can read and understand.

We want children and young people across Australia to know that they are not alone and that their voices matter. This report reflects our desire for all young people to be included in change.

As Young Ambassadors, our journey started in 2019 when 10 strangers from around Australia came together to raise the voices of Australia's

young people. In our time, we have heard from 3,263 children and young people from every state and territory, between seven to 20 years of age. As young people ourselves, we listened to other young people in nearly 180 sessions and have written a report to show what we heard.

We heard young people want politicians to take more action to stop climate change and need more support with their mental health. Young people have strong views on lots of topics and simply want to be listened to.



WELLBEING

Wellbeing is one way for us to understand how healthy and happy we are. Our wellbeing is based on how comfortable and safe we feel. Our relationships with others and mental health are also very important to our wellbeing.

The children and young people we consulted with said that COVID-19 had a big effect on their wellbeing.

Spending time with friends and family had a positive effect on children and young people. However, COVID-19 meant that many were unable to see their friends and had to stop extra-curricular activities. Sometimes this had a bad effect on their mental health.

Mental health is the way we think about ourselves and the world around us. When we have good

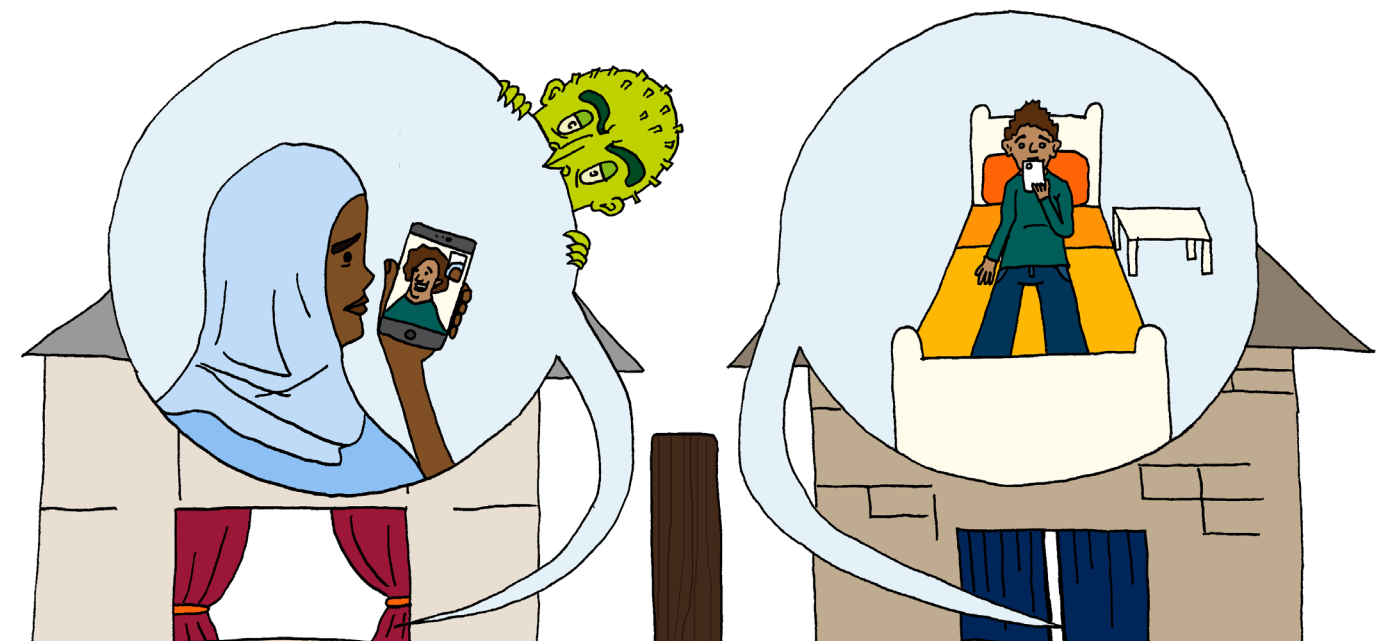
wellbeing, we are likely to also have good mental health, as we can cope with difficult challenges and have a positive outlook.

We heard that many children and young people would like to talk about mental health with politicians to improve how we support children and young people better.

Children and young people agreed that social media plays a big part in their lives. Many are worried about issues such as cyberbullying and body image.

"You're sort of always stressed out at school and everything we have to do and so much pressure to do everything well. We don't really have time to play."

**Year 7 student,
New South Wales**



ENVIRONMENT

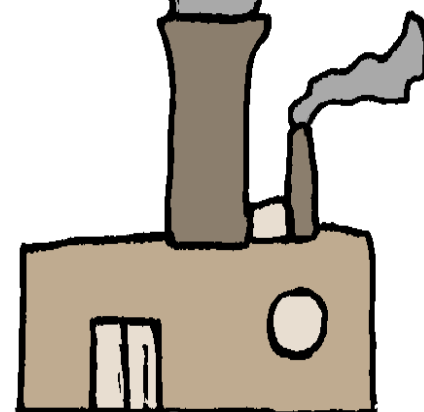
The environment and climate change have been major concerns for young people in Australia for a long time. Since being the focus of the UNICEF Young Ambassador Report in 2019 this has not changed. In fact, this concern has only grown with Australia's climate inaction and the increase in natural disasters such as the 2019/2020 bushfires.

Climate change is one of the biggest fears young people have about the environment. There is a sense of urgency and anxiety around the topic, how it will impact the future, and if it is too late to fix the damage already done.

This feeling has led to young people protesting to show the need for change to Australia's climate policies and practices to reduce the impact we have on the environment.

Young people want our political leaders to step up and represent the interests of young people by:

- Lowering Australia's pollution.
- Making more of an effort to switch to renewable energy.
- Listening to the First Nations people of Australia to learn how to better manage the land.



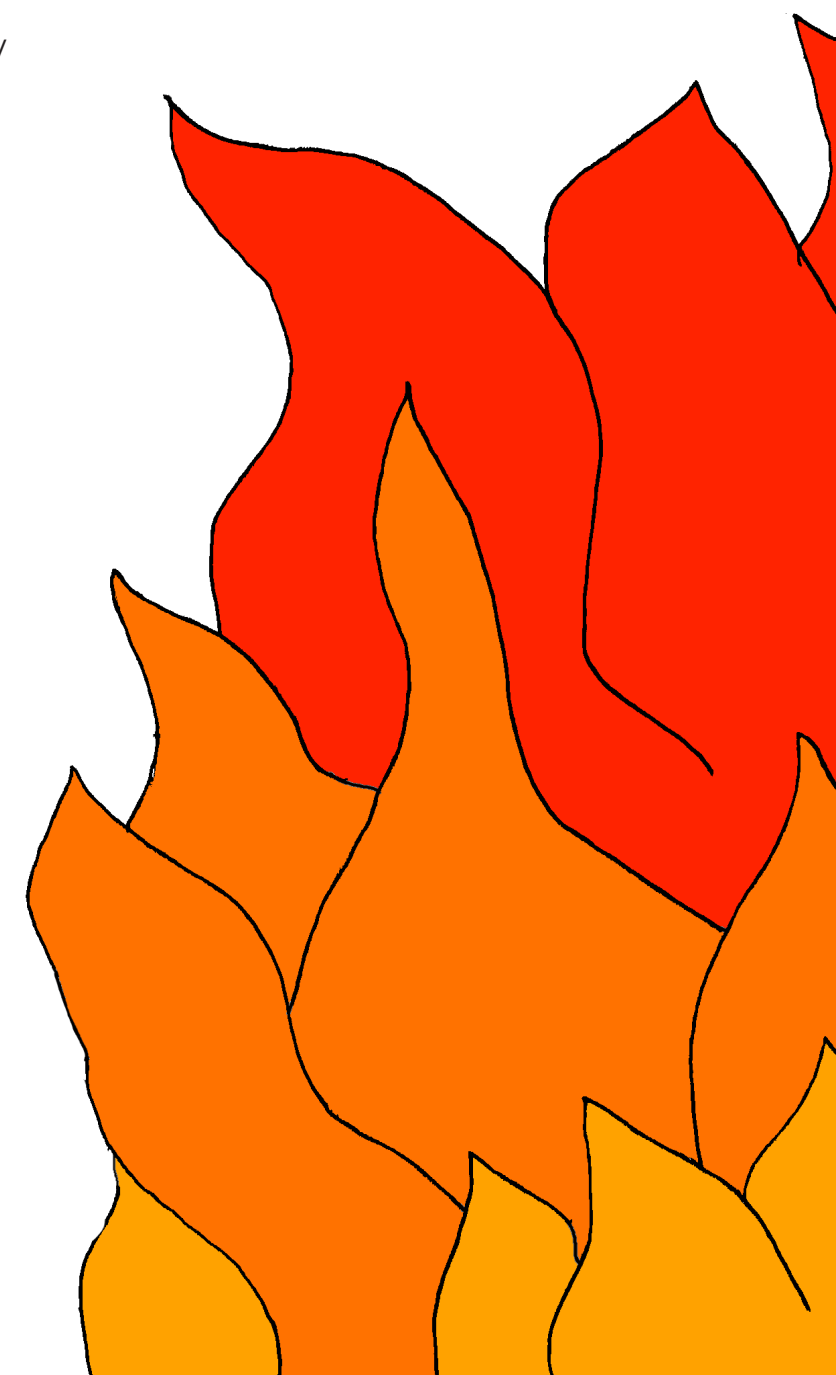
Young people would like to learn more about the environment and sustainability in schools. Change-makers must stand with young people and commit to bold climate action as a matter of urgency.

"When the British came [to Australia], the Aboriginals were looking after this planet for 40,000 years plus and didn't make any mistakes. As soon as we came, look what we've created, we've got greenhouse gases, we've got plastic, we've got pollution, things dying. It was just such a happy place and then we came in and destroyed it all."

Year 5 student, South Australia

"Young people have a responsibility to hold the Government accountable for what they're doing."

Year 11-12 student,
Australian Capital Territory



PARTICIPATION + TRUST

Many children and young people do not believe they are able to share their voice and opinions with leaders.

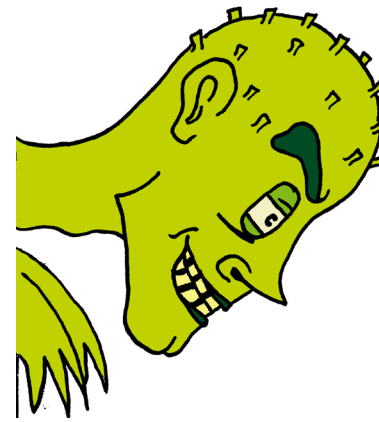
They said that they want to be included in decisions about issues like the environment but do not have a chance to do so. Instead, they want new opportunities to be created for them to speak up.

"I am ready to make and contribute to change, but I need the support and belief from the generation before."

Year 12 student,
Western Australia

Young people are both interested in politics and sometimes angry with the choices made by politicians. This means that they are more passionate than ever to have their opinions heard.

Young people want to be able to trust politicians but do not believe they can. They would like politicians to keep their promises and recognise that children and young people also have a voice that matters.



Young people want the government to care about them and listen to their voices because they are the experts in their own lives.

"We are able to make decisions and we are more passionate about politics than ever before."

Year 10-12 student,
New South Wales



EDUCATION + LEARNING

Learning is a big part of our lives as children and young people. However, the impacts of COVID-19 meant that many of us have had to experience lockdowns, mask-wearing, and even self-isolation.

These big challenges have meant that almost half of children and young people have felt stressed about their learning.

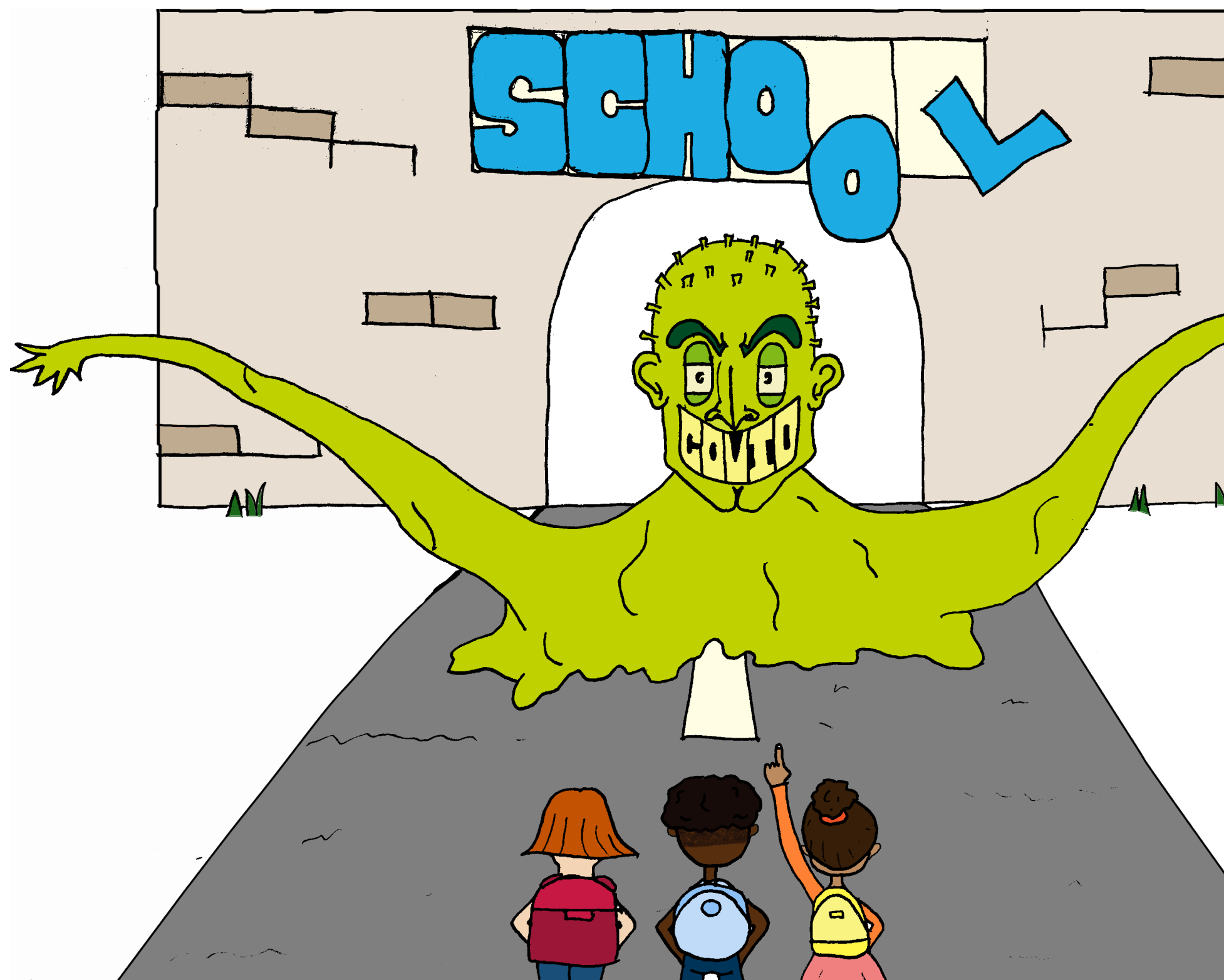
Every child has a right to an education. However, children and young people are worried about differences in the quality of education across different schools.

Many believe that the amount of money you have should not decide whether you go to a better school with more resources and better academic results.

Young people noticed some things missing from what they are learning at school and want to learn more about:

- Child rights,
- Practical and financial skills, such as how to write a resume or do

- your taxes,
- Making safe choices around alcohol and drugs,
- Consent education such as asking for permission before hugging someone,
- How to deal with cyberbullying, and
- The environment.



EQUALITY



Children and young people see and understand inequality in Australia and think it is wrong.

Young people can recognise when somebody is being treated unfairly. This includes race, gender, age or how much money they have.

Forty per cent of young people see race as the most common way in which they are treated unfairly.

Young people know what discrimination is and they see it in their communities. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, as children and young people believe differences between people are being shown more often and clearly.

Young people do not feel safe as they fear being treated poorly due

to who they are as a person in this world.

Young people also want to celebrate the history and culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people. To do this, they believe we all must change how we talk about this topic, including changing what young people study in school and how Australia views its history.

Young people want their voices to be heard when they are talking about their experiences with inequality. They do not want anyone to be treated differently because of things they cannot control. Instead, we should all have a fair chance in life.

CONCLUSION

Our term as UNICEF Young Ambassadors has been an incredible journey, but we could not have done it without your help.

Children and young people told us that:

- Mental health is a big problem, and we must listen to their experiences and opinions to make smart decisions to help children and young people.
- They are worried about the effects of social media and cyberbullying on their wellbeing.
- They believe that everyone deserves a fair chance in life and should not be discriminated against.
- They do not trust politicians however, want opportunities where they can have their voices heard.

- They feel stressed about school and feel as though the curriculum needs to be changed to better suit their learning needs, and
- They are scared about the future of the planet and want action against climate change.

We would like to thank you for sharing your experiences and opinions with UNICEF Australia.

We have taken what we've heard from children and young people to Canberra, meeting with politicians and decision makers to ensure your voices are heard and acted upon.

We hope to meet with you again soon.

Daphne

Daphne Fong

Hawa

Hawa Mohammad

Rhett

Rhett Kleine

Mahendra

Mahendra Chitrarasu

Jgamble

Jacob Gamble

Franklin

Franklin Hooper

Emily

Emily Abbott

Jumana

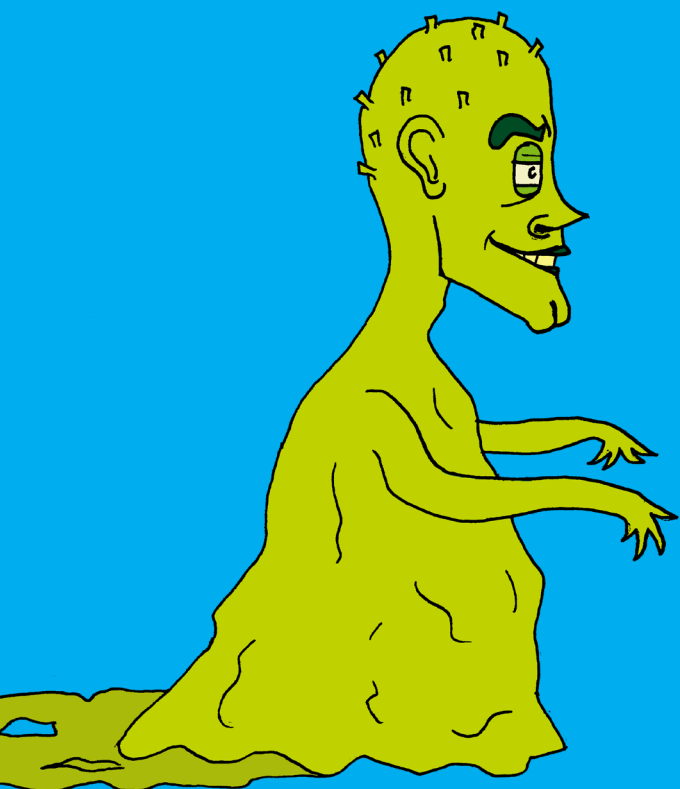
Jumana Jasim

B. Lee

Brian Lee

Mason

Mason Wright



*Illustrations by Harper Hehir and design by Indiana Hehir.
Created by children and young people, for children and young people.*

unicef 
AUSTRALIA
for every child

Australian Committee for UNICEF Limited.

PO Box 488 QUEEN VICTORIA BUILDING
SYDNEY NSW 1230
ABN 35 080 581 437

 **1300 884 233**
 **1300 780 522**
 **support@unicef.org.au**
 **unicef.org.au**

UNICEF Australia acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country of the land and communities in which we and our partners work throughout Australia, and their connection to their lands, waters and communities. We pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures, and to Elders both past, present and emerging.