



## Year 5/6 Category Runner Up Amy Robinson, South West Rocks Public School

### How Far is Too Far

I'm just 11 years old, I try to understand everything I am taught and really try to understand the world around me.

One thing, however, has me very confused; it's distance. I understand metres and kilometres and all that stuff but, I can't work out how distance can affect our conscience.

My family and I live a very privileged life; we have a nice comfortable home, good health care, education, security, more food than we can ever eat and a general feeling of well being.

I like to think we are nice people who try to care about others. I know, for sure, that if a person, particularly a child, living next door was hungry, thirsty, afraid or in danger my Dad would probably break down the door or something and my Mum would probably rush in with some food and bandages! And we would all do our best to help.

My question is this: how far is too far away?

I know if someone was in trouble 3 streets away or 10 kilometres away we would help, we could not sleep knowing that another human being needed help. Even if they were 100 kilometres away, our conscience would force us to act.

Australians are good people and I'm sure most feel just the same as I do, but how far away must a hungry child be before we can pretend that they don't exist.

All over the world millions of people; children, mums and dads and elderly people live in fear and hunger. How far away must they be before we can just ignore them?

If any child anywhere goes to sleep hungry we should all feel ashamed. Just because we cannot hear the cries for help, or see the suffering, our conscience should not be cleared.

We are supposed to have 5 senses, but I think we must have a 6<sup>th</sup> sense. A sense of being, of belonging to the human race and being aware of our duty; our duty to ourselves and to others, to our country and to our planet.

No distance should be too far to offer help to the needy. A hungry, frightened child 5,000 kilometres away is no different to a hungry, frightened child next door and our 6<sup>th</sup> sense, the sense of being, should spur us into action.

I think a good idea would be for our South West Rocks community to adopt a small village in a poor country, perhaps Africa, and each person of South West Rocks to donate maybe a dollar each week (which isn't very much money) and we could try to help the people of this poor village by supplying some money for education, healthcare and food. Perhaps we could fund a well so that the people wouldn't have to walk a great distance just to get clean water. Women and children often get this task. We could even send a resident of South West Rocks to ensure the money is spent appropriately and bring back progress reports.

This would benefit both communities. The people of South West Rocks would be united in a common cause for good and feel proud of their achievements. South West Rocks could lead the way and other towns might follow.

This may sound like a huge task, but I think South West Rocks could show the rest of Australia the way to go, even the longest of journeys is started by the first step. We could show the people of the world that to an Australian no distance is too far.



## Year 5/6 Category Winner Jessica Black, Beverly Hills North Public School

### What Matters

In 1770 Captain Cook arrived in Australia, planted a flag on the shores of Botany Bay and declared that Australia was British. He did this without any consultation with the 500 to 700 Indigenous nations who had inhabited Australia for the previous 30,000 plus years. It was like they didn't exist and their views didn't matter.

So began the suffering of the Aboriginal People of this land. When the First Fleet arrived in 1788, the Indigenous people of Australia were quickly overpowered. They were forbidden to talk in their own languages and were made to live by the white man's ways. Many were murdered, punished and viewed like they were something less than human.

As time went on it was considered that Aboriginal children would do better if they were raised with British culture and there was a deliberate attempt to wipe their cultures out. This was done by forcibly removing children from their families and sending them to church homes where they were made to live a white man's life and where they were trained to become domestic servants. Many of these children never saw their families again.

I am not Aboriginal myself and I cannot begin to even imagine how horrible it would be to be taken away from my family and my culture. Even the thought of never seeing my mother, my father and my brother again makes me want to cry!

History shows us that the injustices suffered by Indigenous Australians have caused hopelessness, despair and disadvantage for generations. Many Aboriginal people still live in terrible conditions and suffer from diseases that are easily curable. When we talk about intervention and reconciliation, these are just some of the things that must be addressed.

Indigenous Australians have only 76% the life expectancy of other Australians, are 24 times more likely to be victims of domestic violence, four times more likely to be unemployed and sixteen times more likely to be imprisoned. These things are the direct result of the past. Yet, until recently, we hadn't even apologised for what had happened.

When Prime Minister Rudd offered an apology on behalf of the Australian people in April 2008 for the injustices that were committed against Indigenous Australians, many people, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous lined up outside parliament house to hear the Prime Minister's words.

Many people cried as they heard the injustices of the past finally acknowledged. Several Indigenous Australians said that they didn't think it would happen in their lifetime. Many non-Indigenous people said that the apology was long overdue.

While the apology from Mr Rudd was important, it was only the first step in what needs to happen. Solutions will not be easy to find, but a long term government commitment towards providing enough money for Indigenous communities so that adequate health, education and housing can be provided, would definitely be a worthwhile step to take.

Perhaps we could start by asking Indigenous communities to identify what they need because they are in a good position to know what would help to improve life in their communities.

At present, some Indigenous communities do not have even the basic facilities that non-Indigenous Australians take for granted, and this definitely must change.

What matters is the need to keep the good will and momentum from the Australian Government's apology going. If we don't start fixing up the effects of these past injustices, by providing resources that will make a real change to Indigenous Australians, then the apology offered by Mr Rudd will be just, 'hot air' that really didn't mean anything.

What Matters? Reconciliation!



## Year 7/8 Category Runner Up Sophie Walter, Masada College

### **A Young Person's Duty to Change the World... That's What Matters!**

*"Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek."*

Barack Obama

On the surface, things couldn't be any better. I am 12 years old, live in a nice house in a nice suburb, go to a nice school, have a nice family and nice friends, go on nice holidays, and – in all likelihood – will have a nice future. Life's fine and, for all intents and purposes, I have no incentive to change a thing.

Brad and Ketu are also 12 years old. Brad is Aboriginal, lives in an inner city suburb, spends each night with a different relative, and some nights alone in a park. His father is in prison, and Brad is frequently assaulted by his mother's new partner – little wonder that Brad is afraid to go home. Ketu lives in Kenya. When she was 3, her mother died of AIDS and her father is now very sick with the same illness. Ketu eats only once a day (a meagre portion of grain), and most of her bones poke through her skin. She knows her situation will be even worse when her dad passes away.

Why should I bother about Brad or Ketu? Their lives will probably never intersect with mine. In any case, surely adults can, or at least should, sort today's problems – our time will come.

And yet, and yet...when I chance upon stories like Brad's or Ketu's, I am moved and don't sleep well at night. Presumably, my response is not unique.

Given our imperfect world, I would like to suggest to other young people that we have a moral duty to change it and try to make it better by doing the following, for starters:

**1. Become actively aware** of problems and those who are disadvantaged, in our community and beyond. Read the newspaper, surf the web, (dare I say) be attentive at school, and so on. Above all, **open your eyes** – often, you don't have to look very far: the 'For Sale' sign in front of the house down the road ("Didn't you hear, Jake's dad lost his job") and the woman in a wheelchair, struggling at the foot of steps at the local shops, demand our attention... alongside the family from Marysville, who lost all in the Victorian bushfires, the children in war-torn Darfur ...the list is long.

**2. Identify problems that you would like to start tackling.** Obviously, we can not tackle all problems at once. Consult others, prioritise, and address one or two problems to begin.

**3. Have a voice and be heard.** Silence is never an option to effect change, so... write letters, participate in blogs, ring talk-back radio, and the like. Remember, young people are often more savvy than adults about the new tools of communication.

**4. Take other practical steps.** Fund-raise, join school committees and junior branches of organisations attempting to “make a difference”, and appeal to those in authority (“mum, I read about this great fostering program – can we look after an underprivileged kid some weekends?”).

Clearly, no recipe of tips will automatically or immediately change the life of Brad or Ketu, or rectify the many problems that we witness around us. By the same token, let’s not have the attitude, “She’ll be right, mate” – unless we commit, unless we act, she won’t be right. The world needs fixing and, just like adults, young people are the change that we seek.



## Year 7/8 Category Winner Jonathan Hopkins, Sydney Technical High School

### **Global Meltdown**

The global economic crisis is dominating conversation and generating widespread concern. Financial issues seem to be pervading our thoughts on individual, national and global levels. Politicians and industry leaders are currently telling us our nation cannot afford to continue with the current goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Yet the reduction of these emissions is vital to limit global warming.

But are fiscal concerns of such paramount importance that they override that of global warming? Is it legitimate that we, in all our ignorance and foolishness, continue to concentrate on our financial errors, when the world – our world – is at the brink of real disaster? It is amazing how apathetic we are to the dangers of global warming now facing us. Even more unfortunately, despite the knowledge of future perilous circumstances, governments are taking insufficient action. Will we act only when it is too late?

Left unchecked, global warming will wreak far worse economic destruction than the current financial crisis. In a continent with limited arable land, increasing droughts will cripple an already vulnerable farming industry. Rising temperatures will also devastate major tourist attractions, from our ski fields to ecological attractions such as the Great Barrier Reef, whose priceless and fragile ecosystems are facing annihilation by the middle of the century. The insidious effect of global warming on ocean temperatures not only threatens our fishing industry but is associated with an increase in natural disasters such as cyclones.

Were the economic and human costs of the recent Victorian bushfires not enough to ignite serious debate over the perils of ignoring increasing global temperatures and concomitant reductions in rainfall, which will inevitably lead to recurrences on an equally large scale? The predicted 100 percent increase in extreme bushfires by the year 2050 has still failed to motivate us significantly.

The dire predictions of continuing rises in temperatures of up to six degrees by 2100 apply to the earth as a whole. Australia's already harsh environment means the changes are likely to be more significant. Average temperatures in our nation have already risen more than the rest of the globe. Predictions that the average temperature could rise by up to 6.4 degrees Celsius by 2070 in parts of New South Wales, with a forty percent drop in rainfall, spell disaster. The procession of "hottest years on record" continues relentlessly but fails to instigate significant action.

We are already witnessing the disappearance of delicate ecosystems in rainforests and coastal wetlands. The march of tropical diseases further south has already begun. Our own chances for

long-term survival are diminishing. We need to stop being short sighted and stop thinking short-term. We urgently need action.

Scientists warn that we need to slash emissions of carbon dioxide, but governments seem reticent to take more than token action. Only when the public see the long-term perils of inaction, will they demand measures from our government and then, perhaps, progress will follow.

Electricity companies should be required to make greater use of renewable sources of energy such as solar, wind and tidal energy. Car manufacturers should be compelled to reduce vehicle emissions, and greater incentives given for hybrid car production.

Improvement of public transport is vital, as is the development of more environmentally sustainable homes.

Many more measures can be taken. It is up to us and we need to act now. Inertia is no longer an option if we are to avoid mankind being included on the "endangered species" list. Write, lobby, take action, make your voice heard, because we are running out of time and last chances. This really matters!



## Year 9/10 Category Runner Up Sarah Fitzgerald, Loreto Kirribilli

### Family Matters

It is my cousin's first birthday. Her name is Rachel. The adults are chatting and laughing on our deck. 8 of our 16 cousins are playing cricket in the backyard. Others are on the trampoline. Some are in the pool, including me. The babies are playing on the rug inside.

Pause this scene, for a moment in time. Imagine this big, happy family, enjoying everything just because they are together.

Everyone is here.

Everyone is happy.

I get out of the pool, everyone still frozen in time. I dry off and then walk over to the adults.

Someone has just told a really corny joke.

Probably dad.

All the males are clutching their bellies, tears of laughter squirting out of their eyes. All the mothers are exchanging the 'can you believe we're related to him?' glance.

I walk inside to the babies on the rug. Rachel is playing with her panda, gurgling with laughter. A bit of spittle has flown out of her mouth, suspended in the air.

Billy is sucking on some LEGO pieces, his eyes looking into his world that no one else can see.

Matthew is hugging Liam's cuddly bear. I think Liam is about to cry. I put the bear back into Liam's little frozen hands and get another bear for Matthew.

Babies. Don't you love them?

I walk outside again. Alex has just hit a six. My older cousin Pete is lifting Ben over the fence to get it.

I just saw Ben's face. Classic.

He's just realised the ball is in the neighbour's pool.

I turn around and see Emily and Lulu jumping on the trampoline. Emily has just touched down again, her face frozen with laughter. Her eyes are squinting and her hair is flying above her head. I suppress a giggle. Lulu is halfway through a flip. Her face is scrunched up in concentration.

I slowly walk back up the yard. Tommy is doing a bomb into the pool. James, Bridget and Eliza have put their hands up to protect their faces.

Then, time comes back in.

All the males are still laughing at dad's joke.

Liam isn't crying about his cuddly bear, and Rachel's spittle has landed on Billy's head.

He hasn't noticed.

Ben has stopped climbing over the fence, and he is now yelling to the kids in the pool if they could get the ball for him.

Lulu has completed her flip, and Emily is still laughing maniacally.

Tommy has done his bomb, and the others in the pool have started splashing him.

This matters.

Family matters.



## Year 9/10 Category Winner Kate Jordan, Loreto Kirribilli

### **My sister Lily**

I was late for rehearsals. Again.

Mum couldn't drop me to school, like we planned. But it wasn't her fault; my sister Lily was throwing one of her occasional morning tantrums. Her favourite doll was lost the night before. As she started to scream, she slipped, hitting her arm against the table. Blood started to run and I ran for the first aid kit. Mum began to calm her down, singing Lily's favourite repetitive tune.

I was over 30 minutes late. I tried to explain, that I had to look after my younger sister. The teacher nodded, "Baby sister? They can be a handful."

But Lily wasn't my baby sister.

Lily was 13 years old.

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I will never forget the day my mum told me my little sister was different. I was coming home from kindergarten, gloating about the Christmas play. My mother's face was dressed in despair. 'Autism' she said, very slowly, as if that would help me understand, and, to a point I think I did.

Lily's condition means she isn't able to communicate properly. She finds it hard to understand people's facial expressions or the tone in their voice. Lily won't understand jokes, as her mind only allows her to take things literally, not metaphorically. Whilst she usually understands what other people say to her, Lily has a very limited vocabulary and prefers to use alternative means of communication, such as sign language or visual symbols.

Socialising doesn't come naturally to Lily – she hasn't learnt the unwritten social rules which most of us pick up without thinking, such as standing too close to another person, or starting an inappropriate subject of conversation.

But sometimes I envy Lily. Simple things like the autumn leaves are enough to make her giggle for hours. She is happy with who she is and will never have to deal with the normal adolescent pressures the rest of us has to face with friends, parents and school.

With only Mum and I to look after Lily, life usually gets on top of me. People often ask if it is tough living with a disabled sibling....

After waking up Lily in the morning, if you don't do everything in the same order as the day before, at the precise moment, it's enough to ruin her entire day.

My home becomes invaded with teachers, social workers, carers and doctors, for hours of intense one-on-one therapy the hope that Lily will lead a better life someday. Friendships are lost, parties are unattended and luxuries are scarce after all the medical bills are paid for.

I often lose my temper with my sister and say hurtful things, and then I feel disgusted in myself as I see the hurt and confusion in her eyes. I used to cry for hours at a time, wishing I didn't have to deal with Lily, then cry even harder for thinking such things.

I love Lily so much. But it's hard. It really is. I know that Lily needs constant care and attention and I understand that, but sometimes it just doesn't make it any easier. I have had to sacrifice so many things in my life because of my sister's autism. In some ways I feel more like her mother than her sister, but that is the way it is.



## Year 11/12 Category Runner Up Hayley Lincoln, Lake Illawarra High School

### **I Still Have Faith**

December time, Christmas time.

To me it has always been a time that should be filled with joy but what do you do when the happiness it is meant to bring is lost?

As a child I used to think Christmas was the most magical time of the year... Nothing bad could ever happen around Christmas time, I was wrong.

“It’s not long to go now,” the doctors kept saying, “enjoy the time you have left,” how can you enjoy the time you have left with someone if every time you see them they just keep getting worse, how are you supposed to sit there and look them in the eyes and say it’s going to be okay when you know it really isn’t going to be? You know it will never be okay again?

I guess we deceive ourselves in a way, to protect ourselves from reality. It gives us a little bit of hope to hold on to when we fear there is no hope left. We find ourselves praying when we aren’t even religious trying to bargain with god to change things, to make things okay.

The hardest part is when we find reality. Coming to terms with the fact that it could be any second, but I suppose that’s how it goes... life and death go hand in hand, at least I will have a chance to say goodbye I tell myself, that is better than nothing.

I see people on the streets and in houses arguing with their parents, putting them down, cursing them and yelling at them over the stupidest things. It’s moments like this I wonder was I like that? Did I ever do that? Why didn’t I tell her I loved her more? The regret I feel now is overbearing. Why didn’t I try that little bit harder to make her happy? Why couldn’t I just deal with the food she cooked without complaining?

I miss now more than ever her cooking, never quite right... either a bit burned or a bit raw, either way... it was made by her and I would give every single meal I am ever to eat in the future away for one last meal by her.

The things I would give to go back and do things again.

To be grateful for what I had, to say thank you for everything she did for me.

I guess that old saying is true you never know what you have until it’s gone.

She is still alive fighting against the malignant cancer that is slowly taking her.

She isn't the same as she used to be. But she is my mother.

She is the reason for my existence, she is my protector, she is my rock, and she is what matters the most to me, and always has been.

If I had another chance I would tell her that every day. I have a lot of hope and I may not be religious but I pray, and I still believe it will be okay.

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**Year 11/12 Category Winner**  
**Kar Leng Chiu, Sydney Secondary College**  
**Blackwattle Bay**

**Say Hello to my Little Friend**

Why should it be, that when a one-handed person is walking down the street, people must stare at it as if it's disgusting?

It's not only a one-handed situation; this affects anyone else who is physically disabled. As a one-handed person who is missing her right hand, I constantly question today's society by always asking, "Does society accept disabled people?" The general public would probably say yes, but someone who actually experiences the looks and the stares says no. I do not at all mind that I am missing my right hand; in fact, I consider it to be one of the most interesting features of myself. I actually consider my stump as a friend, and nicknamed it "Littlehand".

When I heard the news that a one-handed woman was to be a new host on a children's television show in England, I was pleased to hear it. It was fine to see someone who represented the minority on television, and on top of that, someone who was educating and opening the minds of children. However, not everyone looked upon Cerrie Burnell with such ecstatic views. Small groups of parents stated that having a one-handed person on television "scared" children, forcing parents "to discuss difficult issues with their young children before they were ready"<sup>2</sup>.

In my opinion, such comments should never be uttered. It should be the opposite to have someone say that a disabled should never be exposed to people unless they are ready. The young should be taught that there are differences in people and accept them as who they are, instead of ostracising and concealing such facts of life.

Like Ms. Burnell and others, I've also had my fair share from a prejudiced society: children and their parents staring at my stump in restaurants, school kids from my school screaming in surprise at the sight of my arm, little boys telling me upfront that it's "weird" and "disgusting" and passengers on buses eyeballing it. It is upsetting and distressing to see that so many people in a society which claims to accept, ogle at the abnormal and laugh at others disabilities.

If people were to know me, I'm quite sure that they would forget that I am disabled. My sisters are constantly forgetting that I am restricted in performing some tasks as they know me to be as capable as anyone else who is two handed. The fear of the unknown is always there but the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1158343/Why-armed-BBC-presenter-Cerrie-Burnell-proud-debate-disability-provoked.html>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

remedy is to associate with those less able bodied and not to fall into such prejudices, letting the unknown become the known.

I don't mind if people ask "why is your hand like that?" in a polite manner, because I am educating those who are unknown to such issues. However, I don't think that it is my job to always answer to such questions, always repeating "I was born like that" over and over again. More channels should place disabled people on television; ABC already has disabled presenters but what about the more commercial networks, the ones that are more viewed. Channel Seven could have a one handed person doing the weather, Channel Nine having a one legged person reading the news and Ten to have a person who is in a wheelchair presenting a children's show.

With all hopes, such aspirations could build a better society, a society that truly accepts all forms of people especially those who are disabled. All they need to do is say hello to my little friend.