



# 2024

## Youth Leadership Forum REPORT

*Keep the Fire Burning*



# Acknowledgement

*Cairns NAIDOC Youth Leadership Forum*

As we forge our way to a stronger future,  
we embrace the millennia of footsteps that  
came before us. We feel the presence of  
our ancestors and their guidance, as we  
navigate our continued responsibility to the  
lands, seas and skies in which we connect  
to. Their spirit will carry on in the  
generations to come as we inspire, equip  
and empower our people and our  
community.

# Demographics of Young People

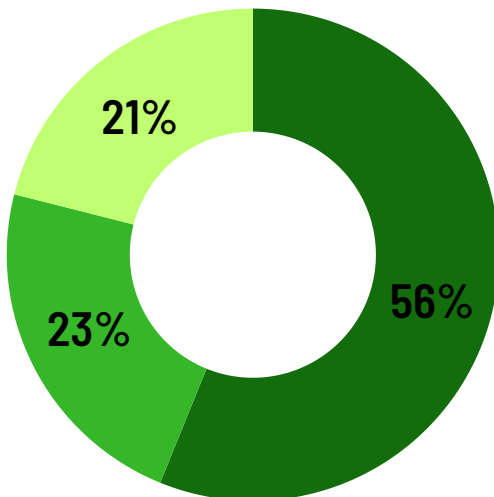
Cairns NAIDOC Youth Leadership Forum

## Quick Stats

80

Young people signed in at the event as participants (out of 101 registered) from 10 different schools/boarding houses.

■ Aboriginal ■ Torres Strait Islander  
■ Both Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander



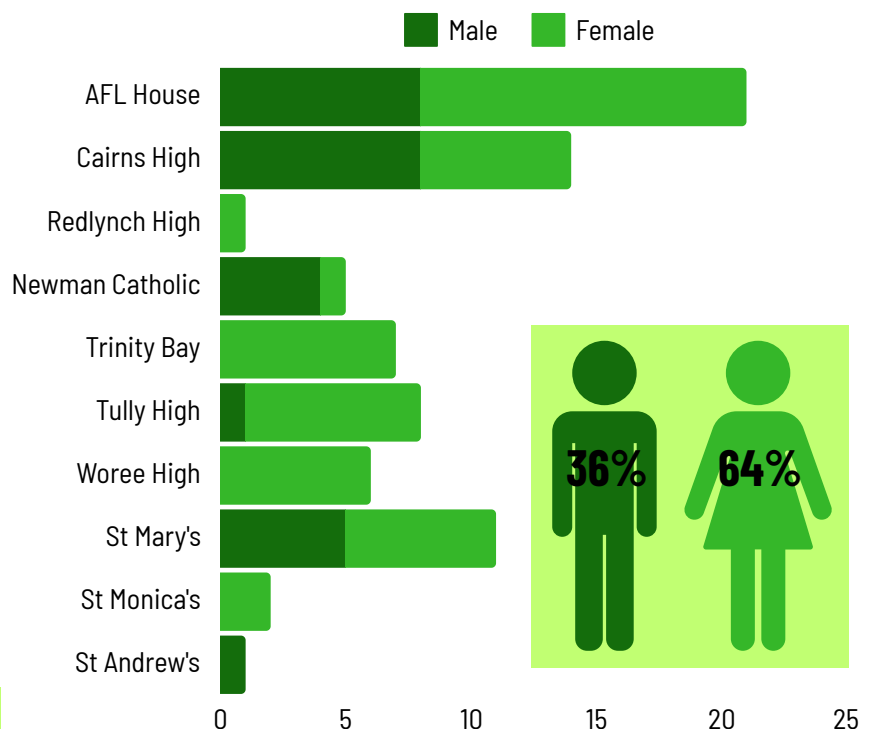
### Proportion of young people according to gender and school<sup>b</sup>

- The majority of participants were females.
- Majority of young people identified "AFL House" as their school on the sign in sheet.



### First Nations heritage of young people who attended<sup>a</sup>

- The majority of young people who attended the forum were of Aboriginal heritage.
- Torres Strait Islanders made up the next largest group and then participants identifying as both First Nations cultures.



<sup>a</sup>Data collected from 57 consent forms.

<sup>b</sup>Data collected from 76 registration/consent forms.

# Report Summary

## Cairns NAIDOC Youth Leadership Forum

Ngara!

The 2024 NAIDOC Youth Forum brought together a dynamic group of 80 young people from 10 different schools for a day of leadership, empowerment, cultural connection, reflection, and community-building. I feel deeply privileged to have been a part of this day, and to be able to gather all the yarns and weave them into this document.

I would also like to take this time to extend my gratitude to the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander CECs, teachers and support staff who accompanied the young people. Your presence and connection with them fostered trust and helped draw out important themes and deep discussions. Your involvement was invaluable in making this day so impactful.

The primary activity of the day was focused on the building of a collective fire (pictured on the report cover). The activity reinforced the importance of working together for the benefit of the whole, rather than focusing solely on individual achievements. It was truly inspiring to witness this connection in a world that often leans toward individualism and materialism. Our young people continue to think collectively, holding on to values that prioritise serving and supporting their community. They recognise the need for their community's support as they step into roles that will help strengthen and uplift those around them. Young people hold culture and identity as central to their strength. The deep love and respect they have for Elders, as the keepers of this cultural knowledge, was evident in every activity and discussion.

Throughout the day, positive reinforcement created a safe space for young people to be vulnerable, practice their cultural connections, and explore their heritage. Discussions on figures like Charles Perkins highlighted the ongoing impact of past struggles and deepened appreciation for the privileges they enjoy today.

Overall, the forum was a powerful reminder of the strength that young people find in their culture and community. It highlighted the ongoing respect for Elders and the commitment to preserving cultural values that bind the community together. The day's activities fostered a sense of unity and purpose, leaving everyone inspired to continue strengthening their mob for future generations.

*Layla Wenitong-Schrieber*

Kabi Kabi (Gubbi Gubbi), Dauwarbarra clan,  
DIYDG Researcher and Co-ordinator of Wanna Know





# Recommendations

## Cairns NAIDOC Youth Leadership Forum

### Recommendations

Young people often lack opportunities to voice their opinions and concerns, and to feel like they have control over their own future. At DIYDG, we feel privileged to hear their voices and to hear what is important to them. It is important that this doesn't fall on deaf ears and that we respond with action wherever possible.

Below are recommendations for all of us to build on the work done at the forum. We encourage you to consider how you can put some of these supports into action.

#### ***Creating opportunities to investigate cultural heritage***

- Assisting young people and their families to identify their tribal links.
- Creating safe, non-judgmental spaces for young people to practice cultural introductions.

#### ***Promoting strong blak leadership and connecting with Elders***

- Providing more opportunities to expose young people to strong blak leadership and foster connections with Elders.
- Providing opportunities for young people to show their love and respect for Elders in ways that are important to them.

#### ***Provide more opportunities for young people to give back to their community***

- Actively involving young people in opportunities to connect with and give back to their community.
- Continue providing platforms such as youth councils (and youth forums) to ensure that their perspectives lead to meaningful action and help address their needs and aspirations.



# Learning Outcomes Summary

Cairns NAIDOC Youth Leadership Forum

## Learning Outcomes

### ***Foster leadership skills and qualities among junior secondary students***

Young people spent the day working in teams, discussing various topics, and sharing their ideas with the larger group. This activity fostered leadership skills by encouraging initiative, collaboration, and clear communication. It also built confidence in public speaking, promoted active listening, and developed essential qualities like responsibility, teamwork, and the ability to influence and inspire others.

### ***Cultivate a sense of cultural pride and identity***

Encouraging young people to introduce themselves by identifying their mob and sharing what makes them 'deadly' fosters pride in their culture and identity. The "Who's Your Mob" activity deepens their connection to their heritage, while listening to others' stories reinforces a shared cultural unity. Watching the Charles Perkins video and learning about the Freedom Riders further instills cultural pride by connecting them to the powerful legacy of their Elders.

### ***Develop communication and teamwork abilities***

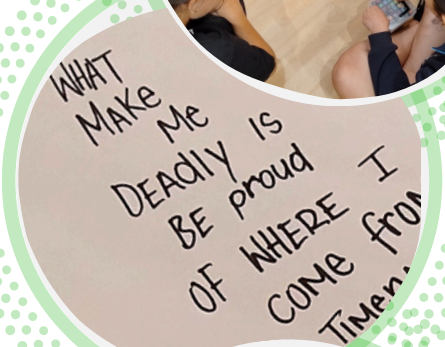
All games and activities include strong elements of communication and teamwork. Specifically, young people were asked to speak on the microphone and present their ideas as a group and also individually.

### ***Encourage active participation in community initiatives***

Throughout the entire day, young people were encouraged to think about their place in their community and how they could help to build the collective fire.

### ***Inspire confidence and self-belief in students' abilities to make a positive impact***

Speaking into the microphone and sharing their experiences build young people's confidence. Young people were instructed on how to give positive recognition.





# Who's Your Mob?

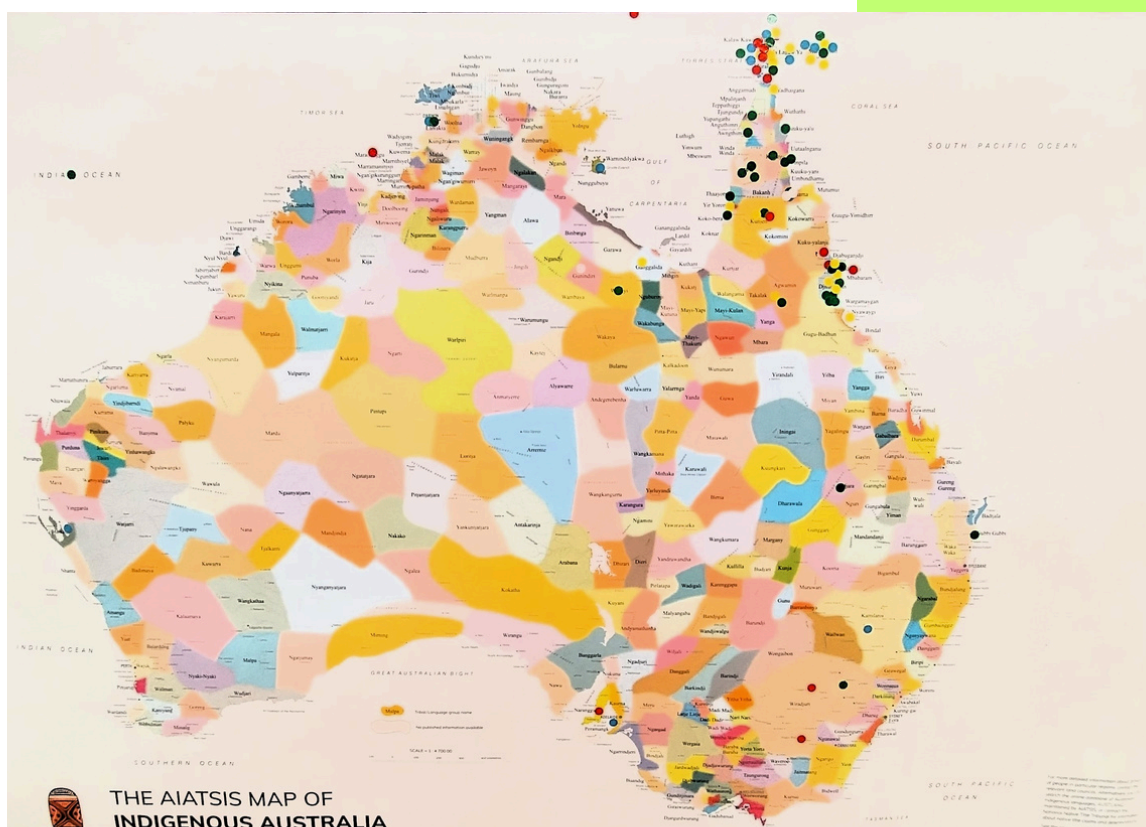
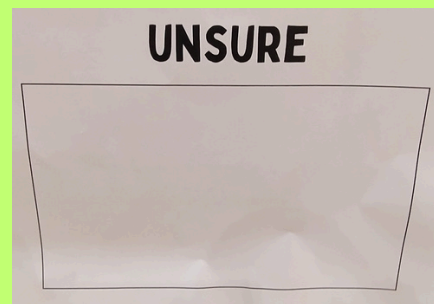
## Cairns NAIDOC Youth Leadership Forum

### Knowledge of Cultural Identity

Young people were asked to identify their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander heritage by placing a dot on one of three sheets labelled "Aboriginal," "Torres Strait Islander," and "Unsure." They were then encouraged to explore their identity further by placing a dot on the map of the tribal area their family comes from. This activity aimed to (1) Identify the First Nations heritage of the participants and, (2) Investigate their knowledge of their tribal connections.

The results indicated that most young people identified as Torres Strait Islanders. This is in contrast to the results from the consent forms that were returned. In addition, many placed their dots on the Cairns area, although consent forms did not reflect parental identification of local tribal connections. This suggests that while young people are aware of whether they are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, they may still be unsure of their specific tribal affiliations, or where they are located on the map.

**Figure 1. Map from "Who's your mob?" activity.** Young people were asked to place a dot on their tribal area if they knew it.



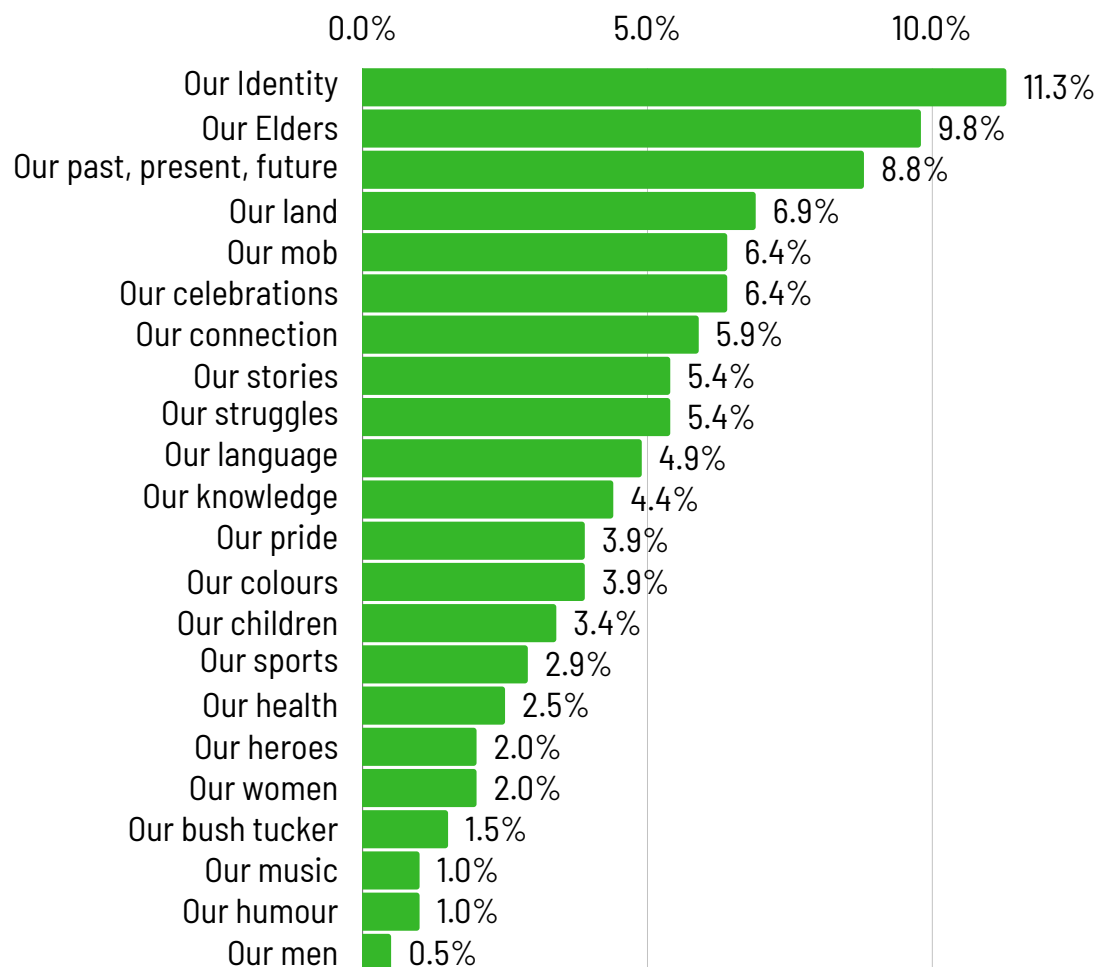
# What Keeps Our Mob Strong?

Cairns NAIDOC Youth Leadership Forum

## Factors that young people believe strengthen our community

Young people were asked to place a sticky note on what they believed was the most important factor in keeping our mob strong. This activity helps us understand what young people perceive as the key elements that strengthen our community. The three most significant factors identified were: Our identity, Our Elders, and Our past, present, and future.

**Figure 2. What young people think are the most important factors that keep our mob strong**



\*Interpret this data with caution: The factors at the bottom of the graph are not necessarily less important to young people. Many are included within the broader categories at the top, like "Our men" being part of "Our Elders" and "Our mob."



# Respecting Our Elders

Cairns NAIDOC Youth Leadership Forum

## How do young people interpret respect for Elders?

Young people were asked to describe how respecting Elders sounds, looks, and feels to them. This question helps us understand how young people view the role of Elders.

The responses are displayed in a word cloud, with the largest words representing the most frequently mentioned words. From this data, it's clear that young people perceive respecting Elders as involving listening to their stories and helping and caring for them. These acts of respect make young people feel happy, respectful, proud, and loved.



# What Makes Me Deadly?

Cairns NAIDOC Youth Leadership Forum

## What do young people view as their strengths?

Young people were asked to write or draw on the board what makes them "deadly." This question helps us understand what young people perceive as their personal strengths.

A total of fifty-eight comments and images were contributed, which were organised into the following themes:

**Culture:** *"I am deadly because I am proud of my culture."*

Most comments and images highlighted pride in their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage, language, and 'blakness'.

**Personal qualities:** *"I'm deadly because I am me."*

Many comments emphasised having the confidence to "be myself" and being "proud of who I am." Other remarks included being caring and respectful, with one expressing pride in their sexual orientation.

**Sports:** *"I'm deadly because I'm an AFL player."*

Another theme was the recognition of sporting achievements as a source of pride and identity.

**Physical features:** *"[I'm deadly because] I'm just built like dat."*

A few comments humorously mentioned specific physical features, such as *"These guns [image of biceps drawn]"* and *"my 6-pack."*



Figure 3. What young people think makes them deadly.

## How young people view their community and their role

Throughout the day, young people participated in activities centred around constructing a large communal fire, with each component symbolizing various aspects of the community. This exercise encouraged them to reflect on their community and their potential roles within it. The logs represented the community's core values, the central flames symbolized ways of strengthening the community, and the outer flames represented the individual goals and aspirations of each young person. The key elements are summarised below.

### 3. Individual Goals and Desires

*Q. What are all the things you want to do, want to learn, want to achieve?*

Young people shared their aspirations which could be collated into several key themes, including culture and heritage, education, sports, travel and exploration, careers, and personal goals. These personal goals included supporting their families or communities, self-improvement, acquiring specific skills, and obtaining tangible achievements.

The most commonly expressed desires were learning more about their culture and family history, as well as contributing to the well-being of their families and communities.

### 2. Community Strengthening

*Q. If you could do anything to strengthen our people, what would you do? Who could you talk to? What do you need?*

Young people shared numerous ideas about how they could contribute to strengthening their community. Their suggestions centered on themes such as cultural preservation, education and leadership, health and well-being, community connectedness, and self-determination and empowerment.

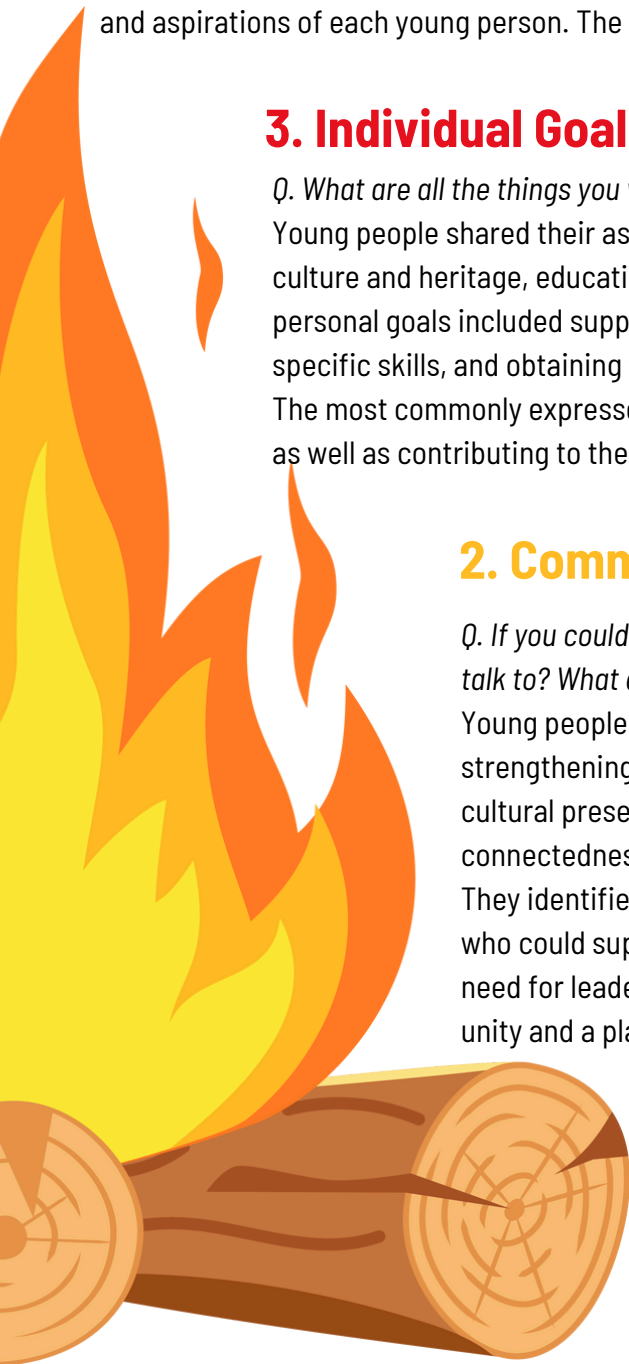
They identified Elders, family members, peers, and community leaders as key figures who could support them in taking action. Additionally, young people expressed the need for leadership support to step into these roles, as well as the importance of unity and a platform to voice their perspectives.

### 1. Community Values

*Q. What are our communities values? How do we show these through our actions?*

Young people identified many values, which can be grouped into the following key themes: respect and responsibility, culture and identity, health and well-being, and love and empathy. The most frequently mentioned values were respect and responsibility.

Their actions reflected these values, focusing primarily on ways they could serve and support their community.





# Stakeholder Feedback

Cairns NAIDOC Youth Leadership Forum

## Feedback from schools

All 10 schools/boarding houses who attended the youth forum were invited to provide feedback on the day. Two provided us with the following feedback:

Building the actual fire over the day with what we spoke about during the day become a real visual representation of how each of us can contribute towards 'Building the Fire' with our own values, concerns, vision of the future and goals.

What parts of the program did you like the most and why?

I was really glad that a big part of the day was pushing them [young people] to speak in front of others...The analogy of building the fire together worked really well.

What areas of the program did you not like and why?

There are no areas of the program we didn't like!

What else do you think would be beneficial to include?

More prizes for kids to motivate them.

Would you recommend other schools participate and why?

Yes, absolutely would recommend to other schools because students were able to connect to other students in other schools and be inspired by other students for example to be less shame and outspoken in front of groups.



# Thank You!

## Cairns NAIDOC Youth Leadership Forum

### DIYDG Staff demographics

This Youth Forum was supported by 16 DIYDG Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff members.

Of the staff involved:

- 5 identify as male and 11 as female,
- 6 staff members were under 25 years old,
- 6 were under 30 years old and
- 4 were over 30.



### EVENT SPONSOR



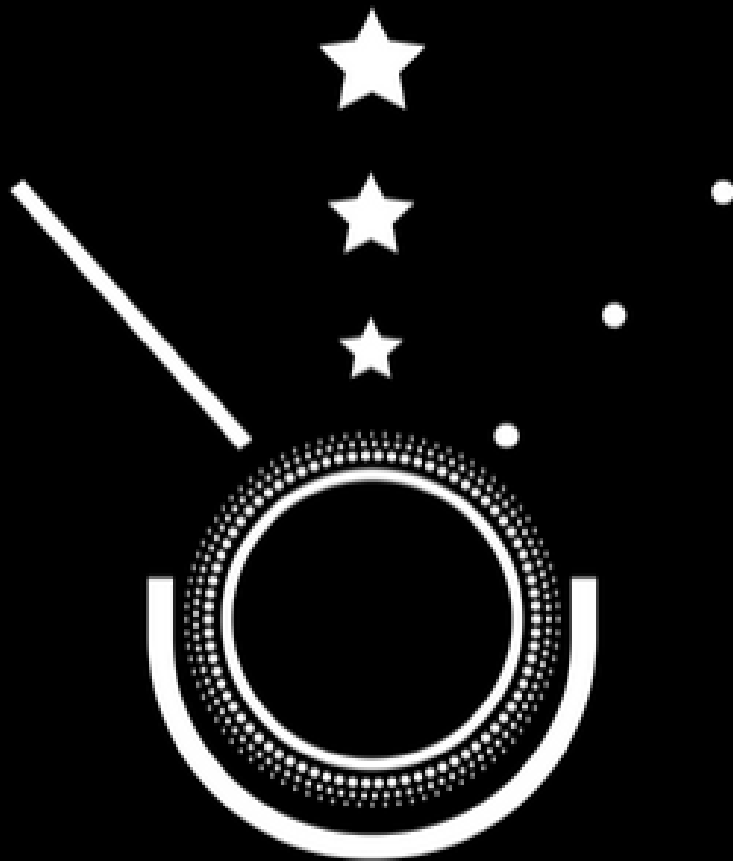
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