

The Advertiser

Think big, that's Jimmy Little's advice to young Aborigines

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THE constant image of indigenous people being disadvantaged is undermining the confidence of Aboriginal children, according to veteran singer Jimmy Little.

His message to them is think big and "don't get bogged down in self-pity".

It is a message reinforced by the annual Croc Festival currently camped in Port Augusta.

The 3000 primary and high school children who have descended on the town spend three days in health, career and role model workshops which aim to get them thinking about their future.

"We're hoping that we're planting the seeds in their minds and letting them know there are opportunities galore," said Little, a Croc Festival ambassador.

"This is to make them think broader around the barriers they've grown accustomed to because they grow up with a lot of negativity and not enough positive."

The mostly indigenous children meet tradespeople and try their hand at welding and carpentry, play didgeridoo and learn about Aboriginal culture, hold concerts and play games built around maths, science and good health.

"Rural kids need more of a push because they don't see all the options on their doorstep," said the man from modest roots who has sung duets with Kylie Minogue.

"There's a lot of children who in everyday life feel they don't qualify, they feel they're a little short on ability and out of the picture."

Port Augusta High School student Sarah Blad, 15, said she is now keen to be a veterinarian.

"I've heard it's really good and I want to know what animals are what and how to help them out," she said.

Her 15-year-old friend, Emma McLeod, has her heart set on joining the Navy and does not need help choosing a career.

She is, instead, interested in learning more about her Aboriginal heritage.

"It's just a good experience for me to learn a bit more," she said.

The festival is fun and informative, said Kiyana Jonas, 13, of Oodnadatta Aboriginal

School, who enjoyed a close-up encounter with an infant crocodile.

She said she had absorbed the “don’t drink or smoke drugs” message but had not put any thought into her future plans.

“My friends think they want to be famous,” she said.