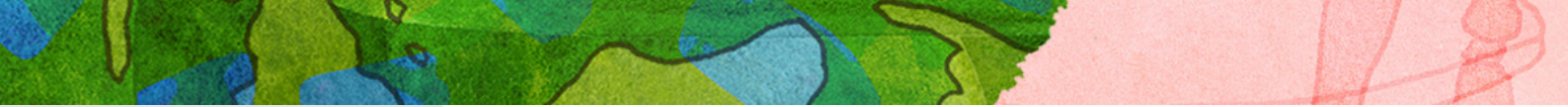


The background of the entire page is a vibrant, abstract artwork. It consists of layered, torn-edge paper cutouts in various colors: orange, yellow, green, blue, and pink. The cutouts feature stylized, hand-drawn patterns and shapes, including what looks like a landscape with trees and buildings on the left, and a large, flowing shape on the right. The overall effect is a collage-like, textured composition.

# ARRIVING at the **VISION**

stories from the A24  
Engagement project





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# stories

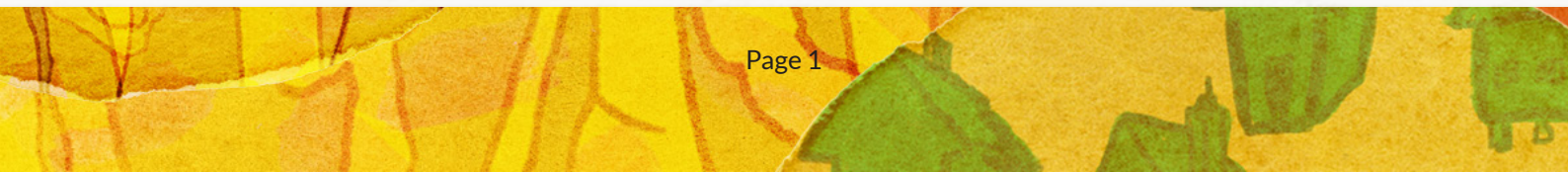
## FROM THE A24 ENGAGEMENT PROJECT

In 2017 we listened to over 200 leaders from communities around Australia. These people represented First Nations, migrants, workers, faith groups, LGBTQI+ communities and more. The project sought to hear from ordinary Australians about the future they want for Australia.

The people we listened to had a lot to say about how great they think this country could be, and a lot to say about what they think is currently wrong. People were asked to dream out loud about the Australia they want and to think with us about how such a transformation could happen. Their ideas and dreams have come to give life to a vision for Australia, Australia Remade, adding depth, breadth, spirit and hope to previous draft visions developed in 2016 by others in the A24 network.

Australia Remade was developed in close collaboration with National Congress of Australia's First Peoples. Rod Little and Jackie Huggins have played a critical role, not only in patiently working on the development of Pillar One – A first people's heart, but on the rest of the vision as well. Throughout the development of Australia Remade we worked closely with other of Australia's first peoples. We interviewed Indigenous people one to one and also spoke with Indigenous people as part of the small group discussions held during the engagement phase of development. These varied and deep contributions were fundamental to the creation of Australia Remade.

This is the story of the Engagement Project that led to Australia Remade; who was on the project team, what we did, the remarkable people we spoke with and the inspiring themes, ideas and imaginings that emerged from the conversations.





# the project team

The creation of Australia Remade was facilitated by 6 members of the A24 network: Ann Porcino, Millie Rooney, Elenie Poulos, Sandy Killick and Archie Law.

Ann Porcino was the overall Project Coordinator, closely assisted in all aspects of the project by Millie Rooney, who was the Project's Research Coordinator.

Throughout the writing process it was clear that this document was never going to have one author. While Millie Rooney and Ann Porcino, later with assistance from Lily Spencer, pulled together the words on the page, this is a vision written by many and reviewed by many; the vision and spark of Australia Remade is a collective effort.

The project team were paid for their work and travel expenses. Funds for this work came from a number of Australian NGOs active in the A24 network and passionate about creating a better future.





# who we spoke with

The Engagement team spoke with over 200 people in 25 in depth, one to one interviews and 15 discussion groups.

We spoke with everyday people; with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, people in low socio-economic groups and in precarious work, people from different cultural groups including from the Islamic and Vietnamese communities, young adults, single mothers, farmers and others living in rural communities, faith leaders, LGBTQI+ people, disability and climate activists, feminists and people working in the arts. Some were prominent community leaders; many were not.

People we spoke with lived in Canberra, Melbourne, Sydney,

Adelaide, Brisbane, Hobart, Launceston and Perth; in La Trobe Valley Victoria and Gloucester and Crookwell in NSW.

We found participants mostly via word of mouth but sometimes through public advertisements or by gathering people who self-selected at various conferences. The group of people was not representative of all Australians; that was never the intention. Our goal was to listen to people from a diversity of backgrounds and walks of life; as many people as we could within the budget we had. (There are about 24 million others we hope to engage with some day!)



# how we went about it

We listened to people in person and online, in one-on-one conversations and in group settings. We asked ‘What is bothering you about life in Australia right now?’ and ‘If you could wake up in the Australia of your dreams, what would it look like?’, (and extensions of each of these questions). We followed people’s lead, where did they want to take us? Sometimes down a path of understanding what they saw as the critical next steps to transform as a nation; other times describing in detail what they thought about the single topic most weighing on their minds.

Discussions ranged from 45 minutes to 4 hours. Content was captured via audio, written notes, and from the post-it notes and butchers paper in the group work. With every conversation we learned more about what a flourishing Australia would look like

and about the common values we hold dear.

We listened and re-listened to the collected audio. Read and re-read the transcripts and summaries. We looked for common themes and differences, new parts of the vision and ideas that aligned with what we had heard previously in A24 gatherings. We sought to understand the difficult realities and fears and the beautiful dreams of everyone who spoke with us.

Drawing on the analysis, we began to write. Staying as close as possible to the precise words that people used in describing their struggles and hopes, we combined the best of previous drafts with the new ideas and simpler, more evocative language that we heard in our discussions. Slowly Australia Remade took shape.





# what we heard

As it turns out, the people we spoke with want remarkably similar things. Their visions for waking in a better world told the same story again and again. The essence of what we heard has been distilled into the 9 pillars for transformation contained in Australia Remade:

- **A first people's heart**
- **A natural world for now and the future**
- **An economy for the people**
- **A society where all contributions count and every job has dignity**
- **A diversity of people living side by side**
- **A country of flourishing communities**
- **A new dawn for women**
- **A thriving democracy**
- **A proud contributor to a just world**

We also heard other amazing things in our conversations; important things about who we are as a nation and how we make change. Things about the power of hope, the importance of a shared vision and the need to celebrate those already going quietly about this work.



## we heard that people want these conversations

Some actively sought us out, inviting us to their meeting of leaders from many faiths and cultural backgrounds and clamouring to enthusiastically get their visions heard. Others thanked us for finding them, appreciating that we had asked the questions that we did and took the time to listen.

### Take James \* ...

He was one of many that thanked us for asking and listening to what they had to say. "If anything I could add, thanks for doing this, thanks for listening. It's really important. I'm happy someone's doing it. It's hard to feel like you can be involved in anything politically or social movements or stuff like that if you come from [my] kind of areas. Or, you [worry that you] might get typecast or you might feel like you don't fit the bill ... so every now and again it's nice to have people touch base."

### And the gender support group...

Thank you for coming to ask us this stuff. We usually have to go out and fight to get our voices heard.



# we felt the eagerness of people to participate...

... and to contribute their vision.

## Three women on a couch

The intensity of these women is incredible. All day they've sat on the couch, hats, coats and scarves firmly on, intently writing, talking and dreaming of a Vietnamese prime minister. They scribble down their thoughts on post it notes in Vietnamese and laugh along to the jokes of the interpreter.

All day the mood in the room has been enthusiastic. An intense buzz of excitement in English and Vietnamese clatters through the space after each question is asked in both languages. Ann and Hao work together at high speed to translate questions and answers and the rich discussion.

This group is a mix of first and second generation Vietnamese and a gathering which, under the title of 'Prime Minister for the Day', is a rare event that has managed

to draw out the older and younger parts of the community. The two generations sit together and apart in different mixes, laughing with each other, and arguing as the younger ones organise the room.

We meet in a room in a community centre, walls adorned by portraits of 'ordinary' Melbournians. These Vietnamese are ordinary too, in that their vision for a better Australia is similar to other stories we've heard: secure housing, multiculturalism embraced, indigenous history is respected, we all have secure work and people are healthy. This group has their own particular issues too: an integrated cyber network, Australian sovereignty over resources and strong laws to ensure food safety and security.

At the end of the day there is a room full of post it notes and butchers paper, covered in English and Vietnamese and people are smiling. Bodies and souls are further fed with a banquet sent by members of the Indian, Vietnamese and Middle Eastern communities.

The three women on the couch, keeping their hats, coats and scarves firmly on, become three women at a feast, in the middle of a strong and diverse community.







# we heard the pain of people living on the margins...

... and the spirit, courage and determination that enable some people to keep fighting, despite their daily struggles.

## The practical means for a decent life

Members of the National Council of Single Mothers and their Children joined us in an online video conference. These women are articulate, passionate, energetic, active and angry. Mary, Tracey, Jeanne and Kathleen; between them responsible for 8 children between 4 and 22, one with multiple disabilities; with backgrounds in communication, counselling, and social policy research.

There is an intimacy in our online conversation, partly because we're all visible in our domestic locations. There's Jeanne's daughter walking past and a toddler clattering in the background. We can see the artwork on Ann's walls, Tracey's living room and the nick-knacks on Mary's shelves

These women work tirelessly to support thousands of other women online to understand the Centrelink maze of paperwork and how on earth people manage to subsist on such low benefits. They fight daily for access to services and support others to do the same. Some weeks they rely on charity hampers.

Tracey tells the story of how her daughter once came home from school with a broken arm. When she asked her why she hadn't called her, the daughter replied "cos mum, if you come home from work, we don't get to eat". None of

the other women seemed particularly shocked by this. Their reality is likely to continue to be tough.

As Tracey says: "None of us married to become domestically violated and divorced, to be left running scared and picking up the pieces, losing everything you work hard for (including a relationship with a partner you thought you could trust to go the journey). Many of us have huge concerns for our wellbeing, safety and security in our ageing years..."

And yet despite the challenges these women power on. "Ha!" says Georgina, "We just need a bunch of single mothers to do the government budget - there'd be enough for everyone".

As we talk all at once in Tasmania and Western Australia and NSW and Victoria and South Australia we hear visions for fairness and equity, a future where kids have secure housing, education and jobs, climate change is sorted, refugees are welcome and we have peace. The future holds overall affordable housing and a strong safety net where there is no difference between the 'deserving' and 'underserving' poor because we are all helped with our needs, no judgment. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are valued and their needs met according to their culture.

The future they want provides everyone with "the practical means for a decent life".





# we heard gut wrenching stories

about the impact of racism and other oppressions on real people, real communities, every day. How much harder some people have to fight; how much more resilience they must find to just get by.

## How deeply proud we could be if we tackled racism and other oppressions

Talking to the calm and eloquent Joe it's easy to feel deeply the harsh reality of racism. 'We're cutting kids down from trees,' he says, 'How is that not a national emergency... hate suits modern politics and its killing people or making them really sick; its at the heart of why we are disconnecting'.

Alina is extremely active in the Muslim community of Victoria. She is angry and determined. She wonders what kind of community we have where it is ok for young Muslim girls to be violently threatened by strangers on the street. "It's scary, but it comes with the territory". It's become normal for her to chat casually on the phone with friends about the latest abuse. Normal, but never ok. She's worried about what this is doing to the young Muslims feeling marginalised and isolated.

And Solomon, he wonders why he is the only one who ever has to reel off his lineage "but no white person ever has to say where their grandmother came from". For people of colour it is often their grandmothers, cousins, uncles and children who feel the brunt of racism and hate in our communities. "The number one concern for me at the moment," says Darshini "is having a lot of friends who are Muslim and people of colour, but particularly Muslim. Just the, I mean it's pretty horrific,

the Islamophobia that is currently permissible in the Australian context. I've been really shocked by that. ... I literally can't understand how adults can behave in that way and not be held to account for the consequences of their actions. I think that's not ok... the daily treatment of Muslims in Australia but also people of colour more broadly as well."

Then there is Tim, a man born to Chinese and Italian parents, who recently set up an advocacy and campaigning organisation in Australia for and by people of colour. He talks about how deeply personal this work is; how significantly racism has impacted him, his friends and family. He knows that the problems is systemic; that we all are set up to blame each other just so that our system can survive to benefit 'the tiny elite, at the expense of the dignity of everyone else'.

Surely, people say, we can do better than this; we must do better than this as a nation if we are to have a bright and prosperous future. As Hannah explains, we need everyday courage to tackle racism and confront the "massive shameful wound people carry everywhere... imagine how deeply proud we could be if we tackled this and brought people along for the ride". And Joe agrees... "Imagine the energy you would get from not having to hate all the time. It would be extraordinary; extraordinarily recuperative and empowering".





# we heard about the best of Australia...

... of the values we share and how much we have going for us already

## The Cockies from Cowra

There are times when you face a room defensive and prepared to be hit only to showered with kindness and humanity. Allen told us about one of those experiences.

Driving into Cowra, he prepared himself, knowing the crowd was likely to be hostile. He had been told in no uncertain terms that he would need a whip and a chair when speaking to this rural crowd about refugees.

The meeting was an important one for the young Afghani who Allen had with him. Zameer was there to tell his story. The story of his father's death and his brother's decapitation. And his long road to Australia, three years of not knowing where he was going or when he would be safe. When kissing him goodbye his mother told him "I would rather know that you are alive somewhere than never see

you again and know that you are dead here – you've got to go." Zameer explained that his dearest wish was to hug his mother in Pakistan. He had a bridging visa, he'd been given special permission to go but he had no money.

Allen recalls the cocky up the back who called out in his laid back Australian drawl, "Oh mate... we'd like you to see ya mum, we're passing the bucket around". At the end of the evening they'd collected nearly \$1,800. The following day the local priest turned up with another two thousand.

Funded by the cockies from Cowra, Zameer and his mum and her four other children travelled to Pakistan to hug each other.

Where Allen had expected to need a 'chair and a whip' he found a couch for conversation and the whip around of a hat collecting money so that a boy could see his mum. 'If those cockies in Cowra are able to do that, then there is hope for us.'





# and finally and irrepressibly we heard stories of courage and hope.

People moved by injustice and the struggles facing the world actively holding hope and turning it into action.

## Listen to the hope holders

The hope holders do not look alike, or sound alike. They may never meet each other as they move in different circles. And yet the hope holders draw from the same pool, breathe the same air and hold the same hope.

You can hear the faith in Duyen's voice. The faith and the enthusiasm for the waterfall of change she knows is coming. "I just feel that humans are geared for hope you know. I see that in my day to day work with community...It takes someone to believe it and then a second person and then a third person and the next thing you know politicians are changing their lines, communities are out in force and it started with a couple of conversations"

Joe is a hope holder too. "I see that everyday, that's how change gets made . . . people who are proven in their bravery. . . people who are prepared to put in the intellectual and physical rigour to take the knock backs and keep showing up and to do it better and cleverer each iteration . . .surrounded by people who don't always agree necessarily, but who have their back."

And Charlie: "There's more than enough goodwill around to change the world in a positive way. . . we're just knocked around the heads everyday with economic stories of

despair and global terrorism and environmental disaster, all of which can be quite real from day to day. But there is also extraordinary change happening at a very micro local level people trying to improve other people's lives... people doing good work all over the place that need to be honoured and celebrated in a different way."

Even those who don't speak directly of hope, hold hope in some form. Take Simon, he's in his late thirties and has been working in the warehouse of a large supermarket chain for years now. He's moved back to Tasmania because life is cheaper and less of his money and time is swallowed up commuting. Far from being a rabble rouser he keeps his head down and enjoys his beer and bbq's with family. Simon's also pretty certain we need our political parties to be 'more courageous' and actually have a vision and then stick to it. Listening to Simon, the hope comes from knowing just how deeply people care.

Each of these hope-holders have their own moments of despair; their dark times when powerful forces determined to maintain the status quo seem unconquerable.

And yet... and yet...

**We're geared for hope and so they go on. Actively working for the more beautiful world they know is possible.**



# what's next?

We have Australia Remade, taken from the open-hearted people who gave their precious time to the engagement team in the belief that maybe, just maybe, what A24 is trying to do might work.

Now it is up to us to use it. To take the vision and ourselves seriously, to hold out hope for others, to think and act from this new paradigm as best we can and get on with the job of transformation. In short we must own our future. All of us, together.

***“There are pockets of energy and hope that if connected will start a movement for change like A24 is interested in. . . It won't be politicians or clever advertising campaigns that get Australian's off their arses. It'll be a sense that there is possibility and that there is something useful for them to engage with rather than the despair and doom and gloom that forces them to shut their curtains and cower inside.” - engagement participant 2017***

[www.australiaremade.org](http://www.australiaremade.org)





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