

ACCG JOINT PARTICIPATION PAPER

2018





A photograph of two young women in school uniforms sitting at a desk in a library. The woman on the left is wearing glasses and has a purple headband. They are both smiling and looking towards the right. Bookshelves filled with books are visible in the background.

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INTRODUCTION

The Australian Children's Commissioners and Guardians (ACCG)¹ is a coalition of independent commissioners, guardians and advocates for children and young people from around Australia that aims to:

- **promote the rights of children and young people, including their right to participate in decisions relating to them, as articulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)**
- **ensure the best interests of children and young people are considered in the development of policies and programs**
- **give voice to the views of, and encourage direct consultation with, children and young people on matters that affect them**
- **encourage systemic improvement, informed by evidence-based research, in areas that impact the rights, interests and wellbeing of children and young people.**

Members of the ACCG regularly consult with a diverse array of children and young people within their jurisdictions on a wide range of topics. This is an important way that children and young people can have their voices heard and influence the development of legislation, policy and programs that affect them.

This report reflects some of the consistent themes from a sampling of these consultations. The consultations analysed in this report were undertaken between late 2015 and early 2018 with approximately 15,000 children and young people across Australia by the National Children's Commissioner, the ACT Children and Young People Commissioner, the NSW Advocate for Children and Young People, the NT Children's Commissioner, the SA Guardian for Children and Young People, the SA Commissioner for Children and Young People,

the TAS Commissioner for Children and Young People, the VIC Commissioner for Children and Young People, the VIC Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People and the WA Commissioner for Children and Young People. The participants came from a range of life experiences and backgrounds, and included children and young people who:

- are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- are culturally and linguistically diverse
- are living with disability
- are from rural and remote areas
- have experience with out of home care
- have experience with homelessness
- have experience with youth justice detention.



The report is not a representation of all of the consultation work undertaken during this period, nor is it intended to provide an exhaustive summary of issues important to children and young people, but rather to provide a snapshot of the voices of children and young people across Australia at a particular moment in time. ACCG members continue to hold regular consultations with children and young people on a range of topics and to share this work with decision makers in a variety

of ways. More information about members' ongoing work to promote the participation of children and young people can be found at www.anzccg.org.au.

While several of these themes were suggested by the Commissioner, Guardian or Advocate or an ACCG member most came directly from children and young people themselves. These themes are:

- **Safety**
- **Bullying**
- **Family**
- **Friends and community**
- **Education**
- **Employment**
- **Life skills**
- **Activities**
- **Environment**
- **Transport**
- **Wellbeing**
- **Empowerment**
- **Doing it Tough**
- **Culture**

Each of these themes comes with a number of findings about how to improve outcomes for children and young people. These findings are listed on the following page.

LIST OF FINDINGS

Children and young people tell us:



SAFETY

- Further research on the locations, situations and environments in which children and young people feel unsafe needs to be done.
- A campaign to raise awareness about violence against children and young people should be created and promoted.

BULLYING

- Bullying intervention programs should be developed by and for children and young people.
- Education programs to learn about different aspects of Australia's diverse and multicultural society would be useful.

FAMILY

- It is important to promote initiatives that help facilitate and foster positive family interactions.

FRIENDS AND COMMUNITY

- Community events that facilitate opportunities for young people to meet and connect with other children and young people are important.
- The targeted dissemination of information about these types of community events to children and young people is critical and should be increased.

EDUCATION

- Children and young people support building on the skills of teachers which will provide positive experiences to children and young people.
- Further assistance for children and young people who have difficulty engaging in education is critical.
- There should be research done into the nature, causes and coping support system around educational pressure.

EMPLOYMENT AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Programs to develop employment opportunities for children and young people are needed.

LIFE SKILLS

- They would value further education in life skills related to household management, financial literacy and vocational guidance, preferably but not exclusively in a school environment.

ACTIVITIES

- Initiatives that promote access to activities for children and young people including sport and arts are of value.
- Improved access to spaces designed specifically for children and young people to socialise is needed.

ENVIRONMENT

- Children and young people should be consulted on environmental issues such as climate change, natural resources, and biodiversity.

TRANSPORT

- Further research into the issues surrounding the availability, reliability, suitability and affordability of public transport for young people should be undertaken.

WELLBEING

- More resources to help deliver mental health services to children and young people are needed.
- More educational programs to inform children and young people about the potential causes of obesity and overweight would be of value.
- Further research into poverty and related socio-economic issues for children and young people should be done.

EMPOWERMENT

- Australian Children's Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates and others should continue their efforts to capture the voices of children and young people across Australia.
- Initiatives promoting positive messages and reducing negative stereotypes of children and young people should be created.
- A variety of communication methods and media should be used to promote improved access to information to children and young people.

DOING IT TOUGH

- Further efforts should be made to reduce stigma and stereotypes associated with children and young people in vulnerable circumstances, such as those in the juvenile justice system or out-of-home care, young parents or young people with experiences of violence or homelessness.
- Service provision should embrace a whole-of-life approach to addressing the needs of children and young people.

CULTURE

- It is important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to have access to programs which allow them to learn about and practice their culture.
- Wherever possible, services for Indigenous children and young people should be developed by, and delivered through, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and workers.

SAFETY

Children and young people across Australia have raised safety as an important issue and one of the key components of a good society:

"Security, safety in school (is important),..."²

"The most important things to me are being safe, happy and being able to live life."³

"A good society, is a safe society. Where there is little to no fear of being harmed by doing everyday things. Where it is a nurturing environment for the youngest of children to the oldest of people. Where a child is welcomed, helped, talked to, and smiled upon, but also where adults are our role models and have control of their lives and children."⁴

Most children and young people have expressed that they feel safe in their current environment and surroundings:

"I think its great about living in WA because you're living in a safe country and also because every body gets along with each other."⁵

"To me, being 10 in WA is fantastic, because we have got [a] nice and clean environment. Western Australia has also got nice and great places, luckily we don't have wars anymore so it is totally safe."⁶



"I know that the teachers are keeping an eye on us. It makes us all feel safe."⁷

While most children and young people across Australia feel safe, they have also expressed concerns regarding the safety of children and young people in a number of situations. Public transport has come up for a number of young people as a potentially unsafe environment. Concerns about safety can make children and young people reluctant to use public transport, which may negatively impact their ability to pursue education, engage in activities and access essential services:

"(It would be better...) If there was more public transport and no bad people."⁸

"Sleeping on trains isn't safe, there are often domestic violence situations on trains, but it's safer than on the streets."⁹

"The public transport system (is) too dangerous and not reliable enough."¹⁰

"Transport is too slow and inconsistent, not punctual, off schedule, unreliable, (there are) 'shifty' people."¹¹

Drugs and alcohol are also frequently mentioned by children and young people. Some children and young people have reported that drugs are increasingly available and present in their communities and that this can be associated with feeling unsafe:

"Access to drugs and alcohol appears to be getting easier. Alongside this, the safety of the community appears to be increasing in risk."¹²

"The abuse of alcohol and drugs is becoming more frequent as young people have more access to them and find it more common and normal to use them illegally."¹³

(Answer to "What makes you feel unsafe"?)
 "People on drugs are doing harm to themselves and others."¹⁴

(Answer to "What makes you feel unsafe"?) "Drunk people throw bottles, are unpredictable, not in control."¹⁵

"Half of [place name redacted] is on Ice."¹⁶

"I had drunk people banging on my door at 2am."¹⁷

"Growing up in a community with issues that white mobs don't have you come to know about mental health and impacts from alcohol and drugs from a very young age."¹⁸

"That young kids take drugs and alcohol."¹⁹

Violence is an important issue for children and young people. Many children and young people have reported that violence is a widespread and common experience with the potential to affect anyone. Children and young people also emphasised that violence can take many forms and have long-lasting negative effects:

"It can come under as sexual, emotional, physical, mental and it can really impact someone's life as they go through it."²⁰

"When we think of violence, we think that it's non discriminative because it can happen to anyone so we can't just say it happens to particular people...no one's safe from it."²¹

(Answer to "What makes you feel unsafe"?)
"People are fighting, people not involved sometimes get hit with things or become involved."²²

"It's life changing, there's no peace. It can wreck your childhood. It's very scary, it's harmful, you can feel very afraid."²³

"It's spreading, it's universal. It's in the media. It's portrayed as a normal thing in movies, therefore it's reflected in the home."²⁴

"We've seen it so much... when you're exposed to anything for so long, it becomes the norm."²⁵

"... (D)-iscipline needs to be distinct from violence..."²⁶

"It can lead to a cycle of abuse."²⁷

(Answer to "What makes you feel unsafe"?)
"Being alone, there is no one there to help you if someone wants to hurt you."²⁸

FINDINGS

- **Further research on the locations, situations and environments in which children and young people feel unsafe needs to be done.**
- **A campaign to raise awareness about violence against children and young people should be created and promoted.**



BULLYING

One of the most frequently raised issues in consultation with children and young people across Australia is bullying. Bullying is a widespread experience shared by many children and young people:

"(It would be good...) if there was no bullying, no mean or rude people. It's not always easy if you are bullied so that's why there should not be any bullying." ²⁹

"I get teased a lot at school." ³⁰

(Answer to "What is bullying?") "Call you names, puts you down, harassment, rude, physical abuse, teasing, rumours, verbal abuse, mental abuse, racism." ³¹

(Answer to "What makes you feel unsafe?")
"Bullied at school." ³²

Young people felt that bullying is not limited to online environments or school, but rather bullying is continuous and present in all areas of life for children and young people. Some children and young people emphasised that bullying on the internet can be permanent, with others highlighting that it can be temporary with apps such as Snapchat allowing evidence of any bullying to be destroyed:

"(Bullying happens...) online, school, public, everywhere, Snapchat, social media, at home, sports." ³³

"(Bullying happens on...) Social media - Instagram, Facebook, Youtube, Snapchat - disappears so there is no proof." ³⁴



"If you write a few harsh words on a piece of paper, you can throw it away. If it's on the internet, it's there forever."³⁵

"(Bullying happens at...) School; online/cyber; workplace; home; sports; public and private areas; anywhere."³⁶

A large number of children and young people have expressed that there is a need for intervention in order to address bullying issues. Many felt that ignoring the problem or reporting it to a teacher or another adult are not effective ways to address bullying. Children and young people frequently report that adults 'don't really understand' or 'don't do anything about it'. They have called for adults to intervene and put a stop to bullying in an effective way:

"Bullying is still a major part in schools. There seriously needs to be a crackdown on bullying policies so suicide and self-harm rates decrease."³⁷

"Get people to stop talking about bullying and do something where the bullying is happening. Help the bullied people and the bullies."³⁸

"Kids (at my school) don't go to teachers if they get bullied. The teachers don't do anything about it."³⁹

"Bullying at school is reported but it's not dealt with, kids are still left to sort out their own problems and get hurt, teachers stand by and do nothing."⁴⁰

"Adults do not understand how serious an issue bullying is for young people - they don't help, we want them to listen and understand and not tell us to ignore it, they don't think it's a big deal; try to get more involved in young people's lives; more awareness workshops; put posters around the school of where to get help."⁴¹

"Adults don't care and write it off as normal; teachers say stay away but that doesn't work; adults don't live in the same generation as today, we have phones, we have computers. It doesn't just stop when you get home; blocking them or telling an adult only makes it worse because they just bully you more; girls bully worse and it goes on and on; teachers should know the signs of bullying and intervene and keep what young people tell them confidential."⁴²

"Stopping bullying by spreading kindness."⁴³

"Adults don't really understand, they think you can just ignore it, but it's every day and if you do just ignore it and walk away they'll come back to you and attack you still."⁴⁴

"We strongly believe that adults don't understand what we mean by bullying... they don't think it's as big as it actually is."⁴⁵

"(There is) racism in community and at school from teachers..."⁴⁶

The issue of bullying elicited some diverse responses and solutions:

"The bully has a reason they're doing it so you need to consider them as well and find out why they're doing it."⁴⁷

"Ignore it, walk away' doesn't stop bullying from happening."⁴⁸

"Make the consequences big enough so that they know what will happen if they bully someone."⁴⁹

"Education to recognise and prevent bullying and to teach victims and bystanders what to do if a situation occurs."⁵⁰

"We have Fight Patrol we (students) get our pink vests on and we walk around the school and see if there's any bullying because we feel like the older kids can connect with the younger kids and we stay confidential with it."⁵¹

"Despite many programs being in place to combat bullying issues etc, it is still a prominent issue for young people."⁵²

"(Fixing bullying...) ... can be done by making students realise the appeal and importance of kindness. Students (specifically in primary school) need to

make more connections with their peers and understand that some may be less unfortunate than they are. Get classes to mingle at the beginning of the year and throughout the year."⁵³

"I believe – due to personal experiences – that there are more programs that could be in place to ensure safety for students. The stigma around bullying is that it is physical, when it is often manipulation and causes children to feel unsafe. Higher counselling and 'headspace' programs are a good idea."⁵⁴

"I would like to change bullying around the world by talking about bullying."⁵⁵

"How schools handle bullying. Take it more seriously. Access to help and services. More programs and extra curriculum activities for youth. Workshop for all the known bullies. Need a slap in the face about what it's doing to people. Push them to having problems, to mental health, depression, suicide. Relying on friends too much then they feel it's their fault, not seeing signs. Victims leave not bullies which is bad. Schools need to do more about it – just smack on hand – suspension and exclusion."⁵⁶

"Bullying – more education to younger kids – kindly, bullies getting treated like crap at home – focus on the bully not just the bullied."⁵⁷

"Something needs to change, not just the law holding us back but there's a culture, in schools, in Australia, 'attack where it come from not after the fact'."⁵⁸

One of the most commonly reported reasons for bullying is discrimination. The perceived points of difference that may result in bullying generally fall along lines of race, religion, gender, sexuality, out-of-home care status and disability status:

"Sometimes people yell at us because we are Muslims. They are bigots but we just ignore them."⁵⁹

"Some (teachers)are racist...like some they say, 'you're a black idiot'."⁶⁰

"My (Student Support Officer) is pretty good and helps me a lot. The other kids think I am dumb because I need help."⁶¹

"Australia apparently prides itself on being a multicultural society, if it was, then racism wouldn't even exist here and it does."⁶²

"I've been picked on for years about being a foster child since Reception (Kindergarten), this year I finally stood up to it."⁶³

"Some Muslims faced discrimination in their country so came here. Now they face discrimination in Australia. They are always treated as outsiders."⁶⁴





"Racism should be stopped and noticed."⁶⁵

"We believe that it's better to join a community that thinks and acts the same way to us. In saying this, the whole reason we believe this is because there are still cultural barriers due to the media."⁶⁶

"(Shopkeepers...) thinking [that] we always going to steal..."⁶⁷

"There needs to be mutual respect between people, regardless of their age."⁶⁸

"Their life is very important and everybody should be treated fairly."⁶⁹

"I do recall a couple of situations where I was being racially abused and... as a result of that I shunned away from learning about Aboriginal culture."⁷⁰

"(I would like...) a society where age, race etc. is not a determining factor for anything, and simply a fact."⁷¹

Many children and young people have mentioned that discrimination makes people feel unwelcome in their own communities. There is a desire among children and young people to learn about the diversity of, and multiculturalism, in Australia, and to use education to address discrimination and bullying:

"Everyone deserves the same treatment, so they are educated about their race and religion, safety."⁷²

"I would however like to be who I am and love who I love in public (within reason) without feeling my existence is a disgrace and the way I feel is invalid. I think us, the youth, deserve much more say in the world around us as we are the future."⁷³

"A good society for young people to grow up in is an accepting, multicultural society that accepts and encourages differences."⁷⁴

"I think that parents (of Aboriginal children in care) should talk to social worker and to the school and put in plans to strengthen their knowledge about who they are as a person and an Aboriginal as well."⁷⁵

"I'm Catholic, but would like to know more about what other people think."⁷⁶

"Australia is made up of people from all around the world. Let's keep that in mind when making decisions that affect them."⁷⁷

"A better space for young people inclusive of religion, race, gender and age."⁷⁸

"Education on multiculturalism and race."⁷⁹

"Accepting of difference, allowing to be yourself."⁸⁰

FINDINGS

- **Bullying intervention programs should be developed by and for children and young people.**
- **Education programs to learn about different aspects of Australia's diverse and multicultural society would be useful.**

FAMILY

Family is a fundamental aspect of the lives of children and young people and, for many, a large part of their daily experience. Children and young people across Australia greatly value supportive and involved family members:

"My mum is important to me because she feeds me, she cares for me, she defends me and she helps me."⁸¹

"I love my family so much. I love them to the moon and back. I am so happy that I am with them."⁸²

"My family is important to me because they make me happy and they play games with me."⁸³

"My family because they're always there for me, they support me, they take care of me and they're the best people in the WORLD!"⁸⁴

"(T)hey stand by me no matter what."⁸⁵

(Answer to "What makes you feel safe"?)
"Feel protected around family."⁸⁶

"(T)hey help you."⁸⁷

"(T)hey all listen, they care about me and they help me with things I don't understand."⁸⁸

"(They) have an interest in what their kids are doing in school."⁸⁹



"Working as a family. Supporting one another helps build a stronger education for the child, because feeling loved can encourage the student to do better in school work." ⁹⁰

"The child needs to be shown that they are loved and that they can be ok." ⁹¹

"Family because they are my inspiration and they are the ones who support and loves me for who I am." ⁹²

Children and young people also highlighted the impact of family breakdown, conflict and lack of engagement on their lives:

"Being 10 is hard but you need to go through it. My mum and dad are divorced so it is extra hard." ⁹³

"Families can be a big impact in people's lives and hurt and make people happy." ⁹⁴

"(They) don't spend time with you and don't really care about what you do or help with anything." ⁹⁵

"If they don't come to school events or talk about what you're doing in school, it can be quite hurtful and feel like they don't care about your education." ⁹⁶

"It is difficult when my family are being loud, especially when I'm working. Something I would change is how my parents yell at me all the time." ⁹⁷

"My family, my siblings are younger, it is important to me to know when they grow up their voices will be heard not only listened to but taken action too." ⁹⁸

Findings

- **It is important to promote initiatives that help facilitate and foster positive family interactions.**

FRIENDS AND COMMUNITY

Children and young people across Australia speak fondly of friends and community. They report that friends are generally a positive influence on their lives and identify a number of benefits to friendships, such as improving the school experience, bestowing confidence, and providing support, particularly in times of hardship:

"(Friends) make you want to come to school more." ⁹⁹

"(Friends) work together to solve problems." ¹⁰⁰

"(Friends) are important because it makes learning more enjoyable and somewhat easier." ¹⁰¹

(Answer to "What makes you feel safe"?)
"Friends respect you and you can talk to them, they stick with you." ¹⁰²

"(With friends) you will have more confidence and try harder to do new things and try harder at school." ¹⁰³

"What I like about being 10 is that I can be trusted to go to the park by myself and I can have sleepovers with my friends." ¹⁰⁴

"My friends are important to me at the age ten because they are there when I need them and they care for me and I care for them." ¹⁰⁵

"I love being ten because I have lots of friends. I like going to school because I see my friends every day." ¹⁰⁶

"(Friends are) the family that you can choose." ¹⁰⁷

"Those who make me laugh." ¹⁰⁸

"(The people you can count on for) support, comfort and good times" ¹⁰⁹

"(Those who have) always got my back if something goes wrong" ¹¹⁰

"... Sometimes when I feel alone and sad I don't have someone to talk with. (A friend is) someone who can listen to me and give me advice. Someone to trust." ¹¹¹

"Friends (are good) because you can just be yourself around them, and they make me happy." ¹¹²

"Real life friends – loyalty – socially active – relationships – people to rely on and trust."

¹¹³

"Maintaining close relationships with lots of different friends – online friends, school friends, out-of-school friends – good to have a variety to talk about different things/ ideas." ¹¹⁴

Children and young people also note that friends can also be a source of difficulty, distraction and conflict at times:

"No (friends aren't important)), it is easier to get through school without distractions." ¹¹⁵

"Friendships change over time, it's important not to be antagonistic to other people, but having friends isn't that important." ¹¹⁶

"In Year 4 there is more drama and arguing..." ¹¹⁷

For some children and young people, online friends can be as important as offline friends. Online communication can provide an important outlet for some children and young people who may find it difficult to connect with others in their school or community:

"...(O)nlne friends replaced friends, gave me a social aspect that I was lacking at school." ¹¹⁸

"I find it hard speaking about things. I think it's just the way I am. Usually I find it easier online." ¹¹⁹

Children and young people also spoke positively about community and a way of engaging with more people beyond their circle of friends. Young people have said that they enjoy or would enjoy :

"(B)eing involved in my community." ¹²⁰

"(M)eeting new people." ¹²¹

"(T)rying new things" ¹²²

"(H)aving a say" ¹²³

"(Meeting) more kids" ¹²⁴

"(Going to) more cultural festivals" ¹²⁵

Findings

- **Community events that facilitate opportunities for young people to meet and connect with other children and young people are important.**
- **The targeted dissemination of information about these types of community events to children and young people is critical and should be increased.**





EDUCATION

Education is one of the most important aspects of the life of a child or young person. For the majority of children and young people it is the activity that occupies the greatest amount of their time and effort. It is also an activity that is important to children and young people as it is focused around developing their skills for the future. Young people spoke about the positive aspects of education:

"I like being 10 because at school we get to do lots of great subjects like maths, writing, reading and phys-ed." ¹²⁶

"Being 10 in WA to me means more responsibility and harder school work. For me it is a new school and I have already made so many new friends." ¹²⁷

"Being 10 is like lots of challenges set for you and at school you get to learn new subjects and you have lots of friends there. I like being 10 because you get to learn new things every day!" ¹²⁸

"Education makes you grow as a person, determines my future, and broadens knowledge." ¹²⁹

"School's centre of many lives." ¹³⁰

"School which gives you qualifications." ¹³¹

Children and young people have spoken about teachers who are a positive influence on their lives, particularly those who care about their students and take an interest in their issues. This includes listening to the issues that children and young people have raised and helping them when they are having difficulties with school. This helpfulness from teachers can often make children and young people feel more comfortable and much happier with their lives:

"(Good teachers) check in on you if something is bothering you." ¹³²

"(Good teachers...) care about personal things – make you feel noticed." ¹³³

"(Good teachers) ... talk to you about other things not just school work. They include you in conversations and they smile." ¹³⁴

"(My teacher) is easy to get along with and he is easy to talk to and he makes an effort to take an interest in you." ¹³⁵

"(Good teachers) listen to you." ¹³⁶

"The teacher I like is very helpful, makes me feel comfortable and helps me throughout the situation I'm in." ¹³⁷

(Answer to "What makes you feel safe"?)
 "Teachers, counsellors, nurse at school." ¹³⁸

"(Good teachers) help me be confident about who I am." ¹³⁹

"(I like teachers who) treat us like adults not kids, to help us when we leave school." ¹⁴⁰

"(Teachers need) a bit more support from the students, not degrading teachers before they even do anything to them." ¹⁴¹

"(I'd like) every teacher to be kind, helpful, funny, amazing, awesome." ¹⁴²

"Good teachers who help and test you beforehand to see where you are at and work at different levels." ¹⁴³

"My teacher never gave up on me. I told him I was in care and he said – do it (homework) over lunch and bring it to me at the end of the day." ¹⁴⁴

"I think maybe teachers should ask students if they like what they are learning. Also I think teachers should ask students what they want to learn and teach the students that. I think teachers should sometimes in lessons teach students what life is like to be an adult and see what is ahead of them in life." ¹⁴⁵

"For teachers to truly and sincerely care to make the school better. To do something serious about bullying, to care about the physical and mental health of students. To do something about the consequences of students to let them learn discipline." ¹⁴⁶

Other children and young people spoke about difficulties with teachers:

“So you’re not on your teacher’s bad side.”¹⁴⁷

“Because if you don’t get along with them you will get in trouble a lot.”¹⁴⁸

“(Teachers) go off at students.”¹⁴⁹

“Some teachers get really annoyed at little kids for not following instructions and they keep forgetting. They’re kids, they can’t do everything right.”¹⁵⁰

“There are lots of kids in our classes and (the teacher) is too busy to help all of us.”¹⁵¹

A number of children and young people have raised concerns that education is not delivered in a way that suits their needs. They also expressed concern for students with learning difficulties, noting that further assistance would support them to get the most of school:

“I would attempt to implement better programs within our education system, particular in primary and high school, that work on making school and life easier and better for children who are disengaged, who are mentally or physically disabled, or who are living in out-of-home care etc.”¹⁵²

“I wanted a teacher’s aide but didn’t get one but they wouldn’t give me one, I’m not very good at my work you know.”¹⁵³

“Extra teaching support in class for children who can’t keep up.”¹⁵⁴

“We should be placing a greater emphasis on nurturing an environment where individuals feel comfortable to work on their personal skills & assets, as well as feel comfortable in their own skin – culture, gender, socio-economic standing; promoting self-love & positive mental health.”¹⁵⁵

“(E)ducation is the most important way to cross bridges (metaphorically) however many kids don’t enjoy it. This results in kids dropping out and not pursuing higher education. The things that kids hate are repetition, long hours, homework, etc. People now know finishing education causes homelessness and poverty. The way to change this is to change our curriculum (see the Finnish education system statistics).”¹⁵⁶

“I don’t think the way people are taught in mainstream school is always suitable for everyone. It should be less regimented to allow kids to go where they want to go and be what they want to be.”¹⁵⁷

“More effort needs to be put into the schooling system. So many kids are left behind so I think that more support needs to be given to kids with learning difficulties such as dyslexia and so on. I also think that our current education system needs some services updating cause there are so many children suffering because of it! Also more support for teenagers with mental disorders such as anxiety, depression as a result of school and home life.”¹⁵⁸

The pressure to succeed at school is a major source of anxiety for children and young people. This pressure can come from a number of different sources. Parental pressure was raised by a number of children and young people who felt that their parents expected them to be ‘excellent’ in all subjects or compared their results against the success of other children. Students also placed pressure on themselves to succeed and associated anxiety with failing in the current job market or getting into tertiary education. Young people are aware of the current level of youth unemployment and the various other difficulties young people are having in trying to successfully transition to the workforce. These difficulties provide young people with anxiety about their ability to succeed while still at school:

“Doing well at school is crucial, as it is a gateway into achieving my goal.”¹⁵⁹

“Too often there’s pressure put on you about what do you want to do. There’s a lot of pressure to have it all figured out.”¹⁶⁰



"With the current state of the job market and housing market, young NSW people may feel paranoid about their futures."¹⁶¹

"There is huge pressure. People are scared of failing."¹⁶²

"Pressure, excellence, making someone stressed or anxious not to disappoint."¹⁶³

"They repetitively say you have to get A+ on all subjects."¹⁶⁴

"Knowing their child's ability not what someone else can do."¹⁶⁵

"Less tests in lower grades of school, there are far too many tests at a young age, there are plenty in high school and University, so just let kids be kids."¹⁶⁶

"(They should do a) revision of the HSC and the pressure that it puts on youth."¹⁶⁷

Workload is another issue raised by children and young people. Many spoke about the amount of schoolwork, homework, assessments and exams they are expected to complete:

"We (need) more of a break so our brains have more time to rest."¹⁶⁸

"There is so much homework, it freaks out most students."¹⁶⁹

"The HSC is a terrible way of assessing peoples' potential and ability and causes a lot of stress, anxiety, and other mental health problems."¹⁷⁰

FINDINGS

- **They support building on the skills of teachers which will provide positive experiences to children and young people.**
- **Further assistance for children and young people who have difficulty engaging in education is critical.**
- **There should be research done into the nature, causes and coping support systems around educational pressure.**



EMPLOYMENT

Children and young people across Australia have raised employment as an important issue, highlighting in particular the lack of employment opportunities that are available to them:

"(We need)... more job opportunities."¹⁷¹

"(We need) more employment opportunities for adolescents, as politicians always say they are going to fix it and nothing happens. I would like to see change in this soon as it is becoming really damaging for the state's economy."¹⁷²

"(We need a) more open society to expand job choices for younger people, regardless of age and gender."¹⁷³

"We need more opportunities to open doors for our future."¹⁷⁴

"Although I do have a job I believe there is not enough opportunities for teens to get jobs or resources to help find jobs for teens."¹⁷⁵

"(The problem is) the fact that no one is willing to hire and provide these hard working individuals with a chance to prove their ability, instead the focus is based on experience."¹⁷⁶

"(I want to) grow up and do something good so that people, even non-Aboriginal people will see me as a good Aboriginal person doing something great."¹⁷⁷



"(The government...) should have a whole bunch of employers and give them tax breaks to hire us." ¹⁷⁸

"(The government should...) pay employers the amount of money it costs to keep us in here to them, it would help us more." ¹⁷⁹

"What will help? Get us employed." ¹⁸⁰

"Jobs are so hard to find, and most are low hours with low pay." ¹⁸¹

"Too many graduates not getting high paying jobs they expected." ¹⁸²

"I have applied for hundreds of jobs, and I don't even get a response." ¹⁸³

"Who the hell is going to employ a resi-care kid." ¹⁸⁴

Children and young people say there is a lack of employment opportunities available to them. This includes both part-time and casual positions which would be suitable around study commitments as well as full-time opportunities for those who have left school. They also feel frustrated by their inability to enter into the workforce due to their lack of previous work experience or other qualifications:

"(I) don't have experience." ¹⁸⁵

"It's hard to build up a resume" ¹⁸⁶

"Certificates are expensive. I can't afford to get a bunch of certificates." ¹⁸⁷

"How can I get experience if I can't get a job to gain the experience?" ¹⁸⁸

"I think there should be more work training initiatives to help young people find employment." ¹⁸⁹

"Programs that will allow young people to find employment, incentives for companies to hire teenagers." ¹⁹⁰

FINDINGS

- **Programs to develop employment opportunities for children and young people are needed.**

LIFE SKILLS

Across Australia, many children and young people feel as if they lack the necessary skills in order to succeed in society. Children and young people have expressed the desire for education that is more relevant to their everyday experience, including lessons on cooking, shopping, managing money, paying bills and taxes, applying for home loans or rental properties, navigating career pathways, interviewing for jobs and resume writing. They want:

"Life skills, learn how to cook, learn how to live, learn to get a job." ¹⁹¹

"Learning about life at school." ¹⁹²

"Teaching more about Australian society." ¹⁹³

"Teaching more life skills in school." ¹⁹⁴

"Usually (we) don't know what we need to know until it is too late. How do I move out of home? What do I need to organise to pay bills? How do I manage my money properly?" ¹⁹⁵

"We need some more programs in school and (Juvenile Justice) unit. More cooking." ¹⁹⁶

"I have no idea about how to look after myself, no idea at all." ¹⁹⁷

"I'm worried that I won't be able to sort out everything that I need to do. Cooking, paying bills, looking for work." ¹⁹⁸



"Assistance for employment opportunities." ¹⁹⁹

"Identifying skills that kids possess at school to help them choose jobs." ²⁰⁰

"Increased education on things in life that are actually important, e.g. taxes and housing loans etc. We never learn the important stuff in school." ²⁰¹

"Change the way education is taught to children. Teach them life skills." ²⁰²

"Easy information about starting work and how taxes work." ²⁰³

"That kids need to have the process of future careers 'uni, etc' explained to them younger and in more depth." ²⁰⁴

FINDINGS

- **Children and young people would value further education in life skills related to household management, financial literacy and vocational guidance, preferably but not exclusively in a school environment.**



ACTIVITIES

Activities are a source of happiness for children and young people across Australia. There is a great diversity in activities they enjoy which include reading, watching TV or the internet, playing video games, and socialising:

"I like watching YouTube and television and playing video games. I also like reading and drawing."²⁰⁵

"Being 10 in WA is the best because we can go to see cool places like Adventure World and community parks."²⁰⁶

"Drama opportunities give students a chance to meet new people and break out of their comfort zones."²⁰⁷

"(Gaming is an opportunity to) meet people who enjoy what I enjoy even if we never say a word."²⁰⁸

"(Books)bring joy."²⁰⁹

"(Social media is about) chatting with friends (and talking)to my family that live far away."²¹⁰

"The things us boys need are activities that are positive like music, rapping and writing songs."²¹¹

"Well run community activities that are established with a solid reputation e.g. local sports club, Girl Guides and Scouts."²¹²



Many young people said their favourite activities revolve around outdoor experiences and sport:

"I love riding my bike around the Swan River."²¹³

"Sport makes me feel fit and fruit makes me feel healthy and strong. Things that make me happy are my family, friends, and being ten."²¹⁴

(Riding skateboards, scooters and bikes is important because)it keeps you fit, gives you something to do and (you) meet new people every day."²¹⁵

"I love playing cricket down at the beach with my family and friends. I love the warm climate."²¹⁶

"This is my family and me. We are going on a hike on the weekend. Note the cave that we are about to explore."²¹⁷

Children and young people have often commented that they would like access to more activities. They feel that activities keep them busy and healthy and give them something to do:

"Sports and AFL get you active and make sure that you're not a lazy couch potato."²¹⁸

"Team sports because people get active and meet new people."²¹⁹

[Sport is important because] "it keeps me happy", "it's something that's part of me" [and because] "I will be healthy."²²⁰

"It would be good... if there was more out of school activities such as different sports, dance, movies."²²¹

"(There should be...) more recreational activities. These places will benefit others, offer more jobs for kids and keep them out of trouble, instead of just sitting at home doing stuff that they shouldn't be doing."²²²

"(There should be) recreational sports groups intended for older youth who are new to the sport (such as soccer for those over 12 who have not played before). So they need not be embarrassed in front of those who have been playing since early childhood."²²³

Other children and young people spoke about how activities are often expensive and unavailable to children and young people:

"(We need) funding for sport – because it is too expensive."²²⁴

"(We need) more free after-school activities."²²⁵

Children and young people also discussed the importance of socialising. They often mentioned that there are limited places for them to socialise, given that schools are typically not available after hours and few businesses cater for children and young people:

"(We would like more) places to hang."²²⁶

"More places to hang out."²²⁷

FINDINGS

- Initiatives that promote access to activities for children and young people including sport and arts are of value.
- Improved access to spaces designed specifically for children and young people to socialise is needed.





ENVIRONMENT

Children and young people across Australia frequently talk about their environment, often highlighting the positive aspects of where they live:

"Being 10 in Western Australia is amazing because we're very healthy and lucky to have all the things we have and not be in another country. I love climbing trees and watching the sunset because I feel the breeze and the smell of mum cooking dinner."²²⁸

"The beach has always been a part of my life. Swimming in it makes me feel special again. I love all the beautiful sea creatures, and I hope they don't get hurt. I don't mind surfing. I love the beach."²²⁹

"I like WA because it's multicultural and people get along in a safe and beautiful environment."²³⁰

"Nature and fresh air - I've always like going outside, parks, beach, being around everything that's natural and not man made and made of concrete. I like being around the colours, everything is so bright, everything feels so fresh in your imagination but in real life... it makes me feel like I'm escaping from everything in that moment, nothing else that bothers me, nothing from the past, it's just the sun and the plants."²³¹

"Nature – getting back and being present. Helps reduce the stress that you feeling from daily life (like school)." ²³²

Young people have also discussed their concerns for the natural environment and raised issues such as climate change and diminishing natural resources:

"We need to respect the planet that we live on. It won't last forever and unless we come up with some solutions we're going to run out of resources." ²³³

"Cutting down on (greenhouse gas) means a healthy life, that's the biggest thing I would change." ²³⁴

"(I'd like if) people respected the place and took more care about the environment." ²³⁵

"People should be more environmentally friendly and worry about global warming." ²³⁶

"We need to learn to care for the earth. At the moment, WE are the cause of the all the problems. We must look at how what we do at an individual level and how this impacts globally. I know that not many young people passionately think about this so I just believe you must focus on this. This is our home and we are the people of tomorrow. We must be empowered to protect the planet before it's too late." ²³⁷

"Saving all Animals. Animals get killed by

pollution every year. People kill animals to sell in black markets." ²³⁸

"We need to keep the place healthy and clean, the animals and their habitat make the world a better place." ²³⁹

"Help the environment because kids might not get to see extinct animals." ²⁴⁰

FINDINGS

- **Children and young people should be consulted on environmental issues such as climate change, natural resources, and biodiversity.**

TRANSPORT

Transportation is a major issue impacting on the lives of children and young people across Australia. Some children and young people spoke positively about the public transport system:

"Public transport in terms of opal cards have made it easier to travel."²⁴¹

"The free/discounted student transport is very convenient for day to day commutes to and from school."²⁴²

"The train system is very good and reliable."²⁴³

Others have identified problems with transport, particularly issues with cost and lack of reliability:

"Buses are too expensive and infrequent; therefore deter people from using those services."²⁴⁴

"Some people don't have money so catching a bus isn't an option for them, also their parents might not have a licence so they are stuck doing the same repetitive activities."²⁴⁵

"The public transport system (is) too dangerous and not reliable enough."²⁴⁶



"Trains need to cater for the large amounts of school children who use them in the morning and evening, i.e. stop skipping the stops where many high schools are located." ²⁴⁷

"Transport is too slow and inconsistent, not punctual, off schedule, unreliable, 'shifty' people." ²⁴⁸

"I think that the public transport should be made easier and cheaper for children as it is very expensive and hard to get around sometimes." ²⁴⁹

"You can never rely on public transport." ²⁵⁰

"The transporting issues we have in our transport to school. Today the train was delayed so many people in my school missed exams." ²⁵¹

"Free transport for uni kids." ²⁵²

"Better public transport - trains rarely stop at small stations near high schools, could at least make all stop trains in the morning and afternoon." ²⁵³

Findings

- **Further assessment of the impact that availability, reliability, suitability and affordability of public transport has on children and young people should be undertaken.**



WELLBEING

The concept of wellbeing crosses physical, mental and lifestyle boundaries. This section reflects on mental health, healthy eating and access to basic services.

MENTAL HEALTH

One of the frequently mentioned concerns of children and young people across Australia is mental health:

"It's a really big part of your life no matter what age you are. A lot of problems can come from being mentally (un)healthy."²⁵⁴

"Protective factors need to be developed on how to positively influence self-esteem, how to connect with family, community and culture. We can use culture to harness positive influence, harnessing our cultural practices as links to community, family, building resilience."²⁵⁵

"More education on mental health to help get rid of the stigma and when to seek help (and) how you can get help. Better school counsellors – professionals take students (and their privacy) seriously."²⁵⁶

"(We need...) 'Safe Schools'. Health education. Talking about mental illness & gender / sexuality / bodily diversity so that we don't think we're broken and know where to go to find accepting communities (please)."²⁵⁷

"More education in mental illness." ²⁵⁸

"Take incredibly seriously young people presenting with mental health/drug problems – appoint them psychiatrists committed to seeing them regularly." ²⁵⁹

"Schools should offer more support and be more prepared to help with mental health." ²⁶⁰

"The reason I think we need more 'Reach Out' facilities is because I have know people with mental health problems, and Port Lincoln needs more support. Everybody has a risk of getting depression, and don't know where to go for help. If there were more places to go for help, everybody would be happier and feel more safe." ²⁶¹

"I think we need a dedicated mental health service for young people who have left care, or are in care." ²⁶²

A number of different issues were raised by children and young people around mental health, including suicide:

"We are all part of the healing, doing the healing with family and friends around us. It's everyone's bit to do what we can to prevent suicide." ²⁶³

"(We need...) to prioritise Mental Health Awareness in schools and in workplaces to decrease the amount of people out

there who do feel alone and give them a support system, to allow them to realise life is worth living and that they are special and needed." ²⁶⁴

School stress was a major theme in the area of mental health:

"Students need a balance of academic focus, and personal wellbeing, instead of focusing on only one which can often affect a students overall performance. Things such as mental health may be promoted, and this ties in with academic success." ²⁶⁵

HEALTHY EATING

On the issue of banning foods linked to obesity, such as sugary drinks, children and young people were divided. While some were in favour of bans, other saw them as restrictive and ineffective. Another strategy suggested by children and young people was portion management through smaller packaging sizes, limits on the sale of items from certain locations, like schools and sporting venues, and promoting that some foods should only be consumed occasionally.

"...(S)ugary drinks should be banned from schools and sporting grounds. Primarily due to it being a critical first step towards dealing with the larger issue of trying to deal with the problem of childhood obesity." ²⁶⁶

"If the idea the soft drink is a 'sometimes food' is to be reinforced, it should be limited at school as this is where the drinks are most

accessible to children and young people, as we spend all day almost every day at school." ²⁶⁷

"By decreasing portion size of the sugary drinks such as selling a 220mL milk in comparison to a 600mL milk it will encourage a smaller intake of bad substances such as sugar." ²⁶⁸

"We collectively agree that based on the evidence shown today, sugary drinks are bad for our health and therefore we believe that they should be limited. Limited being the key word." ²⁶⁹

"We cannot ban these drinks from children; we need to teach them to make their own decisions for good health." ²⁷⁰

"Government should encourage healthy choices, not set bans. They can do this by regulating sales." ²⁷¹

"Banning sugary drinks at school may lead to a 'black market'." ²⁷²

"Health (both physical and mental) – living healthy expands life time and stops students from suffering illness – I do AFL 5 times a week and have a healthy diet and also go to the doctors for a check up 2 each year – gives a friendship circle out of school." ²⁷³



Children and young people also felt that

education is an important strategy for handling obesity:

"We believe there is a lack of education in the effects of sugary drinks. By educating children and young people, we will be able to restrict children from drinking sugary drinks in school and possibly, outside of school as well." ²⁷⁴

"Media should also be used to educate children and young people on the negative effects of sugary drinks..." ²⁷⁵

SOCIAL INEQUALITY

In discussions about wellbeing, children and young people also raised issues around poverty, inequality, and other forms of socio-economic disadvantage.

Some children and young people talked about lacking money. They identified numerous areas in which the lack of financial resources inhibited their ability to lead the lives they see others have:

"Giving all kids education." ²⁷⁶

"A fairer share of money." ²⁷⁷

Children and young people also worried about homelessness, access to affordable housing and their future:

"Please let homeless people have a job, it affects me when I see them on streets asking for money. Please don't drink alcohol, in my opinion people shouldn't drink until they're 21 if you drink alcohol earlier it will ruin your education..." ²⁷⁸

"Eliminating homelessness." ²⁷⁹

"I deserve to be treated nicely and lovely. I deserve to have a Home. I deserve to have a job and money. I deserve a life. I deserve to have a lovely life." ²⁸⁰

"Housing prices - I am afraid for my future." ²⁸¹

"Most of us need permanent housing. We only get given a place for a certain amount of time ... I don't think there's a lot of options for young mums." ²⁸²

"Finding anywhere (to stay) is hard, somewhere safe almost impossible." ²⁸³

Children and young people also expressed concerns about being able to access food if they are in difficult circumstances:

"I have the right to have food and to sleep in a house." ²⁸⁴

"Access to cheaper/free food, safe community, more homeless shelters for children/ young adolescents." ²⁸⁵

"After rent is taken out, I have no money left to buy other things I need like food." ²⁸⁶

"People struggle on money...it's also they struggle with food, so they have to steal food." ²⁸⁷

"I have somewhere to live, but I am lucky to put food on the table." ²⁸⁸

"Beyond food and rent, I can't afford much at all. It makes it very hard to find a job. I'm stuck." ²⁸⁹

Children and young people across Australia have spoken about services and how they can assist those who are experiencing difficulties to achieve greater levels of wellbeing. Many children and young people spoke positively of their experience with services and workers who went above and beyond to help them:

"(They) stuck their neck out." ²⁹⁰

"(They) bent the rules." ²⁹¹

"Health and mental health services." ²⁹²

"I believe the support groups, like beyond blue, and head space are working well for younger people, as it seems more and more people are coming out with depression and these organisations help." ²⁹³

"Support is always available to youth for any problems or issues that arise and most are available 24/7." ²⁹⁴

"I believe the support groups, e.g. beyond blue, and head space and working well for younger people, as it seems more and more people are coming out with depression and these organisations help!" ²⁹⁵

Some children and young people spoke about

negative experience with services, reporting under-resourcing and variable quality of workers:

"I was very depressed and suicidal and I went to my high school counsellor and said I wanted to kill myself and they said come back Monday. I was kicked out of home and lived on the streets." ²⁹⁶

"One psych for 400 students is not enough. It's absurd." ²⁹⁷

"Schools are a safe place for most kids, but (staff) need to understand, work with and support young people with challenging behaviours better." ²⁹⁸

"There were many times I needed counselling because of my clinical depression and the people I tried to seek help from were awful to me." ²⁹⁹

Many children and young people expressed a desire for greater availability and access to services:

"In the early parenting days I needed help with Centrelink and child care options as I didn't understand what was available to me. I would have benefited greatly from access to this information through a social worker." ³⁰⁰

"The department of housing and government services need to be more readily available." ³⁰¹

"(There needs to be) an improvement to housing services, their availability and the times it takes to find somewhere, especially in cases involving domestic violence."³⁰²

"(There needs to be) more mental health education."³⁰³

"(There needs to be) more people understanding what people are going through."³⁰⁴

"(There needs to be) easier transition from youth to adult services."³⁰⁵

Findings

- **Australian Children's Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates and others should continue their efforts to capture the voices of children and young people across Australia.**
- **Initiatives promoting positive messages and reducing negative stereotypes of children and young people should be created.**



EMPOWERMENT

The ability to participate and have their voice heard is an important issue for children and young people. This is a key principle of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child³⁰⁶ and an important aspect of empowering children and young people.

Children and young people want to have their views considered when deciding on issues that impact their lives. Many children and young people reported positive experiences in being able to express their views and the idea that their voice should be heard:

“All children have a voice and a right to do certain things. We all want our voice to be heard and our opinions to be taken seriously.”³⁰⁷

“Talking is important.”³⁰⁸

“I do need to talk with you. I need to let you know what is important to me, to get what I want and need and to be kept safe.”³⁰⁹

(Answer to “What makes you feel safe?”)

“Someone to talk to.”³¹⁰

“It’s important that young people have an opportunity to talk about this stuff but it has to be done safely so, you know, it doesn’t make life worse for them ... But I think that even though adults are scared to talk about this stuff because it is uncomfortable, it has to be done if things are going to change.”³¹¹

"[I] don't want someone else making the decisions about what I want."³¹²

"How do you know what I want if you don't ask me? Or don't listen when I tell you?"³¹³

"We have 'equal thoughts': don't just think that adults have the big thoughts. Kids have big thoughts too."³¹⁴

"A good society values the opinions of young people, even if they are inexperienced."³¹⁵

"Not just popular kids get a say or participate - everybody is equal."³¹⁶

"We should all listen respectfully. It does not matter if you are young or old. Your ideas may be very good and are worth listening to... They don't always have to agree but at least let them be heard."³¹⁷

A number of children and young people also expressed concern that their opinions are not respected and their voices go unheard:

"Even if I can get my views out there, I'm not always listened to."³¹⁸

"Parents don't care about kids' opinions because they think kids know nothing."³¹⁹

"I think that adults think they know what kids need to be safe but I don't think that they do. They base it on what they remember from when they were kids and the world is different now. So they need to talk to kids and find out what it means to them."³²⁰

"(I) need to be able to communicate – no-one to talk to – need person to talk to."³²¹

"I'm 20 now and this is the first time I've ever been asked to do anything like this (consultation)."³²²

"It's hard to have your voice heard. It's hard for people to notice you. I was never really noticed until about a year ago. I think I want to help kids get noticed a lot earlier – so they can get the help they need at a much quicker rate."³²³

"Encouraging local Councils to talk to the average teen not just the high achievers or the troubled teens to get feedback."³²⁴

Some children and young people reported that they had limited opportunities to speak about what they wanted. Children and young people have also emphasised that adults do not always care or listen to their ideas or views. They have pointed out that the needs of children today can be very different from the needs of adults when they were children, and have noted that many adults do not feel comfortable talking with

children and young people. Children and young people want to be listened to and respected by older generations and treated as full citizens:

"Lots of adults don't care enough about kids and this stuff is going to keep happening. Until they see us as having good ideas and believe us (when things go wrong) nothing will change."³²⁵

"Young people need to be accepted, there is a stereotype that we do not try and that we are all bad influences in society. This is not true and can cause us to feel rejected."³²⁶

"Adults can jump to conclusions, even police, not just parents. Adults need to listen properly."³²⁷

"I believe that you should start listening to younger children. It's not just the adults that have a say. The children have a say and should always have an opinion and say."³²⁸

"Life would be better if we weren't put in a cliché box by the elder generations – "Oh those teenagers don't know what they are saying" or "oh those kids always drinking, clubbing, pranking" etc. People say that these pre conceived ideas won't happen if kids stop misbehaving but it's the other way around. Kids will stop misbehaving if people stop expecting them to."³²⁹

"We need a society where the opinions of young people are valued. We are the voice

of the future and it is important to provide guidance, support and to acknowledge the efforts made."³³⁰

"Adults to treat children with respect, all children should have the right of opinion, their opinion should be taken with respect and seriousness."³³¹

Children and young people report that they feel stereotyped and that the media often portrays them in a negative light. That is, that they do not know anything, only care about having fun or are generally a bad influence on society. These stereotypes may hinder adults listening to children and young people as well as the willingness of children and young people to speak up about issues that concern them.

Children and young people across Australia suggested ways in which they could be better engaged:

"Talk to kids personally with kids in school or home."³³²

"(Use) peers to talk about these issues etc."³³³

"(Communicate...) through other forms of social media. Definitely on the internet though."³³⁴

"Ask the kid how they are feeling through something they like to do. Like, six year olds like to draw or paint."³³⁵

"I want to be represented in politics by a real young person, not some 30 year-old who has no idea about my life."³³⁶

"When there's an interest we have, adults could get involved in it, even if it's not their thing. We have to do what adults do even if we don't like it."³³⁷

Findings

- **Australian Children's Commissioners, Guardians and others should continue their efforts to capture the voices of children and young people across Australia.**
- **Initiatives promoting positive messages and reducing negative stereotypes of children and young people should be created.**
- **A variety of communication methods and media should be used to promote improved access to information to children and young people.**



DOING IT TOUGH

Across Australia, children and young people can find themselves in a variety of difficult situations. These issues affect the lives of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people.

Children and young people in the Juvenile Justice system, for example, have highlighted a number of concerns about their experiences in detention. A lack of information was one of the reoccurring themes for children and young people in detention:

"(We're told) nothing at all...Staff treat us like adults and expect us to know our rights – which we do not."³³⁸

"... I don't know how to (raise concerns), I get confused ..."³³⁹

Another common issue was the feeling that they were not being listened to:

"I feel like our voices are not being heard."³⁴⁰

"We are still children who have made mistakes and want to be heard"³⁴¹

The conditions in detention centres and the standard of health, education and personal care services were also frequently mentioned by children and young people in detention. In some cases, they offered very positive feedback about the support available in detention, especially with regard to education:

"This is the only school I have been to since year seven."³⁴²

"(My teacher here is) always there to give you options and be honest."³⁴³



"Good teachers who help and test you beforehand to see where you are at and work at different levels."³⁴⁴

In other cases, children and young people expressed concern about the conditions and programs in detention:

"I've been treated unfairly and I want to get it fixed 'cos its affecting me, and food and lunch should be better fresh not soggy."³⁴⁵

"I have been waiting patiently about the health services, it took 2 ½ months to get something to happen about my feet and I feel it's a breach of my human rights."³⁴⁶

"Sometimes it gets really hot in the rooms and the fans we get are not keeping us cool."³⁴⁷

"(You have to) work up to get shoes / shampoo / conditioner / moisturising cream. These should be given to you. Not a privilege."³⁴⁸

"When you first come in you can't buy certain things. Takes 3 months for shoes. (I) need a watch. Been here for 18 months still don't know the time."³⁴⁹

"Being in a room with a toilet and a sink only. It just makes you more angry that you're in there, that you're going to be in there for a while. I don't think it works. We need some more programs in school and unit. More cooking."³⁵⁰

"(I need) school at my own pace."³⁵¹

"(I need) school which gives you qualifications."³⁵²

"Freedom of religion: I had to go through a lot of s**t for the centre to recognise my conversion to Islam."³⁵³

"(I need) family, to be able to talk to family, have them visit."³⁵⁴

"There should be another unit (for young people who are facing mental health issues) as we have exposure to that and it is really sad."³⁵⁵

"There should be another girl's unit to allow time away from the main unit."³⁵⁶

Children and young people in juvenile detention also demonstrated concern with the application of rules, including occasional confinement or isolation:

"We have to stop the violence in this centre. Then they could come to work. This centre is run by violence. They use restraint(s) to stop the violence."³⁵⁷

"(Isolation) That's the one issue for me, that stresses me out."³⁵⁸

"Isolation is fine but should be one hour max. Long periods are just ridiculous... just a place to calm down then back."³⁵⁹

"Reading material, books to read in isolation. They say we're allowed to have books but they never give them to us. They say they don't want us sticking the pages over the camera and that. I think we should be given a chance. If we do that with the pages (stick them over the camera), then take the books off us." ³⁶⁰

"They take points for the smallest things like, didn't tuck shirt in before you get to the door etc." ³⁶¹

"Some staff, they can change the points if they don't like us". ³⁶²

"Respect – Because we aren't all bad people just cos we are locked up, so if they show respect we will." ³⁶³

"Seeing the case manager, a lot." ³⁶⁴

Children and young people in detention spoke about the impact of feeling isolated and victimised while in detention:

"If the complaint is about someone criticising you, the complaint will be seen a snitching comment in their eyes so it's safer to keep it to yourself." ³⁶⁵

"They treat me like I'm someone heaps bad." ³⁶⁶

"Coming here has made me hate the government and police more." ³⁶⁷

"Can't be locked in room all the time, e.g. not enough staff so locked down (23 hours), (I get) anxious, angry." ³⁶⁸

"Because they can rip us off just because they can, it's on their personal opinion." ³⁶⁹

"Because they expect too much." ³⁷⁰

"Nothing happens when you make a complaint anyway." ³⁷¹

"We get marked down so easily for stupid reasons." ³⁷²

"The staff will target me." ³⁷³

Many children and young people also raised concerns about their life after detention, such as how to deal with the stigma of being in detention and how they will go about getting employment:

"I don't know if I should tell people I was in jail." ³⁷⁴

"I would really like to work straight away, when I get out." ³⁷⁵

"What programs do we do that help our life?" ³⁷⁶

Young parents are another group of vulnerable young people who may experience difficulties and social disadvantage. They speak about the difficulties of experiencing financial, educational and service restrictions :

"Live in my shoes for one month and I'm sure you will make a lot of changes to your health, social support and education systems. Financially I only just manage to survive on good weeks, on a bad week I find myself eating toast for dinner and walking 5-8kms to the shopping centre. It's about

time you try before you buy – that goes for everything!”³⁷⁷

“All young mums would appreciate a little more financial help and housing help without being judged.”³⁷⁸

“Listen to young people. Stop cutting funding for organisations. Make organisations more accessible and easier to find.”³⁷⁹

“I’m doing a bridging course to go to uni and want to be a midwife. Studying is hard with two kids.”³⁸⁰

“I’m too worried about legal stuff to focus on TAFE.”³⁸¹

“(My goal is to) get a job as disability teacher’s aid, get my own home, so I have something to leave my children.”³⁸²

“I want to finish my childcare course because I had to stop when I was pregnant.”³⁸³

Many young mothers talked about experiencing discrimination when it was discovered that they were pregnant. Young mothers have reported that they were excluded from education and employment:

“The school told me to leave when I got pregnant.”³⁸⁴

“(College) was supportive but I couldn’t cope and I couldn’t get there so I dropped out.”³⁸⁵



"I was at school but by the time I was twenty weeks I left because I was in and out of hospital. I asked school for (home) work but they didn't provide any support." ³⁸⁶

"I was scared school was going to kick me out because I was pregnant." ³⁸⁷

"I am going to try online, because I can't go to school with my baby." ³⁸⁸

"I lost my job when they found out I was pregnant, I was only six weeks. They asked if I was pregnant or just putting on weight. I got a text message saying I'd lost my job after they found out." ³⁸⁹

Stigma was one of the major issues for young parents, with many young people feeling judged as bad or inferior parents:

"I was getting hate from other students." ³⁹⁰

"I was working when I got pregnant. I was in a good place, but when I became pregnant it just spiralled downwards." ³⁹¹

"Sometimes people say that they are better mothers than me." ³⁹²

"My cousin was pregnant when she went to school with me, so I thought it was normal. She wanted to go back to the community because she wasn't judged there." ³⁹³

"People feel as though they have the right to ask you personal and intimate questions.

Not just you, but often your children too e.g. why you were so young or is the father around." ³⁹⁴

"The only reason people don't go to mainstream school or don't go to education at all or anywhere like hospitals or anything, it's because there is [a] sense of judgement and people who feel judged don't feel welcome." ³⁹⁵

"There is not really any support for young men. It can be upsetting to hear that other males aren't supportive. A support group for dads would have been useful, but I don't know how many there are." ³⁹⁶

"I am so scared that if I mess up they will take him away from me, just like I was." ³⁹⁷

Children and young people in out-of-home care also report experiencing stigma while seeking respect and opportunity. They spoke about needing holistic services to address whole-of-life needs, and not just a single issue in their life (e.g. housing, substance abuse, etc.):

"It's not just having no parents – that's just the start of it. We have to deal with the government and social workers and lots of other people and bullying." ³⁹⁸

"That we are more than what you see on a piece of paper and more than just another name/ number. We too need all the support to live a fulfilled and accomplished life. We too need better access to resources to mental health and after-care services. We need you to be open and honest with us

about our lives. We need you to be 110% dedicated to us, or there is no point working for us." ³⁹⁹

"We're singled out as low income, trailer trash, holey clothes." ⁴⁰⁰

"I am not the same as every other young person in care." ⁴⁰¹

"Don't treat us like pieces of junk, or like someone they are looking after just for the money." ⁴⁰²

"I just want to be where I'm safe and wanted, can see my friends and have a good education. I hope one day I can live with mum again." ⁴⁰³

"Making sure that all children in SA have a safe family and home. If not in a safe home should be taking. There should be better inspections of the families and the home so there is no danger for children. There should be) ... programs for foster parents to get support." ⁴⁰⁴

"Help young people on their feet once they leave care as they don't have any support after 18 years of age." ⁴⁰⁵

Findings

- **Further efforts should be made to reduce stigma and stereotypes associated with children and young people in vulnerable circumstances, such as those in the juvenile justice system or out-of-home care, young parents or young people with experiences of violence or homelessness.**
- **Service provision should embrace a whole-of-life approach to addressing the needs of children and young people.**

CULTURE

While the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are present within each of the sections above, a particularly strong theme arising from our discussions with Indigenous children and young people was the importance of access to culture:

" Culture is everything!"⁴⁰⁶

" Your culture is in your heart and you have to respect it."⁴⁰⁷

" (Culture) tells me who I am and makes me feel good. It makes me feel like I belong somewhere."⁴⁰⁸

" ...Our culture is so good because it's the oldest one in the whole world. It is important to me to hang onto the information because I don't want us to lose our culture."⁴⁰⁹

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people we heard from spoke very highly of the cultural programs that they had participated in and called for further opportunities to engage in cultural learning:

" For me (what's important is) learning about my culture and how I relate to it and being able to spend time learning about my culture with my grandmother and family and [to] be shown the different types of things and responsibilities."⁴¹⁰

" I would like to learn more about culture from elders."⁴¹¹

"I just wanna learn more about my culture, you know. Culture's sleeping at the moment, I wanna wake him up. Awaken its spirit."⁴¹²

"I wanna see more of us Aboriginal boys get into groups. Like I'd like to see, even if it was the same group, you know, in a couple of years down the track, travelling Australia in a dance group, you know. And learning how to make Boomerangs, Didgeridoos, the little shield things, canoes, everything you know."⁴¹³

"I reckon they should teach us more about dancing and that too, how to play instruments and that too, you know. Learn our mob and that like where we come from."⁴¹⁴

"(I'd like) more cultural stuff. Like camping you know...Teach us about our culture, teach us how to make and do everything properly, you know. That's what I want to see happen more. I reckon that's what the Elders want to see happen more."⁴¹⁵

"That's what the judge wants me to do, he wants me to learn about my culture and all that...(but) I kept saying to them, I said there's nothing in (my area) like that to do."⁴¹⁶

They also spoke about feeling a greater sense of comfort and trust when accessing services delivered by Aboriginal organisations and workers:

"(I like the Aboriginal Medical Service doctors better than the other doctors) cos like I know the workers very well like they're my Aunties and all that. I can understand them more than I can understand the other people. I can open up to them and like if I go to that other doctor I won't open up to him, I won't tell him what's wrong with me or nothing...I went to the (other) doctors and he was asking me all these questions like I didn't really understand him and that's why I said to him I wanna go back to my own doctor."⁴¹⁷

"(It's good to have) someone that can sit down there with ya, where I'm from we got the AMS (Aboriginal Medical Service) workers you know, they do cultural programs with me and stuff you know. They have money and stuff for us, they take us out, we learn about our culture. If I wanna go get my L's, they sit down and do the test with me you know what I mean and help with that there, and once they know that we can do the test, they'll take us out and pay for it for us to get our L's."⁴¹⁸

"It's really easy to talk to an Aboriginal person. When you come across a non-Aboriginal person you can talk but it wouldn't have that flow that you have with the people you know."⁴¹⁹

"(It would help to have) an Aboriginal worker, who can help us get a job, you know, and who knows what we've been through and how it is for us...because they'll

understand some of what we've been through, we'll be able to connect with them better, be able to speak up more, you know...Cos they know where we come from we'll be able to open up more."⁴²⁰

"(I'd like) an Aboriginal worker so he would actually understand where we're coming from and like, yeah he would understand what we're talking about. And like why we're in the situation we're in. And stuff like that."⁴²¹

"There's a good Aboriginal (worker) that comes in like, she actually sits there and she talks to us about our cultures, like what we can do with like Aboriginal workers and that and yeah like she's heaps good support. And if we sit down and talk to her everyday that she comes she'll talk to the workers about what we're actually telling her because she understands where we're coming from."⁴²²

FINDINGS

- **It is important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to have access to programs which allow them to learn about and practice their culture.**
- **Wherever possible, services for Indigenous children and young people should be developed by, and delivered through, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and workers.**



CONCLUSION

In total, this paper reflects the experiences and opinions of around 15,000 children and young people around Australia about a range of topics impacting their health and wellbeing. Members of the ACCG are pleased to be able to unify these voices and demonstrate the capacity of children and young people to contribute to matters affecting them and their community.

Children and young people in all States and Territories across Australia are willing and able to tell their communities how to best to support them now and into the future. It is the responsibility of both the community and government to listen and adapt policy and practice to ensure the voices of children and young people are a focus of any action that may impact the implementation of child's rights practice.



Endnotes

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