

Listening to
Children
and **Young**
People in
Tasmania
2016

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Introduction

One of the most important guiding principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is the right of children and young people to **have a say in decisions that affect them and to have their opinions taken seriously in accordance with their age and maturity** (Article 12).

As a guiding principle, this right is fundamental to the fulfilment of all other rights – by giving children and young people a voice we as adults acknowledge their valuable insights into ways in which we can improve policies and practices that directly affect them, such as at school, in the justice system, and in organisations and agencies which provide services to or care for them.

In this way, we are promoting the enjoyment of rights such as the right to an education, the right to leisure and play, the right to the highest attainable standard of health and the right to be protected from all forms of abuse and neglect to name just a few.

My work as the Commissioner for Children and Young People is guided by the rights contained in the CRC, with a specific role to promote and empower children and young people to share their views and opinions. These opinions then inform the direction and scope of my work. Part of my role is to encourage other organisations to have in place mechanisms that allow children and young people to participate in decision making.

As adults we all want to do the best for children and young people but often forget that they have the greatest insight into their own lives – they know what makes them feel good, what worries them and what matters to them. To make things better for children and young people we have to work in partnership with them – work with them as well as for them, and to do this effectively we must listen to children and young people and take their opinions seriously.

By listening to children and young people and showing them that what they have to say is important we teach them that their voice matters and that they have both rights and responsibilities in the same way that adults do. By learning about their rights, I hope children and young people also learn that they have a responsibility to respect the rights of others.

Children and young people often tell me that listening is the most important thing that adults can do to make things better for them. I hope that by hearing what children and young people in Tasmania have to say about their own lives and what is important to them, we can all help children's voices to be heard and use what they have to say to make a difference in their world.

To ensure the best interests of children and young people were safeguarded and promoted, all of the consultations that I held with them were conducted in accordance with guidelines for the participation of children, including obtaining consent, voluntary participation, and the de-identification of personal information. For more information, see the guidelines produced by UNICEF and Save the Children¹ and the NSW Advocate for Children and Young People.²

Mark Morrissey

Commissioner for Children and Young People
Tasmania
December 2016



PRACTICE STANDARDS IN CHILD PARTICIPATION³

1. An ethical approach: transparency, honesty and accountability.
 2. Children's participation is relevant and voluntary.
 3. A child-friendly, enabling environment.
 4. Equality of opportunity.
 5. Facilitators are effective and confident.
 6. Participation promotes the safety and protection of children.
 7. Ensuring follow-up and evaluation.
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1 UNICEF and Save the Children (2011) *Every Child's Right to be Heard - A Resource Guide on the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child* https://www.unicef.org/french/adolescence/files/Every_Childs_Right_to_be_Heard.pdf

2 <http://www.acyp.nsw.gov.au/participation-resources>

3 Save the Children, *Practice Standards in Children's Participation* (2005) <http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/sites/default/files/documents/3017.pdf>

Methodology



Every year, I bring together children and young people across Tasmania as members of the Commissioner for Children and Young People's Children and Young People Advisory Councils. In 2016 I had councils in the **south (Hobart)**, **north (Launceston)** and **north-west (Burnie)**. The members of the councils joined after responding to advertising online and in the media in early 2016.

Applications were received, and after selection the members were invited to two meetings during the year. During the consultations, children and young people on the Advisory Councils were asked four main questions:⁴

- If you could change one thing in Tasmania what would it be?
- What makes a good society for children and young people?
- What is working well for you and other young people you know in your community?
- What is not working well for you and other young people you know in your community?

A meeting was also held with the members of the Friends School High School Council in Hobart, and with a group of Aboriginal young people.

⁴ These questions were adapted from the NSW Advocate for Children and Young People, *NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People - Consultation Results report*, <http://www.acyp.nsw.gov.au/consultation-results>

After the meetings, a survey was also put online to get responses from any child or young person in Tasmania on the same four open ended questions discussed by the councils, as well as one ranking question, and five multiple choice questions. There were responses from 309 children and young people across Tasmania. The survey was not designed to be representative of all Tasmanian children and young people; rather it was used to get a general feeling amongst the population to compare with responses from the Advisory Councils.

The survey was distributed through the Youth Action Priorities mailing list, the Department of Education, Independent Schools Tasmania and the Catholic Education Office. The survey was also advertised on social media.

The qualitative information for each of the four open ended questions was coded into categories and then quantified based on the content of the response. One response could be coded into a number of categories depending on the content. The results of the ranking question were collated separately, and the results of the multiple choice questions are reported on under each of the themes.

The views of children and young people that I collected in 2016 and as described in this report will be used by me to assist the government and community organisations to understand what is important to Tasmania's children and young people.



About the Participants

Face-to-face Consultations

Children and Young People Advisory Councils

There were 33 members of the Children and Young People Advisory Councils across Tasmania in 2016. The members of the Advisory Councils ranged in age from 11 to 17 years old.

Table 1: Children and Young People Advisory Council Participants

Location	Males	Females	Total
South	4	7	11
North	5	3	8
North-West	3	11	14
TOTAL	12	21	33

Aboriginal Young People

I met with six young Aboriginal people to discuss with them their thoughts on what is working well and not so well for young Aboriginal people in Tasmania. Quotes in bold are from this group of young people.

Online Survey

Survey Respondents

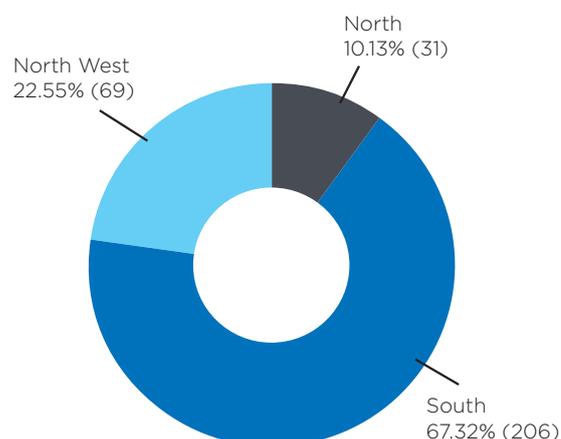
Gender

The majority of survey participants were female (65 per cent), with 31 per cent identifying as male, 3 per cent identifying as other, and 1 per cent preferring not to specify.

Location

Most children and young people who participated in the survey were from the south of the state (67 per cent) with the remainder coming from the north (10 per cent) and the north west (23 per cent).

Figure 1: Regional distribution of survey participants (n = 306⁵)

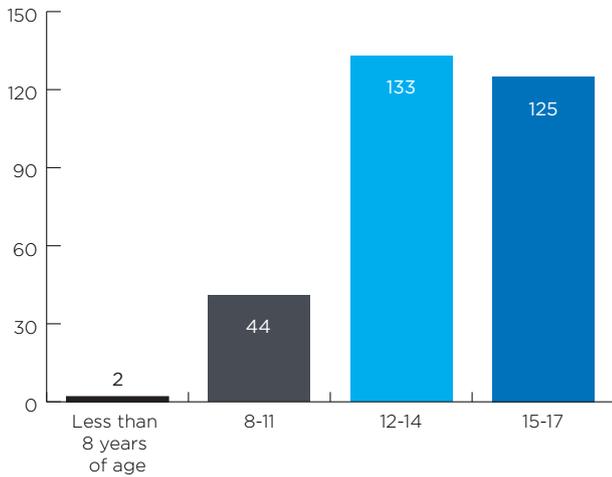


5 306 of the 309 participants answered this question.

Age

Over 80 per cent of the survey participants were aged between 12 and 17, with only two participants under the age of eight participating.

Figure 2: Age of survey participants (n = 304⁶)



Diversity

Nearly 90 per cent of respondents stated that they do not speak another language at home other than English. Eight per cent of respondents identified as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or both.

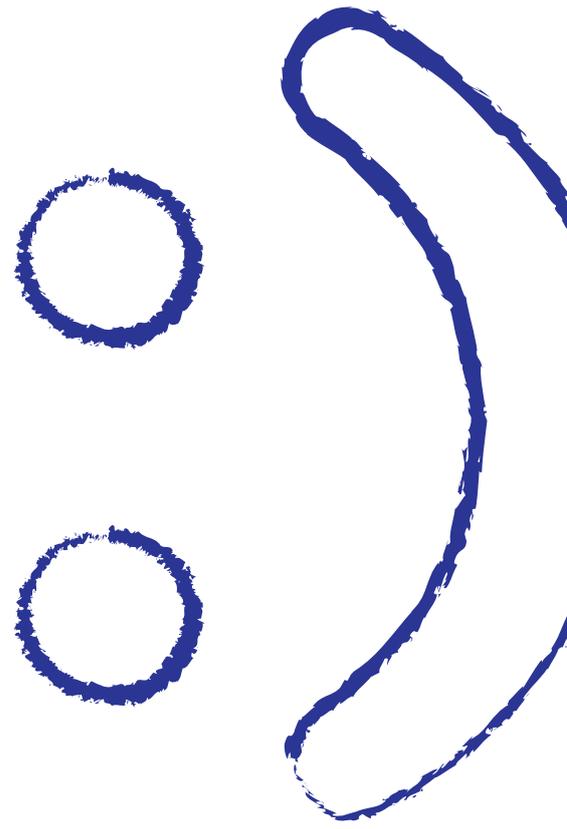
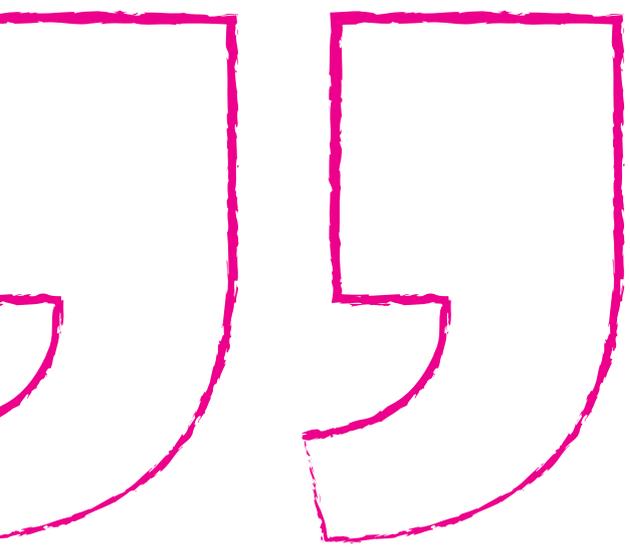


6 304 of the 309 participants answered this question.

What did children and young people say?

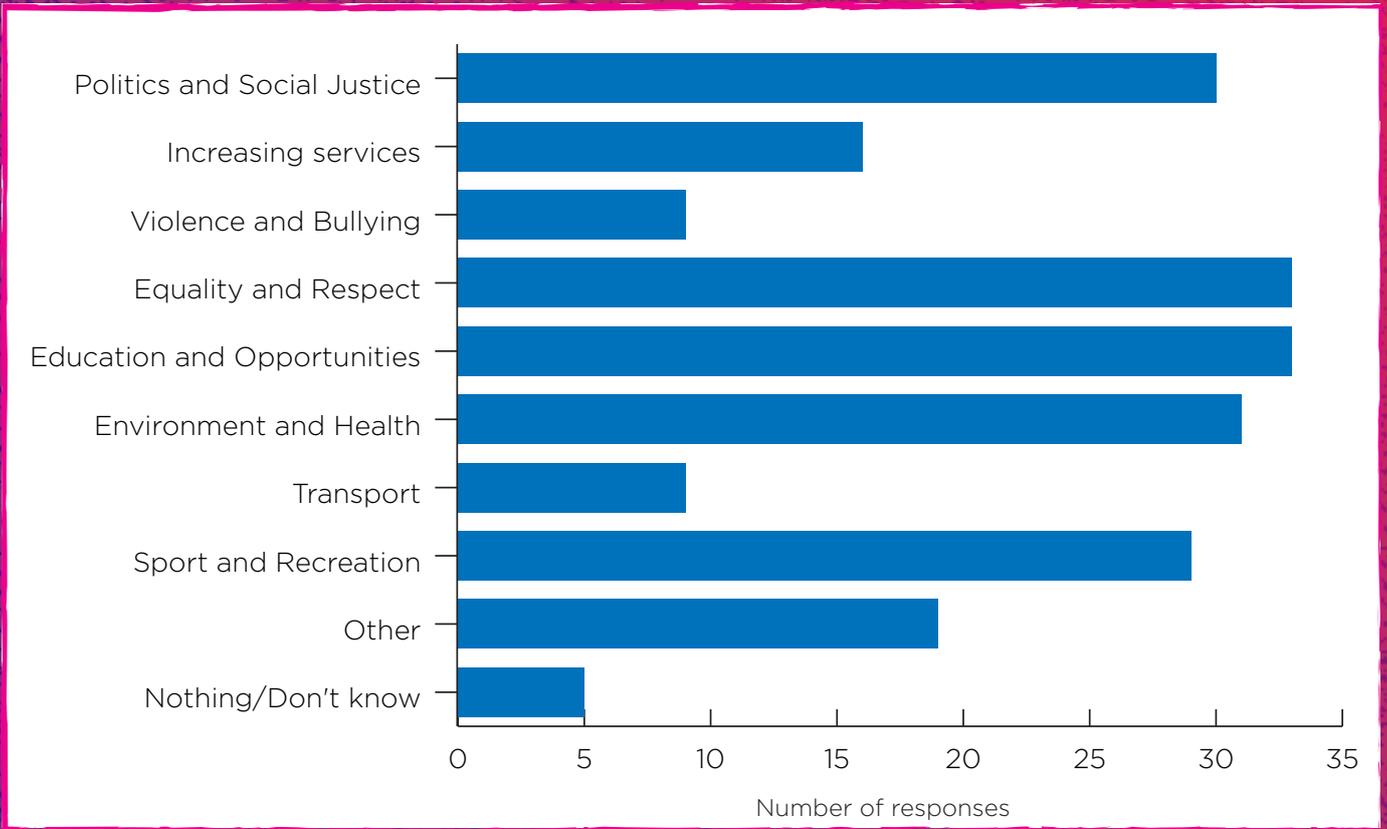


Here are the top answers from the online survey to the four questions answered by around 300 children and young people across Tasmania. When answering the questions, children and young people were asked to **think about their own lives and those of other children and young people in their community.**

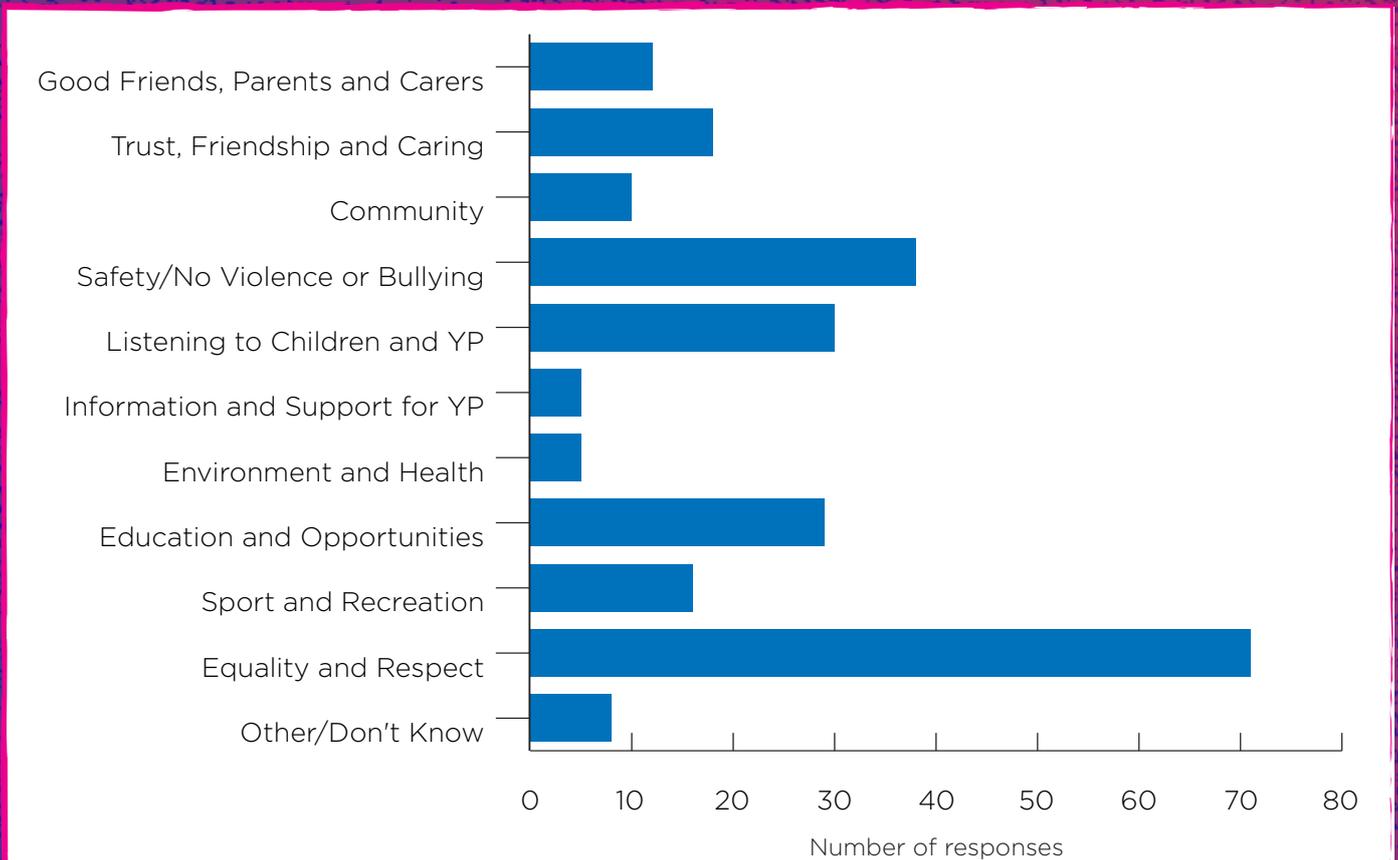




If you could change one thing in Tasmania what would it be?

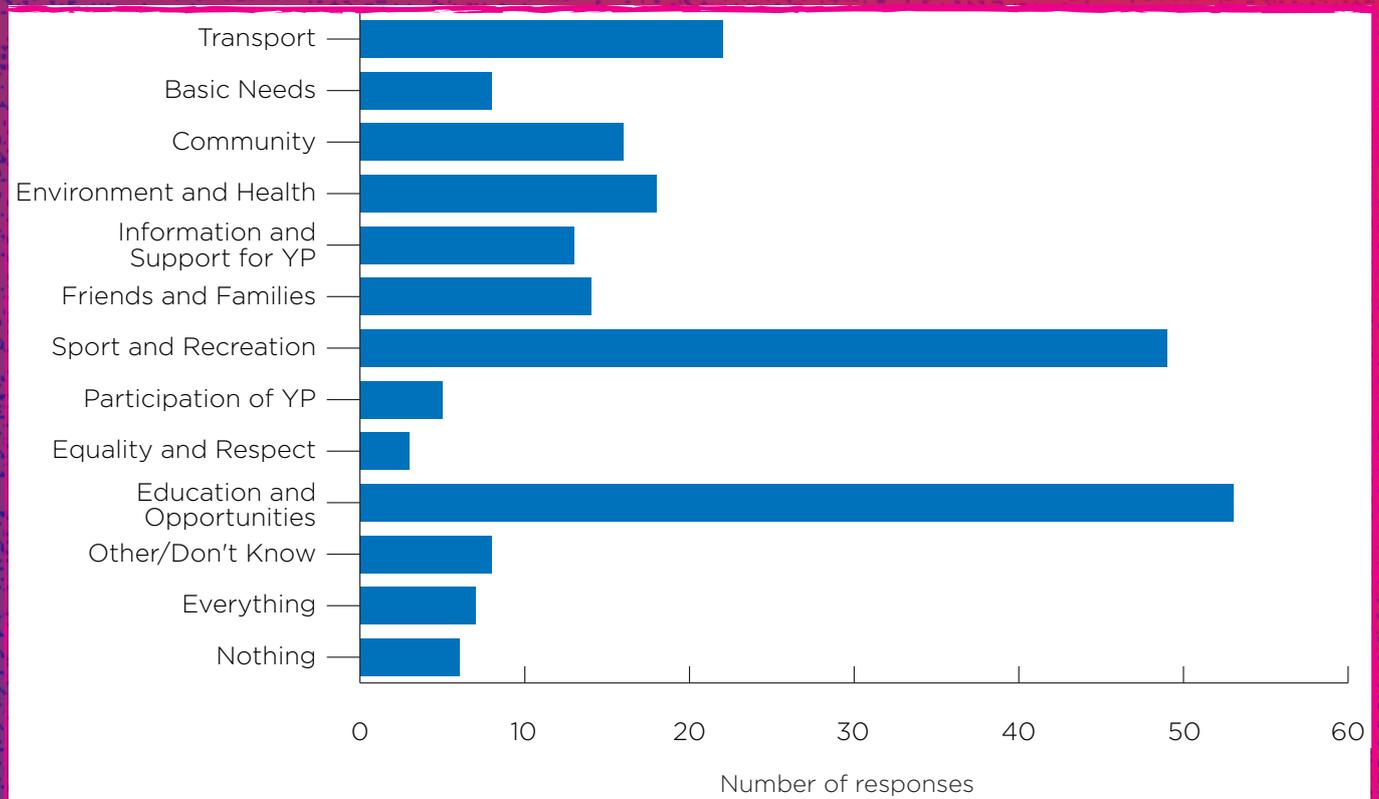


What makes a good society for children and young people?

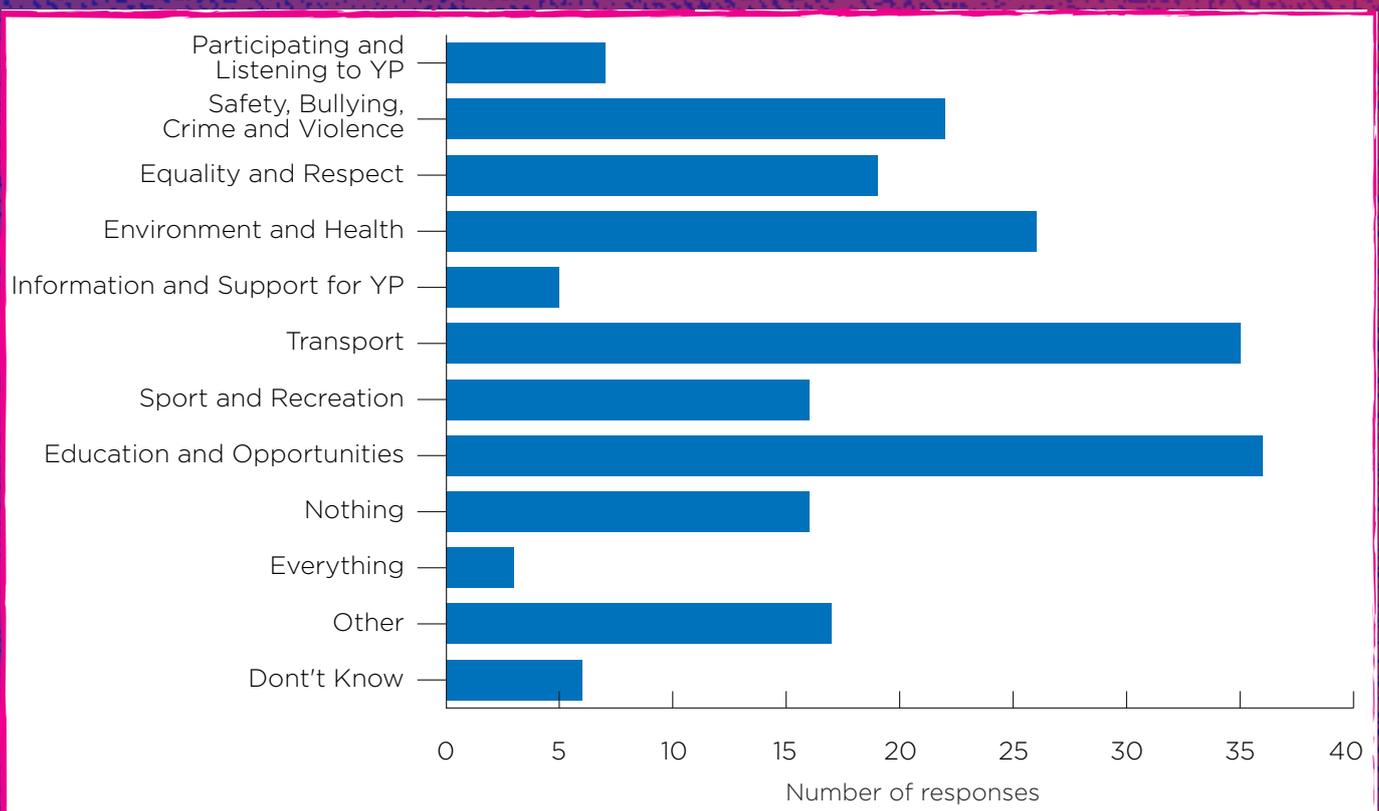




What is working well for you and other young people in your community?



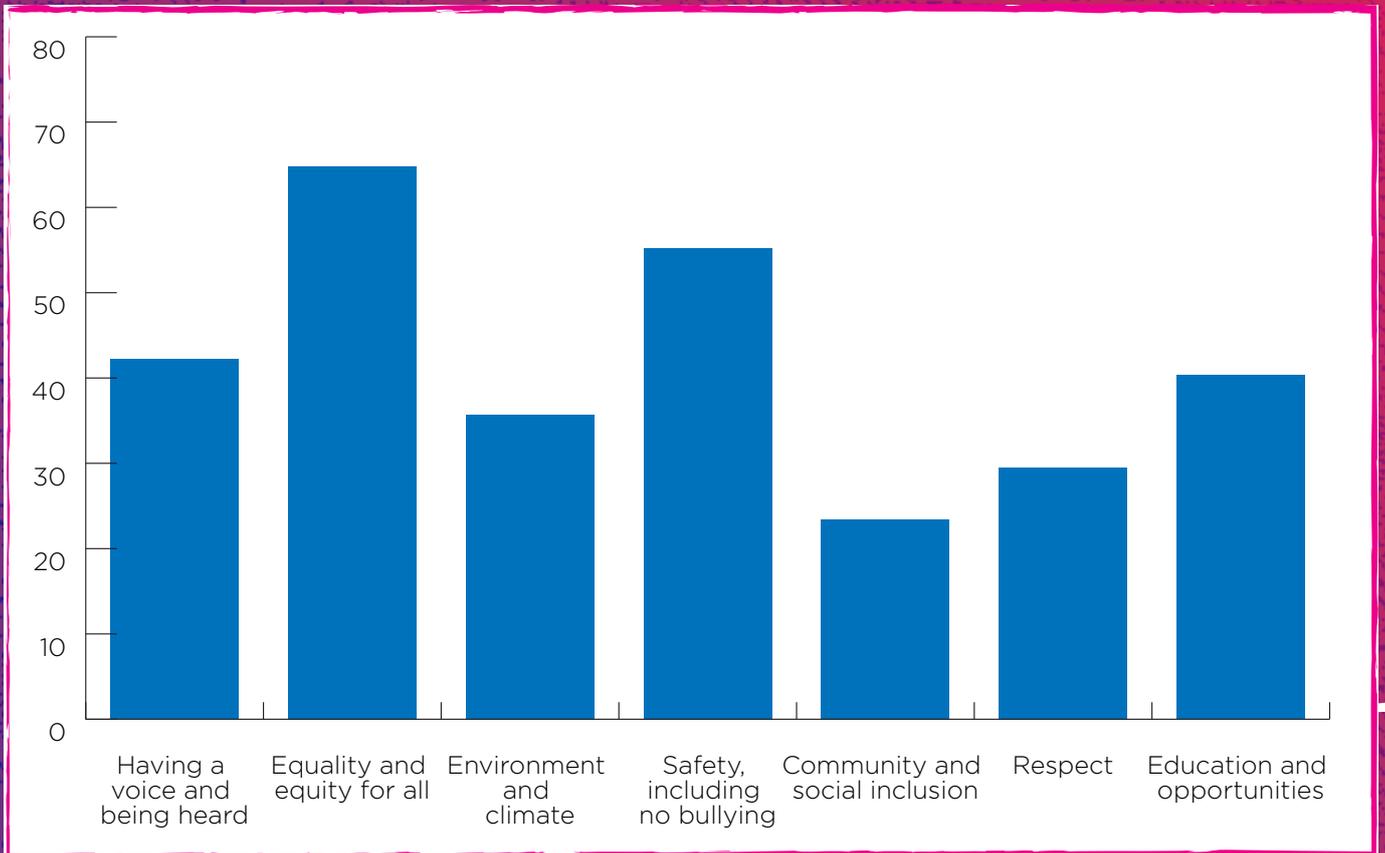
What is not working well for you and other young people in your community?





For the ranking question, children and young people were asked to rank the following issues from 1 to 7 in order of importance from most important (1) to least important (7). The chart shows the percentage of children and young people who ranked these issues as either 1, 2 or 3 (i.e. top three issues).

Percentage of children and young people who ranked issue as either 1, 2 or 3



Key Themes



The summary below captures all of the responses of children and young people as part of the **online survey** and the **face-to-face consultations**. The main themes below encompass the areas which were most spoken about by children and young people.

Having a Voice

Children and young people want to have their views heard by adults and to be taken seriously. They also have lots of ideas about how their voice can be heard at home, at school, and in the broader society.

Equality and Respect

Children and young people value equality and want to live in a society where everyone is treated equally, is included, and is free from discrimination. In particular, children and young people want to be treated with the same respect as adults.

Education and Opportunities

Children and young people want their education to be relevant, useful and practical and to give them the best preparation for gaining employment. They would also like to see more employment opportunities particularly for young people when they finish their education.

Environment

Children and young people are concerned about having a clean and safe environment, and spoke about a range of issues from littering and pollution, to climate change and renewable energy.

Safety

Children and young people want to feel safe at home, at school and in public. Bullying was one of the main areas children and young people would like to see improvements in the way incidents are handled.

Sport and Recreation

Many of the views expressed were associated with the positive benefits of extra-curricular activities, sport and recreation in children and young people's lives.

Transport

Children and young people would like to see increased transport options particularly for those living in rural and remote areas, as well as improved traffic flow in urban areas.

Health

Children and young people spoke about their own or their family's experiences with health care including the need for everyone to have access to the highest quality of health care, including for their mental health.

These themes are discussed in more detail in the following pages of this Report.



Key theme:

Having a Voice

During the face-to-face consultations, children and young people enjoyed the opportunity to speak with me about their ideas and opinions on how to make Tasmania a better place for them. The children and young people who participated in these consultations did so willingly and with enthusiasm. They were **thoughtful, considered** and **respectful** in their opinions. They saw this as an opportunity to speak directly to a decision maker, to Government, and to adults more broadly.

Across the consultations and the online survey, children and young people expressed the desire to have a voice and to be involved in decisions that affect all aspects of their lives. This included challenging adults to not just listen to children and young people but to take action and make change based on their opinions. They also had ideas about how children's voices could be considered, including through advisory panels at school and in organisations, school councils, and through youth groups.

As part of the online survey, children and young people were asked the best way that young people could be listened to better by adults. Most respondents (39 per cent) said they thought that there should be more events/activities organised by young people, followed by more adults in support roles (36 per cent), and the establishment of student representative councils in all schools (25 per cent).



“Parents don’t care about kids’ opinions because they think kids know nothing.”

“They should have more of a voice and be respected and have their opinions valued more. Adults should not just act like they are listening to youth but actually enforce some of the ideas/opinions that arise.”

“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. There needs to be mutual respect between people, regardless of their age.”

“It’s really common with adults, that when they argue, they say my [adults] views are right.”

“There’s always going to be those people that don’t have the ability to stand up and speak, and those people that do. If those people that do, can start pushing those people that don’t to start speaking up then we can move forward together and people can all speak up together and that’s how change is going to happen, that’s how everyone is going to be happy is because everyone’s opinions have formed the future.”

“Not only more adults in support roles, but more youth in leadership positions. Also including the youth in modern day problems and societies so we know what you’re talking about and can give our fresh opinion, idea and view point on situations.”

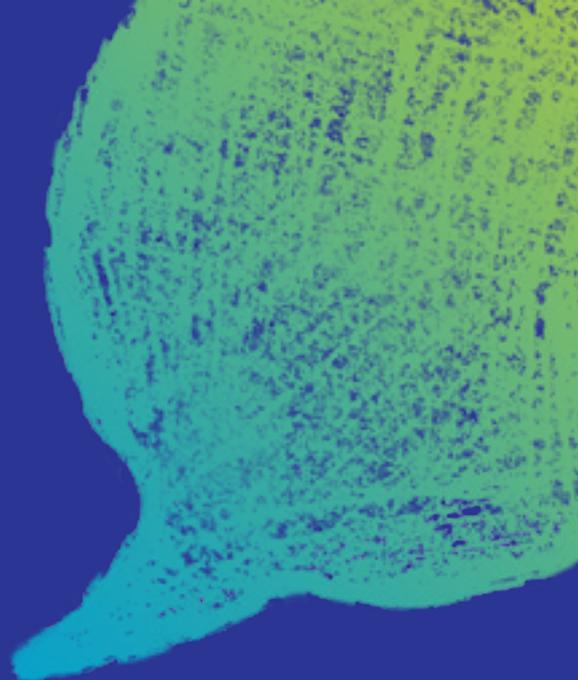
“Adults generally need to respect youth more than they do. Every generation seems to think that they are smarter than the one that comes before them, and wiser than the one that comes after them, and while life experience is key, it is also so important to respect our views. Often, nothing is done to fix a problem unless a high ranking adult is involved, and young people deserve to be heard just as much as anyone else.”

“Youth sectors in councils should all have youth involved, so that the opinions and voices are heard properly, and not just paraphrased like they often are (words tend to be put in our mouths when it should come from the people actually affected).”



Key theme:

Equality and Respect

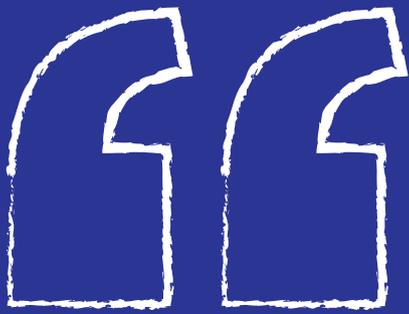


Children and young people clearly see importance in **equality for all**, regardless of **race, religion, gender, disability, nationality, age** or other factors. This theme occurred throughout the survey results as well as during the face-to-face consultations. For example, “equality and respect” was the largest response to what makes a good society.

Aboriginal young people wanted more respect for their culture and history, and sharing of positive stories about Tasmanian Aboriginals.

Children and young people applied the idea of equality and respect across a range of issues, including the education system and state versus private schools; difficulties experienced by minorities such as people with disabilities, Tasmanian Aboriginals, and those who identify as LGBTIQ; social disadvantage; refugees and asylum seekers; gender differences and drug addiction.

As part of the survey, children and young people were asked how adults can better respect young people in Tasmania and treat them with fairness. All of the respondents were about equally divided across the three options: give young people more of a say in how schools are run (30 per cent); give student complaints the same attention as parent/adult complaints at school (34 per cent); and avoid generalising all young people based on the actions of a small group (36 per cent).



“I don’t think it’s fair that because of what school you go you can get privilege. If you put the hard work in you should be able to get what you want.”

“What are they so scared about? What is so scary about gender equality?”

“People who have disabilities, they aren’t popular, they sometimes will be treated badly, so they don’t get a chance to do anything, to change anything, because of their disability.”

“I think how adults react to each other and interact with each other, reflects on how they are as a person, how they’ve been brought up and that will reflect on what we see and how we should act. So if they act like they respect each other and show all those good qualities then that will really show that’s what we’re aiming to be, whereas if it’s worse, then we’re thinking ‘should we be like that because the rest of society is like that?’”

“Australia apparently prides itself on being a multicultural society, if it was, then racism wouldn’t even exist here and it does.”

“I would make it so that teachers and students are more educated about the LGBT+ community and how to respect others.”

“Our history is never talked about, our Aboriginal history, and there are not a lot of positive or proactive messages about Aboriginal people and what they have done.”

“It’s equity not necessarily equality. It’s hard to explain. Everyone should get, not necessarily the same, but what they need, because everyone’s needs are different. It’s very much trying to cater for everyone but still giving everyone the same opportunities.”

“I feel like a society needs to provide for everybody’s basic needs, like healthcare, and having somewhere to live and having the ability to use government services. At the same time I think we need to create a society in which people who work hard are rewarded. So, equality and opportunity. A society needs to be made where it can address the problems of society as a whole.”

“We are trying to become more involved with our cultural traditions and practices by talking to the elders, making recordings of traditional songs, mutton birding, and making clap sticks. The elders are the ones that can pass the links on to the young people.”

“I think educating students on what gender means and what sexuality means and the different possibilities with those is important also and could potentially save kids a whole lot of grief with figuring that stuff out. Equally teaching acceptance and appreciation for diversity in race, religion, gender, sexuality is important and is what could improve our country moving forwards.”

“What we need is people to be more proactive about Aboriginal history, and not to disrespect the Tasmanian land and country.”

“A warm and welcoming society is needed for young people and to be able to speak openly about their opinions. Adults should pay more attention to treating each other better, as it can reflect onto their children.”

“If I were to change just one thing I suppose it would be just for the general society and community to be more accepting, particularly towards more diverse and controversial issues such as gender identity and sexual orientation. I for one don't want to live in a place where I can't get married to someone I love solely because their gender is the same as mine. I find that ridiculous. One day I may want to settle down and have a family and get married and it shouldn't make a difference whatsoever about my significant other's gender.”

“Just realise that we are very different to what you are accustomed to. From a young age we were bombarded with the media and I think we are one of the most brutally self-aware generations thus far. We need more control and more say in everything. It is so frustrating to know so much and yet know you know so little and still have no ability to actually make a difference. I don't know a single person my age with any faith left in the government or society. We've seen how our parents were treated. Most of us come from broken homes and we no longer have blind faith in standards and expectations. We need to be heard and acknowledged. We are not just children. Not a number or a statistic. We are all inexplicably complex intricate beings and we have so much to offer and that needs to be recognised. Give us a chance to have some control of our own futures.”

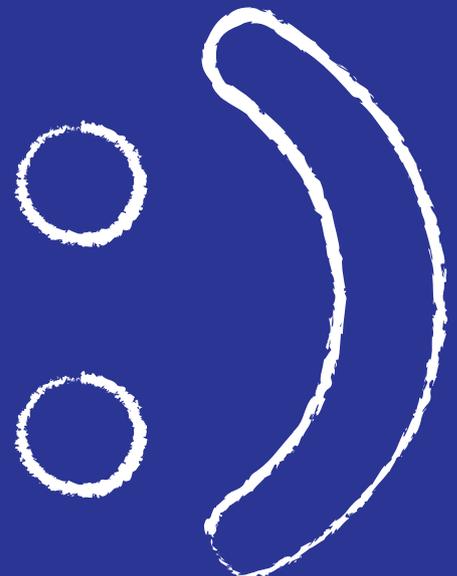
“Just treat us like equals. Our feelings and opinions are being dismissed because we're “just going through a phase” and “we don't know what we want”. Honestly just acknowledge us for what we are and accept that we live in an ever changing and evolving society. An open mind is key, especially when it comes to the youth of Tasmania.”

“I would however like to be who I am and love who I love in public (within reason) without feeling like 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.”

“I think that children are still treated like our opinions and ideas sometimes don't matter and then sometimes they put too much pressure on us to deliver. I think that all adults and young people should be treated fairly by each other and to each other but in today's society it is still not happening there is still discrimination against age, colour, job and wealth.”

“A good society is one in which young people are respected, respectful, opinionated, treated equally and make important contributions to their area.”

“All children should grow up knowing that it's okay to be who they are; regardless of sexuality, gender, race, the clothes they wear, etc.”



Key theme:

Education and Opportunities

Education and opportunities were key themes throughout the face-to-face consultations and the online survey, with a range of responses covering areas which were working well and those which are in need of improvement. Regarding those areas working well, children and young people stated that they had **good teachers**, who were **supportive** and **caring**, and provided **individual support** for those children who needed it. Some also mentioned the school environment and how it was friendly, helpful and supported their interest in learning.

The areas flagged for improvement by children and young people related to the need for education to be relevant for their future needs, in particular for finding employment, but also relevant to learning general life skills and contributing to their ability to be prepared for adult life.

There was a general sense of frustration with the lack of opportunities for employment in Tasmania,

particularly in rural and remote areas. Related to this was the lack of pathway planning undertaken in the later years of high school to discuss options with career/pathway planners.

Some children and young people mentioned that they agreed with the extension of some schools to Year 12, and said that providing education for longer leads to a greater number of future options. Children and young people also expressed frustration at the amount of school work and homework they have which is leading to them feeling stressed and overworked. A small number of children and young people also commented on the lack of qualified teachers, and the difference in educational experience between public and private schools.

Aboriginal young people highlighted the need for school to be better at catering to different needs particularly if formal school doesn't suit certain students. They also spoke about the need for opportunities outside of school to do part time work or training so that they are better prepared to get a job. Finally they shared their personal experiences of being suspended and excluded from school and how there was a lack of support for them to stay in school.

As part of the survey, children and young people were asked how education could be improved in Tasmania. The majority of survey respondents thought that there should be more choice for students in the subjects that they do (47 per cent), followed by more extracurricular choices for students (36 per cent) and more teachers in schools (17 per cent).



“Improving the standard of education for students whose only option is public schools. The main thing is providing access to adapted learning for students who are unable to learn the “traditional” way or without assistance.”

“We need to create an environment in which people can get a great education in Tasmania and also continue to use that and people to be attracted towards Tasmania as an innovative and intelligent place.”

“People who work hard to solve these problems should be rewarded. It would be good if people can have the opportunity to extend their education. People in class struggling with the work, and people finding it too easy. Finding a way to help those people rise up to meet that education and also allowing people to work at their own pace.”

“We don’t do anything at school about Aboriginal culture. Sometimes the school does an acknowledgement of country, and we used to be involved in activities such as NAIDOC week, as well as doing activities like bushwalking where we can see native plants. Occasionally elders are invited into schools but only if we ask.”

“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.”

“It’s important to teach in ways that people can use.”

“It doesn’t take away any opportunities to go on through to grade 12.”

“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.”

“Once I wore the wrong shoes to school and I was suspended for it.”

“To be treated fairly and be taught about things like finances so when you are older you will actually know what you’re doing.”

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

“When you compare Tasmania to the rest of Australia, the literacy rates and numeracy rates are abysmal in comparison...another problem to solve is the brain drain to mainland.”

“We have a really good teacher, she listens to us and gets involved in our problems, and then helps us with them. After she listens, then she also follows through.”

“I am learning from a curriculum that teaches me how to find the circumference of a circle which is all well and good, until I grow older and am thrust into adult-hood where I suddenly have to pay taxes and do all these other things I can’t even begin to know how to do.”

“We need people that we can talk to and trust and support us in what we want to do. We also need help to find part time job opportunities whilst we’re at school so we can have real life skills. One of us is going to volunteer at the dogs home, and another is going to get some experience doing gardening at MONA. One of the main problems for work for us young boys is that we don’t have transport. How do we get to volunteer and do work if our parents don’t have transport and we can only use public transport?”

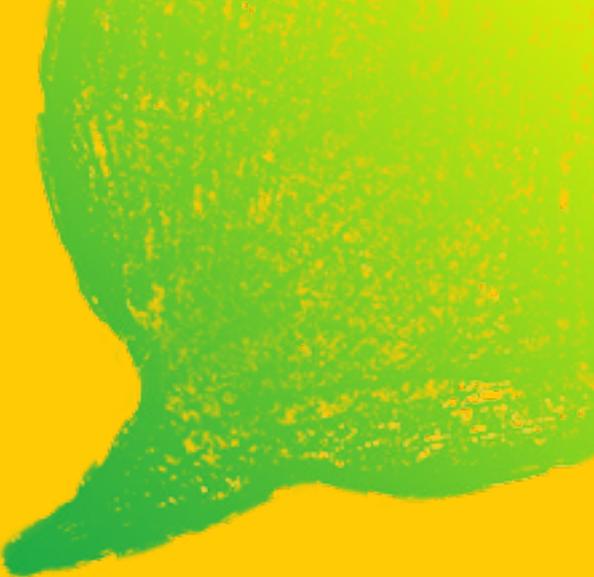
“The way the education system is, students are bored and smarter than past generations. They see no point in learning irrelevant information. Students want to have the ability to change their education to suit their needs.”

“I would attempt to implement better programs within our education system, particularly in primary and high schools, 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.”

“I have been excluded and suspended from school so many times – when I was in primary school I was suspended for a whole term. And then I was just told I could walk home. When I came back to school after being suspended for so long, the principal told me that only nice boys go to this school, rather than telling me I had done a good job being brave enough to come back. I mouthed off to him and he suspended me again.”

“Education! I attended a public primary school for 8 years, and wasn’t at all impressed with the education I received. We weren’t even taught our times tables, and the only reason I learnt them was because my parents had to teach me. The quality of teachers at my primary school was terrible and the methods they used to teach us just didn’t work. Many teachers just came to school and winged it. They told us we would be doing self-learning. Where we decide what we learn and teach it to ourselves. Teachers even played Candy Crush SAGA, when students were struggling in class. I now attend a private high school and I can assure you that I’ve never had to teach myself or others. I think there needs to be much higher standards for teachers to meet. Maybe even raising the ATAR to get into a teaching degree. I think the government should use more money towards making better quality teachers rather than just giving poor teachers more resources to waste.”





Key theme:

Environment

Having a clean and healthy environment was one of the major issues discussed by both children and young people during consultations and in the online survey. They had a clear awareness of the human impact upon the environment, from local level issues such as **littering, junk food, and supporting local farmers,** to global issues such as **deforestation, climate change** and **renewable energy.**

As part of the survey, children and young people were asked how they thought we could care for the environment better. Most respondents said they thought that the best way would be to teach young people about the environment from an early age (47 per cent), followed by those who thought there should be more education generally so people know how to respect the environment (30 per cent), and those who thought that there should be more stories in the media about the environment and environmental issues (23 per cent).



“More hands on activities that motivate kids to do the right thing and help them know caring for the environment is good.”

“Cutting down on them (greenhouse gas) means a healthy life, that’s the biggest thing I would change.”

“Finding better sources of energy to power our homes, factories and businesses. Renewable types of energy such as solar, wind and hydro.”

“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.”

“The responsibility of land care, and renewable energy. Although we do already seem to do this quite well, it would be great if we could lead the rest of the country to a ‘cleaner’ more sustainable life! This is most importantly aimed at the younger generations as they are truly the voices of tomorrow.”

“I love going to National Parks, but it appals me that when I look out at the view, I see forestry hubs and areas that are being logged in our wonderful wilderness. It distresses me that it is so close to these parks.”

“I think it’s important to teach kids from a really early age about the environment and how much we rely on it. This way kids will hopefully grow up with a more positive outlook on preserving it.”





Key theme:

Safety

The main comments from children and young people relating to safety referred to **bullying** and **wanting to feel safe in their own community and at school**. They thought that teachers and schools could do more to prevent and respond to bullying in the classroom, and were clear about the need to understand the reasons behind why a child might bully another.

Aboriginal young people stated that they were often bullied because they were Aboriginal, and said that they found it difficult not to react and then be punished themselves for reacting. They also spoke about not feeling supported by teachers and principals when they were bullied, and feeling like their only option was to not go to school.

One young girl from the Advisory Council in the north-west of the state had a plan for how to deal with bullying in schools:

“All schools should have a team of trained teachers to provide face-to-face contact with students, like there are first aid officers. These teachers will help deal with, advise and stop bullying. Students and parents can then deal directly with the teachers on this team.”

All schools should set up an email account for this. Students can use this to email information, report events, raise issues and make staff aware of what is going on. The account can be monitored by senior staff. This will give privacy to all students, benefit the shy ones who may not seek face-to-face contact and provide a way around many students’ fear of being bullied and labelled a ‘dobber.’”



Children and young people also spoke about wanting to feel safe, particularly in relation to violent crime, domestic violence, speeding, drinking alcohol and drug use. Some also didn't feel safe on public transport or in certain parts of their community.

There was a clear awareness of the need to stay safe while online. However, when I spoke to the children and young people in the Advisory Councils there was a general lack of awareness about the Office of the Children's e-Safety Commissioner and their role in providing information and support on how to stay safe online.

Following the Advisory Council meetings, I facilitated a visit by the Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner to Tasmania to provide free workshops for parents and educators across the state in response to the issues raised by children and young people.





“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.”

“Kids (at my school) don’t go to the teachers if they get bullied. The teachers don’t do anything about it.”

“People doing the bullying, giving them the help they need. Need to be listened to as much as the person being bullied.”

“Teaching staff need to advocate more for students who are abused or bullied.”

“Get people to stop talking about bullying and do something where the bullying is happening. Help the bullied people AND the bullies.”

“There are lots of problems with bullies. Especially because I react [to the bullies] and then the teacher reacts, and then I get suspended and nothing happens to the bully. Teachers have to follow through with their words, listen and then follow up.”

“We get bullied because we are Aboriginal and we get a lot of racist abuse. The bullies pick on us because we’re not black, or because of our last names and they know that your family is Aboriginal. We become a big target.”

“Sometimes a bully’s life is screwed up or they just enjoy picking on people. Sometimes if we deal with them as people you find out that it’s not the kid’s fault, things might be happening with their parents like divorce or other things outside of school.”



“I think that a good society is one where everyone respects one another and feels comfortable around other people. It is really important to feel safe in your community and I believe that this is important for children. They should be able to play outside without worrying about the consequences and being unsafe.”

“The attitudes of teachers and principals need to change. They don’t care about you, they say they’ll fix something but then they don’t. If you threaten to go to the Department [of Education] then they’ll start to suck up to you.”

“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.”

“Sometimes it’s hard to get an appointment with the psychologist at school, because we have to make an appointment and then there are other people always telling us to hurry up. Serious stuff is happening in my life and I need that support.”



Key theme:

Sport and Recreation

There were a lot of positive comments from children and young people regarding the importance of sport and other recreational activities in their lives. Children and young people spoke about their **love of outdoor activities, scouts, sports**, as well as **creative pursuits** such as **art** and **music**.

There was a view that the range of activities and spaces in the community for children and young people needed expanding including sporting grounds, playgrounds, and general areas for particular age groups (i.e. teenagers). Some children and young people also talked about the cost of extracurricular activities being too high.

As part of the survey, children and young people were asked how access to sport and recreation activities could be improved for children and young people in Tasmania. The majority of responses thought that there should be more equipment and places to play in at schools (41 per cent), followed by more innovative youth programs like YouthARC (31 per cent) and more district based sports (28 per cent).

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“Grants to enable financially struggling young people to have access to sport and recreational activities including memberships and access to facilities (gyms for example).”

“Make exercise not just a thing you get from team sports like cricket, but more recreational activities such as white water rafting, hiking and laser skirmish. Doing this will also help facilitate a positive relationship between student and nature.”

“Recreational sports groups intended for older youths 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.”

“The frequent workshops run by organisations like Kingborough Gym, social circus, and Moonah Arts Centre mean I’m constantly challenged [in a good way] and offered a new set of skills.”

“I think the health and sporting facilities in my area are working well. There is plenty of opportunity for young people to be involved in a wide variety of sports and other activities (singing, theatre etc.)”

“I think that there should be more teen places because there are lots of little child places but then if you want to go to an older place you have to like drive out to Devonport.”

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Key theme:

Transport

Children and young people mainly spoke about their difficulties with public transport in Tasmania, mentioning its **high cost**, and the **absence of services** particularly to rural and remote areas. Some also discussed the need for **better roads in the cities** (to improve traffic flow) as well as more **bike paths** to improve environmental benefits.

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“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.”

“Public transport has improved in the last year or so but could still be greatly improved.”

“I live in a rural area, so transport is pretty poor. Sure there is a bus that runs to school, but there’s no public transport.”

“Buses are too expensive and infrequent; therefore deter people from using those services.”

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Key theme:

Health

Health care, and in particular **mental health**, was mentioned both in the consultations and the online survey as an area of concern for children and young people.



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“It’s a really big part of your life no matter what age you are. A lot of problems can come from not being mentally healthy.”

“Small communities need more support in the form of neighbourhood centres. I know a lot of these have been removed and from personal experiences and hearing those of others I know that they bring so much hope and assistance to young people in a disadvantaged community, and more time needs to go into that. There also needs to be more easily accessible mental health services and services for helping young people find employment.”

“Everyone’s always looking to achieve well in TCE, then getting to university, always getting a good job. It’s always living for the future. I think if we focussed on mental health a bit more we would be able to enjoy life and people would be happier.”

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Conclusion

This report will inform my discussions with the Tasmanian Government and other key stakeholders about **priorities** for children and young people in Tasmania. It will also form the basis for planning discussions for my work and my priorities in 2017.

Both the face-to-face and the online survey responses revealed the breadth of issues that concern children and young people in Tasmania. Many of the responses show a strong interest in making their own lives better, but also an awareness and thoughtfulness about how to make society as a whole more supportive and compassionate. In particular, children and young people were concerned about not only how they are treated by other people, but how society treats those who are different including refugees and asylum seekers, and people of different races, sexualities, nationalities, and genders. Equality and respect were clearly very important to children and young people, with these concerns ranking the highest in terms of importance and as a part of a good society.

As this report is a collation of the views of children and young people, only the main themes in the responses are discussed. Other issues that were mentioned by smaller numbers of children and young people included concerns about homelessness, poverty and better access to services, the cost of childcare, lowering taxes, voting, budget cuts and funding decisions at government Departments affecting services, family violence and family separation, and increased funding for community organisations. This demonstrates quite clearly that our children and young people have a nuanced and insightful appreciation of the issues of importance in our society today.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of my Children and Young People Advisory Councils for their time and active participation in the forums during 2016, as well as all of those children and young people in Tasmania who filled out the online survey.

Applications will be sought in early 2017 for members of my Children and Young People Advisory Councils for 2017. Please check my website www.childcomm.tas.gov.au in early 2017 for more details.

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