

Talking Point - It's time we really listened to our children and young people

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When 15-year-old Greta Thunberg stood in front of the United Nations' climate change convention in 2018, her frustration was evident.

She said: "For 25 years countless of people have stood in front of the United Nations climate conferences, asking our nations' leaders to stop the emissions. But, clearly, this has not worked since the emissions just continue to rise.....So I will not ask them anything."

Greta, like many young people, had lost patience with the adults charged with protecting her rights, her wellbeing, and her future. Greta chose to take a stand to have her voice heard – and good on her!

She is not alone – here in Tasmania, young people marched for action on climate change in late 2018 and they're preparing to do it again in a few weeks.

Their message is clear: they want to be listened to and they want their concerns addressed.

Whether they are talking about climate change, or technology, or human rights, it seems that despite their best efforts, right around the world, the expressed views of children and young people are often sidelined.

My best guess as to why is because we think they are naïve, because they are young and they do not yet have all the responsibilities of adult life - therefore we don't take them seriously or we choose to believe their views hold less weight: "what would they know?!"

The fact is, they know a lot. A 15-year-old in today's world has had access to far, far more information through the rise of technology and the internet than most adults had at the same age.

An adult simply cannot judge a young person's level of knowledge or experience based on their own experience of growing up.

Young people are capable of processing huge amounts of information, navigating and rising to the challenge posed by misinformation online and making judgements which are well informed, rational and valuable.

Their views are important from every perspective.

- **Socially:** they are citizens in their own right with their own unique perspectives on issues that are important to them.
- **Economically:** they drive considerable economic activity
- **Environmentally:** it's fair and reasonable, as custodians of our future, that they expect the planet to be left to them in at least as good an environmental condition as it was for those who went before them.



Young people's views are also highly valuable because they can think differently and creatively – a great addition to even the most complex decision making processes.

As one young member of the Children and Young People Consultative Council said: "We see the world from a different point of view."

If this isn't enough to convince you, of course, the other fact, and often the most important fact that is overlooked in our approach to dealing with our youngest citizens - is that children and young people have rights, as agreed internationally through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

These rights include the right to say what they think on all matters affecting them and for their views to be taken seriously. There can be no real appreciation or understanding of what is in children or young people's best interests without according them this right.

During 2018, to inform the development of its Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy, the New Zealand government sought out the views of thousands of children and young people across the country on what having a good life means to them. Unsurprisingly, an overwhelming message was that children and young people want to be accepted, valued and respected. I hear consistent messages during my discussions with children and young people around Tasmania.

It's time we showed our young people the respect they deserve by being brave enough to really listen to them.

There are 113,000 children and young people in Tasmania and they have a view and a voice and we ignore them at our peril.

They may represent just over 20 per cent of our population now, but they are closer to 100 per cent of our future - and now it's up to us to listen.

As another Consultative Council member articulated: "Why do adults get to create the future we have to live in? We should have a say in our reality."

Listening to children means more than just hearing what they have to say. It means taking account of their views in our thinking and decision making at every level.

Imagine a Tasmania where all children and young people feel that their views matter and they actually make a difference.

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