

Talking Point - Wellbeing June 2021

There is so much we can learn from children and young people.

And at a time when we are re-imagining life in Tasmania due to the ongoing impacts of Covid-19, there is much to be gained from giving our children, the custodians of our future, more say in policy and decision-making processes.

Recently, I had the great pleasure of talking to children and young people, as well as the parents and carers of very young children, from all over the State about what they needed to have improved wellbeing.

I learned so much as I travelled Tasmania speaking to children and young people. I am so thankful for those learnings and for the generosity of young Tasmanians and their families for sharing their views and personal experiences with me.

In particular, I learned that many Tasmanian children and young people are clearly very proud to call Tasmania home.

They expressed their strong appreciation of all the benefits Tasmania's natural environment has to offer:

- an opportunity to connect with nature
- the environment as a source of identity and pride — for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Tasmanians alike
- a place for recreation and, through that, good mental and physical health
- an opportunity for future employment through clean energy and tourism
- the pleasure experienced in the beauty of nature itself

Children and young people highlighted that they want the Tasmanian environment to be valued and protected - they want to see real action on climate change and a greater focus on sustainability.

I learned that many children and their parents/cares would like more things for children and young people to do in their communities – and more places or more appropriately designed places to do them.

The cost of participation in activities was frequently highlighted as an issue and I learned that what is needed are more free and/or low-cost activities outside school, as well as “all season” child-friendly sports, and leisure infrastructure - playgrounds, swimming pools, skate parks, basketball courts, and bike paths.

Importantly, improved transport options to access activities and services was frequently highlighted as a need, particularly in rural and remote communities.



When it comes to their education, children and young people expressed a desire for an education system that is more responsive to their needs including flexible and relevant subject choice.

Extension programs and/or self-paced learning support, more in-class support for students experiencing learning challenges, improved and more available school-based support services (including mental health, social work and counsellors) were all highlighted as things that would improve the education journey.

Worryingly, young people told me their schools' responses to bullying were often absent, inappropriate or insufficient.

A lack of appropriate access to health services including those providing support for mental health for children and young people was a common theme. I learned children and young people and their families value their physical and mental health and want more child health, and specialist services for children and young people, especially in regional communities.

They see a need for more frequent public transport options to attend appointments, more counsellors, psychologists, and acute mental health support for children and young people, as well as more pediatric specialists and drug and alcohol services for young people and their families.

General support for families was another stand-out issue. I learned about a desire for more accessible and affordable childcare, better access to information and services to support children and families and more antenatal and postnatal services for families. I learned that a universally available free parenting course would be popular amongst young families, that there was a need for better family intervention and relationship support, and a need for greater promotion of and information about the importance of the first 1000 days of children's lives.

Children and young people stressed to me that a sense of belonging - of feeling safe and of being accepted in their communities - was of great importance to them. They are asking for better leadership on equality and non-discrimination, and a greater respect for diversity.

They have also identified that having access to the basics can sometimes be difficult. They would like improved access to financial resources, better access to technology, support and assistance to access food and for more affordable housing to be available.

I have documented these findings in a recently released report entitled, *We Call it Happy*, which I have provided to Government to inform their development of Tasmania's first child and youth wellbeing strategy for 0-25-year-olds. I will also use this report as I monitor the development and implementation of the new strategy.

We have an obligation to those children and young people who shared their views and opinions with me to show them how we take those views and opinions into account in making decisions that affect their lives.

The full Report is located on our website: www.childcomm.tas.gov.au

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