


# FRONT & CENTRE

an agenda for south australian children and young people



Commissioner  
Y for Children &  
Young People






This document outlines the broad focus areas of the Commissioner for Children and Young People South Australia for 2018 to 2022. It has been prepared to inform and engage the community about the work of the Commissioner.

The document outlines:

- Platforms that will guide the work of the Commissioner.
- Key functions as outlined in the *Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016*.
- Key outcome areas identified through consultation with stakeholders, including children and young people.
- Priority projects requested by children and young people on the Commissioner's Listening Tour.

More information concerning the Listening Tour reflections and the work of the Commissioner is available from [www. ccyp.com.au](http://www.ccyp.com.au)





# a message from the commissioner

Before I took office as the Commissioner for Children and Young People, South Australian children were asked what they wanted in a Commissioner. At the heart of what they wished for was someone they could trust, someone who understands them and knows what's going on and someone to stand up for them.

During my term in office it is my intention to not only fulfil these expectations, but to work with parents, family members, carers, professionals, policy makers and the broader community to build families and communities where children and young people are safe, healthy, engaged and valued. Where they can access available opportunities, and face their futures with optimism.

'Front and Centre' outlines my priorities and where I will focus attention to improve the development and wellbeing of our children. At the heart are a range of strategies to move beyond the rhetoric and truly place the needs, interests and welfare of our children and young people front and centre in our collective thoughts and actions. Every one of us has a role to play in creating this reality, and making SA the place where the wellbeing and

development of all our children and young people is a community priority. Realising the needs and interests of South Australian children in a rapidly changing world should be our focus.

This plan is underpinned by the voices and experience of children and young people that I had face to face conversations with during my 2017 Listening Tour. As well as child advocates, service providers, civil society organisations, academics and policy makers across South Australia.

As I travelled through South Australia in 2017, I heard and gathered information from adults children and young people from diverse backgrounds on their unique opinions, views and experiences.

I have heard first hand that many children and young people in South Australia lead happy active lives and feel respected by adults. They value school, education and learning, family relationships, their culture, opportunities to participate, friendship and their pets.



## My Commitments

- Promote the wellbeing of children and young people in South Australia.
- Work with parents, family members, carers, professionals, policy makers and the broader community as partners, collaborators and stakeholders.
- Engage in two way discussions with children and young people.
- Connect to metropolitan, regional and rural communities.
- Meet people in their spaces and time.
- Demonstrate respect and active involvement of children and young people in all I do.


I have also heard that children and young people in South Australia are very concerned for those who they see are feeling less included, less mentally well, less financially secure and less prepared for their future. They have also told me the areas they would change to make life better for all children and young people, including those doing it tough. They are experts in their own lives and want to have their opinions heard, treated with respect and taken seriously.

Over the next four years I will advocate for the views, aspirations and rights of children and young people to be affirmed, promoted and protected and for the issues affecting children and young people doing it tough to be prioritised. Together we can design and deliver better ways of putting our children's best interests front and centre in policy practice and service.

Helen Connolly

**Commissioner for Children and Young People**

March 2018



This agenda seeks to bring together the issues that are important to children and young people and to give them a 'voice' and create the conditions for all children to:

- Be happy and active
- Stay safe
- Feel listened to and respected
- Be valued and informed
- Access information





# about the commissioner for children and young people

The South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People is a new independent position, established under the *Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016* (“the Act”). This legislation was introduced by the South Australian Parliament in response to Recommendation 245 of the Child Protection Systems Royal Commission. The purpose was to create a statutory officer with powers and functions to advocate, at a systemic level, to improve the wellbeing of children and young people in SA.

The Act sets out the Commissioner's role including her responsibility to promote and advocate for the rights, and interests of all children and young people in SA, and to promote the participation of children and young people in the making of decisions that affect their lives. The Act specifically requires the Commissioner to engage those groups of children and young people whose ability to make their views known is limited for any reason.

This direct engagement with children and young people in seeking their views on policy process and practice is at the core of a child rights based approach. When their voices and views are amplified

and supported by adults who value their participation then we have the foundation to ensure that the development and wellbeing of SA children is a community priority.

The Commissioner's work is guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the core treaty which sets out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of children. The general principles of the UNCRC are:

- **Article 2 (Non-discrimination):** Children should not be discriminated against.
- **Article 3 (Best interests of the child):** Every decision and action must be in the child's best interest.
- **Article 6 (Survival and Development):** Every child has the right to life and develop to their full potential.
- **Article 12:** The extent to which children and young people's views are sought and taken into account in decisions that affect them.



In Addition to the general principles of the UNCRC, the Commissioner will pay particular attention to:

- **Article 15:** Provision of public spaces where children and young people can meet safely.
- **Article 17:** Provision of appropriate information materials to meet children and young people's needs.
- **Article 18:** Parents and carers are supported in order that they can care for their children. Children and young people with complex family circumstances are supported.
- **Articles 22:** Children and young people and families who are asylum seeking and refugees have services and supports to help them.
- **Article 23:** Children and young people with a disability have access to a range of

services and choice and control over the services they receive in education, health, play and leisure.

- **Article 24:** Children and young people have resources and support to meet their mental health needs.
- **Article 28:** Children and young people do not experience discrimination in their education.
- **Article 31:** Children and young people have access to and can participate in a range of cultural experiences.
- **Article 37:** Children and young people have access to legal and other assistance in instances where they are detained.
- **Article 40:** Children and young people are supported to not enter the criminal justice system and those in the system have fair treatment and legal representation.





# what children and young people have said should be the commissioner's priorities

- Create more part time and full time job opportunities.
- Develop more ways to participate in community life, including places to hang out and affordable sport and recreational activities.
- Focus on developing more respectful and kinder relationships with families, friends, teachers, workplaces and online.
- Address the impact of stigma, lack of understanding and isolation of mental illness and difficulties around getting the “right help”, especially for those transitioning from youth to adult services.
- Promote equality, equal access, equal rights, equal treatment and acceptance for people from diverse race, gender, sexual, religious and socio-economic backgrounds.
- Prepare children and young people for leaving school and entering adulthood through learning skills and education about social issues and participating in society, trying new things and having a say.
- Understand the complex and intricate nature of friendships in the digital world.
- Provide more opportunities for children and young people living outside Adelaide particularly for those who are not into sport.
- **Keep meeting face to face and listening to children and young people.**



# what stakeholders identified as factors impacting on wellbeing, anxieties and aspirations for children and families



- Deepening income inequality and intergenerational exclusion is increasing levels of worry amongst young people.
- Economic growth without job growth and impact on youth employment.
- Loss of confidence in government and withdrawal of young people from participation in governance.
- Rising demand for “experiences” and the impact on delivery of services like health and education in a way that resonates with this generation.
- Greater immersion in a virtual world of increased creativity, micro transactions, collaborative consumption, anywhere working, freelancing and impact on future of work and the gap between what is taught and what will be needed.
- Impact of growing up in a digital world on relationships, safety, values, beliefs and behaviours.
- Demographic shifts and the pressure to ensure the interests of the “voting” aged population are prioritised over those of children.
- Growing concern regarding regional sustainability and opportunities for young people to participate in regional community life.



## our values

independent

child rights centric

accountable

meaningful

## our principles

We **search** for opportunities for children and young people to be empowered, engaged and involved.

We **collaborate** and partner with government, community and business.

We **reinforce** our view of children and young people as drivers of change, partners in reform and contributor's with insights and solutions.

We listen to the views of children and young people, collaborate with them and represent their diverse voices in the public arena with a special focus on those who struggle to have their voices heard.

Our advocacy is directed by the experiences and issues that children and young people talk about and have asked us to focus on.



# we will align our work to the following key goals, objectives and outcomes

## GOAL 1

Promote and protect the rights, interests and wellbeing of children and young people and amplify their experiences, insights and opinions.

## GOAL 2

Provide oversight and advocacy to strengthen the development and wellbeing of children and young people.

## GOAL 3

Develop opportunities for children and young people's participation in decision making and contribution to public, civic and community life.

## KEY OBJECTIVES

**Champion children and young people's rights** and work with the broader community to respect and support their inclusion in laws, policies and decision making.

**Connect with children and young people's** enthusiasm and capacity for innovation, and identify and create opportunities for them to engage and influence change.

**Monitor, investigate, research, make submissions and advocate** for change in laws, policies, programs and practices or issues that negatively impact on children and young people.

**Advise leaders and decision makers** on how to improve the development and wellbeing of South Australia's children and young people.

**Partner and collaborate with organisations** and systems to include children and young people as stakeholders and to incorporate their perspectives and views in policy and system reforms.



### **outcome #1**

decision makers are actively engaging children and young people as stakeholders and considering their rights and interests in a systemic way

### **outcome #2**

children and young people whose views are seldom heard, have more opportunities to inform key decision makers on the effectiveness of the “system” in protecting and promoting their rights, interests and needs

### **outcome #3**

children, young people and their families are better equipped to understand the digital world, and feel empowered to access its benefits and manage its risks

### **outcome #4**

children and young people have meaningful ways to participate and make a contribution across public, civic and community life



# focus area #1

## place the interests of children and young people front and centre in everyday life

### Our first steps:

- Develop a framework to support the implementation of child rights centric practical actions across business and community services.
- Inform new and emerging professionals on what children and young people expect from them co-designing and co-creating a series of "What You Need to Know" educational resources.
- Improve feedback mechanisms through partnering with children and young people on how they want to raise concerns, give feedback and express their views and opinions on the services they receive.
- Develop strategies to embed young people's perspectives and views into governance, leadership and operational frameworks through collaboration with key business and community leaders.

Children and young people are directly affected by the decisions that are made today. Their everyday lives as well as their future are impacted by policies, systems and services. Children and young people are best placed in many cases to identify what they need, what will improve their lives and how best to engage them. By including children and young people in decision making processes, their views and ideas will enable the development of more effective, efficient, timely and impactful policies, systems and services.

### Outcome:

*Decision makers are actively engaging children and young people as stakeholders and considering their rights and interests in a systemic way.*

### Achieved by:

- Increasing visibility of children and young people to policy makers and service providers.
- Embedding mechanisms for children and young people to input into decision making and regulatory frameworks.
- Partnering with agencies to improve mechanisms for direct feedback from children and young people.



# focus area #2

## prioritise the development and wellbeing of those doing it tough

There are children and young people in SA not doing as well as we want, or receiving the support they need to succeed. This includes children in care and protection, those involved in youth justice, children with a disability, children falling through the gaps in systems, such as education and health and those who have experienced trauma and discrimination. There are many children who are in homeless families, have caring responsibilities or who are in families struggling to make ends meet. These kids are doing it tough. This is not an inevitability and we can work together to break the cycles of disadvantage and bring about change for all children and young people who need extra support to develop and flourish.

### Outcome:

*Children and young people whose views are seldom heard, have more opportunities to inform key decision makers on the effectiveness of the “system” in protecting and promoting their rights, interests and needs.*

### Achieved by:

- Representing the views and voices of children and young people who are doing it tough to policy makers, planners and providers.
- Advocating for the interests of those who fall through the gaps to decision makers.
- Researching and reporting on child vulnerability, emerging issues and potential solutions.

### Our first steps:

- Inform policy makers and broader community of the early intervention and prevention strategies children and young people want to implement to reduce bullying.
- Improve legal systems and processes for children and young people through systemic monitoring of the views and input of young people who have had direct contact with the Family Court, Youth Court, Criminal Courts and Tribunals.
- Partner with the adult mental health system to work with young people to identify how to best address their mental health.
- Improve policies and practices through awareness of the impact of educational exclusion and suspension on children and families.



# focus area #3

## engage and empower young digital citizens

### Our first steps:

- Raise awareness of the educational, social and economic impact of gaming through a youth led conversation.
- Empower children and young people and support their preparation for the jobs of the future by creating an ongoing digital challenge.
- Inform stakeholders on safety and relationship issues identified by children and young people arising from digital involvement and create opportunities to co-design responses.
- Resource families to support their young children to engage safely in the digital world.

Children born this century are growing up in a completely digital world. This impacts on the way children and young people view their world, access information and services, gain knowledge, form opinions and participate in things that matter to them. Digital access doesn't automatically translate to digital literacy and digital empowerment. All children and young people in SA should be able to engage with the digital world, access its benefits equally, be digitally included and have their rights protected.

### Outcome:

*Children, young people and their families are better equipped to understand the digital world, and feel empowered to access its benefits and manage its risks.*

### Achieved by:

- Supporting children and parents to understand digital identity and rights.
- Showcasing the positive impact of online activities on individuals and community.
- Empowering children and young people through their digital skills and capabilities.



# focus area #4

## strengthen children and young people's participation in society

Children and young people want to contribute to the vision, strategy, culture and operations of public institutions, laws and governance. They want to matter, be connected to a purpose and have their individual and collective strengths and contribution recognised. We must engage children and young people and provide opportunities to build a society based on increased honesty, integrity, transparency and equality. This will strengthen our democratic institutions and structures and protections that underpin the fabric of civil society and promote economic and social justice.

### Outcome:

*Children and young people have meaningful ways to participate and make a contribution across public, civic and community life.*

### Achieved by:

- Promoting children and young people's wellbeing through the development of practical citizenship and participation, and support to challenge and hold institutions to account.
- Identifying regional children and young people's interests and aspirations, hope and dreams for their communities, and supporting in their inclusion in local and regional planning.
- Emphasising the contribution, possibility, achievement, talent and global potential of South Australian young people.

### Our first steps:

- Partner with business and community leaders to showcase contribution, grow aspiration and retain young people in South Australia through multiple platforms.
- Inform regional institutions on how regional children and young people want to engage and participate in their communities now and in the future.
- Future-proof participation in civil society through children and young people's direct engagement in political participation, civic engagement and policy development.





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