



GPO Box 1146, Adelaide, SA 5000

13 August 2018

Secretary to the Committee
C/- Parliament House
GPO Box 572
Adelaide SA 5000

To the Select Committee on Poverty in South Australia

As the inaugural Commissioner for Children and Young People my mandate is to promote the rights, best interests and wellbeing of all children and young people. To undertake this in the last 16 months I have spoken to thousands of children and young people on issues that are important to them.

I advocate for the views, aspirations and rights of children and young people to be affirmed, promoted and protected. I bring to the table issues that are important to children and young people to give them a 'voice'. I also seek to influence and identify the responsibilities and roles of the public, civic and commercial sectors to design and deliver better ways of putting our children's best interests front and centre in policy practice and service.

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

I 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.

I also heard that children and young people in South Australia are very concerned for those who they see are feeling less included, are less mentally well, less financially secure and less prepared for their future. They 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.

During my first 6 months as Commissioner I asked South Australian children and young people about what they would change to make South Australia better and what they thought I should prioritise in my role.

Children and young people were asked to write down their 'one thing' they wanted the Commissioner to do right now. As a result of this question I received more than 1000 notes telling me the 'one thing' I need to do first.

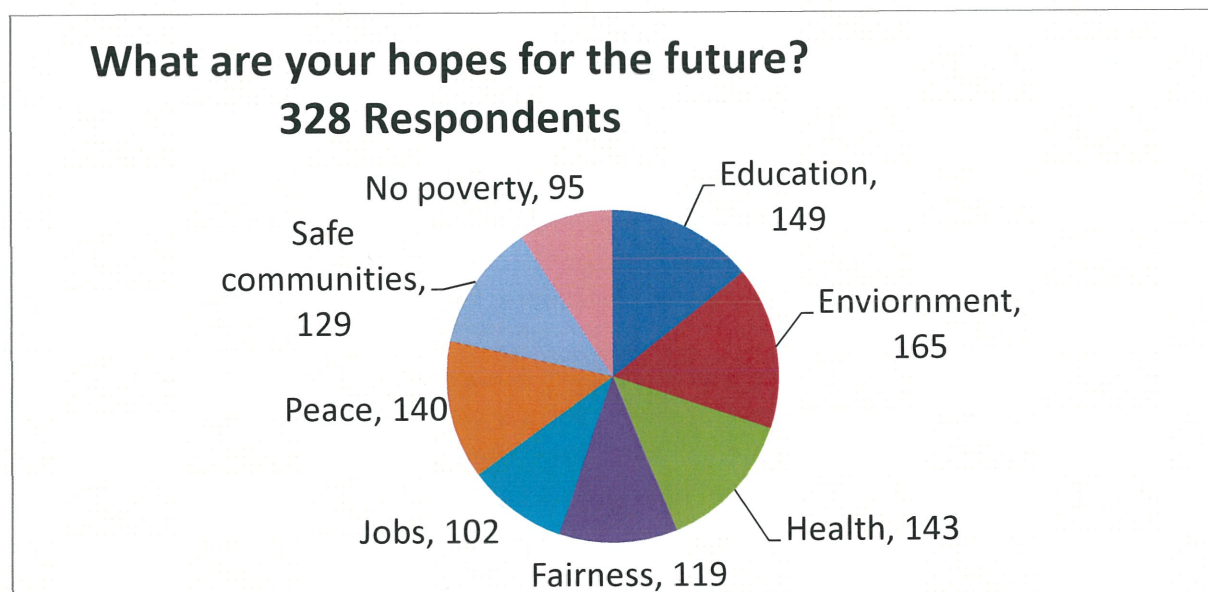
The top five 'one things' asked of me by over 1000 children and young people are:

- Keep listening to kids
- Help poor kids
- Make sure everyone gets an education
- Help stop bullying and cyberbullying
- Create opportunities – now to make decisions, to be involved, jobs education sport.

Helping poor kids scored very highly and reflected the fact that poverty is a topic that is in the forefront of their minds. This was reinforced in my one on one conversations with children and young people, in which they confirmed that poverty and lack of resources was an issue that touched many lives, either themselves, close family or friends.

This is not surprising as according to the South Australian Council of Social Service (SACOSS) in 2016 131,945 people or 8% of the population live in poverty, including 22,350 children and young people in South Australia.

In addition to my conversations and consultations I also randomly polled children and young people about aspects of their lives. In relation to their hopes for the future it is interesting to note that issues like jobs, poverty, health and the environment are issues they consider.



From my work to date I can share the following thoughts and views from children and young people that reflect their connection to the issue of poverty.

Children and young people want everyone to have the same opportunities

Children and young people I have talked to want everyone to be treated the same. They speak about concepts like equality and wanting their peers to have the same opportunities as they have, such as a good education, access to sports and activities, food, housing and to feel safe.

"Treat everyone the same."

They also want better supports to help homeless people get a job and get back on track.

"Give people opportunities ... (example) homeless people jobs, usually people that go for a job interview clothes don't fit, give people clothes for an interview."

Children and young people want an increase in social service payments and supports for those children and families doing it tough

Children and young people know about the stress their parents and/or guardians are facing. The young people living independently have also told me about their stress of living day-to-day on meagre income and how unprepared they are for living in the adult world. They have talked to me about the need for payments to single parents, the unemployed and students to be increased, both for themselves and their parents.

"Centrelink assessment based on young person's circumstances rather than parents income so people in abusive homes who need money don't fall through the cracks."

"The cost of living is too high even with social supports like Centrelink."

"Centrelink to increase our pay."

"One thing I would like to change is the centre link money so my mum (mum) can be able to take better health care for me."

"Increase single parent payment."

"Money – enough money to help single parents with health and education."

Children and young people are worried about the cost of living

The children and young people I have spoken to are worried about the cost of living and asking for supports to help support those that cannot afford it. They talk about the high cost of education (including uniforms and books), utilities and bills, food, health and medical bills and housing.

"A lot of young people cant even afford the things they need (health food, clean water, school uniforms, school supplies)".

"Lower Bills so most people can live better lifes (Lives) and don't have to worry about bills."

"Food should be cheaper and shops should not throw away food away to minimise on the Australians sleeping on an empty stomach."

"Making house less expensive."

"The price of medical bills."

The topic of poverty was talked about often. I haven't, however explored with children and young people what they think solutions might be and if their experience of poverty is different to that of adults. In my research I have also found a lack of data on children's lived experience.

As a result I have decided that I will undertake some further conversations with children and young people on how poverty affects them, if it differs to the documented effects of poverty and what they think can be done to help the children and young people doing it tough. These initial conversations will occur in early September and will inform how I further engage on this topic in 2019.

It is imperative that we get the views of children and young people on this topic to ensure future policy and services are better able to assist them.

I would also like to bring to your attention new government-led work currently occurring in New Zealand (NZ) to reduce child poverty. Reducing the incidence of child poverty is one way to reduce the overall incidence of poverty in a country/community. The action being taken in NZ could be one strategy the SA government could adopt to help those families and children 'doing it tough' in SA.

In January 2018, the NZ government tabled the Child Poverty Bill. This Bill will require the government to:

- Establish ten year targets on a defined set of measures of child poverty and periodically set and publish three-year targets.
- Develop and report on a strategy to promote the overall wellbeing of children.
- Report on how the Budget will reduce poverty on Budget Day.

Most importantly, this Bill requires the government to consult with children, Maori and other stakeholders to develop the strategy.

As the Minister of Children the Honourable Tracey Martin so eloquently articulates:

“The voices of children and young people should be at the centre of the strategy development process. Children and young people have a right to participate in decisions that affect them, including collective participation in decisions that affect all children and young people.”

I hope that when your recommendations are handed down it includes the active participation of children and young people that are affected so that the best solutions can be made for them. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Helen Connolly', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Helen Connolly
Commissioner for Children and Young People

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