

Commissioner
for Children and
Young People

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Our approach to advocacy



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The South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People is an **independent statutory position**, established under the *Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016* 'the Act'.

Our approach to advocacy

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 advise and make recommendations to Ministers, State authorities and other bodies (including non-government bodies). The Commissioner is required to undertake or commission research and prepare and publish reports on matters related to the rights, development and wellbeing of children and young people at a systemic level.

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.

In order to include children and young people, the Commissioner works collaboratively with groups committed to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) principles and explores the supporting mechanisms to practically embed them in her work.

In the Commissioner's work she listens to the views of children and young people, collaborates with them and represents their diverse voices in the public arena with a special focus on those who find it difficult to have their voices heard. Much of her advocacy is directed by the experiences and issues that children and young people talk about and have asked her to focus on.

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A key objective of the Commissioner for Children and Young People is to champion a child's rights approach to position children and young people's interests, development and wellbeing front and centre in public policy and community life and to advocate to decision makers to change policy, attitudes and practice in favour of children and young people. Her advocacy can take many forms, from face-to-face discussions with decision makers and developing strategies to raise public awareness of issues. It can also be direct representation of the views and opinions of children and young people to protect their rights and interests to ensure social justice.

Our approach to systemic advocacy is grounded in the following principles:

- Identify systemic issues
- Raise awareness and provide opportunities for action
- Active promotion of solutions
- Influencing people in order to change systems policies and structures
- Build alliances.

Practically our actions:

- Support children and young people's ability to have their voices heard
- Facilitate collective action to create change
- Collaborate with civil society
- Grow community awareness.

The focus of our actions can be government, organisations, business and community and our goals include:

- Awareness raising
- Public policy development
- Legislative change
- Operational policy
- Practice improvements.

We work primarily at three levels:

- Working to change laws, policies, and programs at local and state levels
- Driving changes in public opinion, beliefs and narratives
- Creating opportunities to strengthen children and young people's voice

Working to change laws, policies, and programs at local and state levels.

Those directly involved in assisting children and young people can feel powerless due to inappropriate policies or program structure. We look to get to the source of the problem and change the structures by influencing decision makers to change policy or programs and thereby create a greater impact.

Our processes are underpinned by constructive dialogue both with adult stakeholders and children and young people. We engage in conversations that focus on the positive and build capacity in those we work with. We move beyond traditional problem solving approaches, ask positive questions, inspire constructive dialogue and dream about alternatives and possibilities. We focus on values, new ideas and solutions in concrete terms.

Driving changes in public opinion, beliefs and narratives

To achieve change, it is sometimes necessary to shift attitudes towards a group of people in the community on a specific issue. Through public campaigning and raising awareness, we look to change community attitudes and create public support on an issue and/or campaign.

Creating opportunities to strengthen children and young people's voice

Through direct representation of children and young people on issues they identify, and consultation on issues identified by others we can speak with credibility. We forge partnerships with the broader community in order to be able to substantiate the issues we respond to and represent children and young people in a genuine way.

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