

## Stay focused on regional young people while the future is being re-imagined

The Commissioner for Children and Young People, Helen Connolly, says that young people in Regional South Australia are looking for opportunities to participate in building the sustainable future of their local communities. Given the coronavirus and the recovery projects linked to the devastating bushfires now is an ideal time to incorporate young people into the discussion, to hear their ideas and to act upon them.

Young people told the Commissioner that being invited to participate would make them feel more valued and listened to in their own communities. It would mean they were being seen as important stakeholders who are deserving of opportunities to have their voices heard and their ideas acted upon.

The recommendations are contained in the Commissioner's latest report launched today – *Regenerating Our Regions - increasing participation of young people in rural South Australia*. The new report came out of the Commissioner's Regional Youth Voices Forum attended by 172 regional South Australian young people from the Barossa Valley, Clare, Gilbert and Coyder Council areas. They included 150 students from years 8 and 9 (aged 12 to 14 years) as well as members of the Youth Advisory Committees from these areas.

Developed in partnership with Goyder's Youth Advisory Committee, young people who attended the forum told the Commissioner that the only conversation adults around them were having is one about agriculture and economics and that they wished they could be involved in other conversations with adults that were more relevant to their issues and concerns.

The Commissioner is therefore urging community leaders to find ways to involve regional young people in decision making, engaging with them on their own terms about subjects of interest and concern to them. These include mental health, education, online behaviour, and employment and job opportunities, which they identified at the forum as key priorities.

The report describes a range of simple actions community leaders in regional communities can take to support young people to participate and to feel more valued. Key amongst them was the need for adults to listen to young people. Other recommendations detailed in the report, included the need for adults to be 'kinder', 'more caring' and 'more compassionate' toward young people, supporting them to take a more active and responsible role in their communities.

While many communities are in the midst of recovering from the devastating impact of the summer bushfires and preparing for the impact of the coronavirus, it makes sense to include young people in the communal effort that is required to overcome these major challenges.

If they're not included in the development of ideas and solutions to major problems that their own communities face, they're unlikely to see their future within them. Conversely if they can contribute their ideas and energy to help build that future, they have a vested interest in it and are much more likely to stay and become an enduring part of it.

**Quotes to be attributed to Commissioner for Children and Young People, Helen Connolly:**

Given that sustainability of South Australia's regional communities is intrinsically linked to the aspirations of its young people, changes that encompass greater participation by young people are essential. Instead of sidelining regional young people, we could/should be embedding them in their local communities; capturing their ideas, harnessing their vitality and enthusiasm for doing things differently and ensuring their contributions are not only valued, but celebrated. By asking young people what they think and what they would do, we send a strong message that their opinions and ideas matter. Inviting young people's participation in finding solutions to issues the community faces as a whole, demonstrates clearly that their contributions are considered key to building a sustainable future for all.

**Background:** South Australia's Commissioner for Children and Young People Helen Connolly, was appointed in April 2017. The Commissioner is responsible for promoting and advocating for the rights, interests and wellbeing of children and young people across South Australia.

**For more information** about the work of the Commissioner and to access the *Regenerating our Regions Report* go to [www.ccyp.com.au/reports/](http://www.ccyp.com.au/reports/)

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