

31st March 2020

Email: youthplan@sa.gov.au

Re: *Strong Futures: Draft SA Youth Action Plan 2020-2022*

As South Australia's Commissioner for Children and Young People, my mandate under the *Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016* is to advocate for the rights, interests and wellbeing of all children and young people in South Australia.

I have spoken with thousands of children and young people across regional and metropolitan South Australia about the issues that are important to them. Children and young people tell me that they want to have a say in the decisions that affect their lives, their communities and beyond. They want to have access to education, healthcare and other services that meet their needs. They want to be trusted, listened to, respected and valued, and they want to have access to information that will help them to explore solutions, voice their ideas and make decisions.

I am pleased to see that the Priority Areas and the Strong Futures Projects set out in the *Strong Futures: Draft SA Youth Action Plan 2020-2022*, are very much in line with what children and young people have told me they care about. The proactive approach of engaging and listening to young people at every stage in the development of the Strong Futures plan is in line with current models of engaging with children and young people. The plan recognises that including and empowering children and young people directly in decision-making processes will make policies, systems and services more timely, impactful and effective.

However, I note that there is one key area that appears to be missing from the Plan: the engagement and empowerment of young digital citizens.

Children and young people today spend a significant part of their lives in digital and online environments. They tell me that the online world is simply an extension of the offline world. It is another place where they live their lives, learn, be creative, relax and connect socially with others. They are aware of the impact this world can have on relationships, safety, values, beliefs and behaviours and they want the tools to feel empowered to navigate this significant part of their lives.

Many children and young people, particularly those who live in regional areas, do not have access to affordable and reliable internet or for those who cannot afford it, any internet at all. This has an

impact on how they access education and employment opportunities, how they connect socially and how their voices are heard. Furthermore, where children and young people do have access, access doesn't automatically translate to digital literacy or digital empowerment.

All children and young people in SA should be able to engage with the digital world equally, access its benefits, be digitally included, and have their rights protected. I encourage you to consider dedicating a Stronger Futures Project to digital engagement and empowerment, especially in the regions. This project would fit in neatly with all of the Plan's existing priority areas: "Earn and Learn", "Fair and Inclusive", "Wellbeing and Environment", and "Connect and Grow". The following information about my digital challenges may be useful.

The Commissioner's Digital Challenge

I have recently launched the latest in [my series of free digital challenges](#), which are all about providing children and young people with the skills they need to become empowered and engaged digital citizens. In the 2020 *Space to Dream* Digital Challenge (Challenge), children and young people learn how to use the 5-step design thinking process in order to invent a toy or gadget for a person their age who is travelling to Mars.

The Challenge seeks to reach and engage children who are not at school or who attend schools that are not engaging in digital learning. Children and young people can complete the challenge inside or outside of school, through public libraries, Scouts, Girl Guides, Children's University Adelaide, or at home with their families.

Space to Dream follows my 2019 *Learn to Speak Robot* Challenge, which focused on digital thinking (coding and computational thinking). An estimated 19,026 children took part in the 2019 challenge across 217 schools, 31 libraries, various community groups, and at home with families.

The following quotes from children who took part in the 2019 challenge demonstrate how children and young people feel when they are supported and empowered to develop digital skills:

We completed a coding program which was very beneficial to us in adapting to the world around us ... We can't wait for the future!

- Student from Westport Primary School

I think if others tried it, their coding brain would get stronger and be able to cope with other challenges in other subjects.

- Student from Marion Primary School

Future challenges will be designed to expand across core areas of the digital learning journey with a systems thinking, digital literacy and digital citizenship component.

The rest of *Strong Futures Plan* aligns and builds on some of my previous and ongoing projects. I therefore think this is a perfect opportunity to highlight some of these projects and demonstrate how they relate to and reinforce key outcomes of the Strong Futures Plan.

I hope you find the following information useful as you move forward with the next stages of the plan. I would be happy to have a conversation about any of these projects at a time convenient to you.

Yours sincerely,



Helen Connolly

Commissioner for Children and Young People

Hopes and Dreams and Regenerating our Regions: Children and young people in regional South Australia

This is particularly relevant to Draft SA Youth Action Plan Priority Area 2. Fair and Inclusive. **Strong Futures Project 3.** Develop practical actions that support social and economic outcomes for young people in regional South Australia.

During my 2017 listening tour, I heard from hundreds of children and young people in regional South Australia about the importance of feeling proud of where they lived. They told me that they didn't necessarily want to leave their communities when they were older, but that they wanted more opportunities within their towns and communities.

My 2018 Hopes and Dreams regional tour was an opportunity to continue this conversation. I visited ten regions over ten months to listen to children and young people about their hopes and dreams – big and small – and what support they need to realise these hopes and dreams. [The CCYP Hopes and Dreams Report](#) summarises what children and young people across regional SA want from their communities and how their communities can support them to be connected, creative and confident.

In response to what I heard during my 2017 and 2018 tours and in collaboration with the Youth Advisory Committees of the Barossa Valley, Clare and Gilbert and Goyder Councils, I brought together a large number of young people from regional SA at a Regional Voices Youth Forum. [The CCYP Regenerating our Regions report](#) summarises what the Youth Forum participants told us are the biggest challenges facing young people in their regional communities, what they think should be done to better support young people facing these challenges, and what assets their community has that could be used to address them.

Work Inspiration: The transition from education to work

This is particularly relevant to Draft SA Youth Action Plan Priority Area 1. Earn and Learn. **Strong Futures Project 1.** Build the foundation skills and participation of young people not in full time work and/or study.

Children and young people tell me that they want to be prepared for adult life and work. While thousands of children and young people have shared with me their goals for the future, I have also heard about the significant barriers facing young people and their access to education, training and employment opportunities.

Based on these conversations, I began a project about how we can support and prepare our state's young people for the transition from education to the world of work. I have looked at this

transition, future skills development, work experience and barriers to learning with a view to empower young people and improve outcomes. This project included a survey of 779 young people about what they think would help them be prepared for jobs and their future working lives. The findings of this research will be released shortly.

In collaboration with the Australian Migrant Resource Centre, my office also organised a Leading for our Future Youth Symposium. This event brought together hundreds of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to discuss their experiences of accessing education and employment opportunities. This group of young people explored the key issues and barriers to study and work, and identified actions and solutions to address these barriers. The key recommendations and further details about the event are presented in the [Leading for our Future Youth Symposium Report](#).

The following projects are particularly relevant to Draft SA Youth Action Plan Priority Area 2. Fair and Inclusive. Strong Futures Project 4. Invest in the capacity of youth services to deliver high quality services to young people.

Improving the health care system for trans and gender diverse children and young people.

My 2019 [First Port of Call Report](#) outlines four priority areas the state government can act on to better meet the health care needs of South Australian trans and gender diverse children and young people. The report is based on consultations with trans and gender diverse children and young people, their families and advocates, about the barriers and challenges they have faced when seeking support, consent, medical treatment and other health services. The key priority areas include:

1. increased visibility of trans and gender diverse children and young people
2. the provision of better information for children and their parents
3. better education and training for health care professionals
4. the provision of timely and gender-affirming services.

Children living with disability

It has become evident during my consultations that children and young people living with disability are often excluded when it comes to decision-making that affect their lives. There are limited opportunities for children and young people living with a disability to participate in decision-making processes, express their views, or be genuinely listened to. I plan to engage with more children living with disability throughout 2020 about the issues that are important to them. Their voices will shape my advocacy and inform service providers, working within the disability sector and other stakeholders, about how to better meet the needs of South Australia's young people living with a disability.

Aboriginal Youth Engagement Project

This is particularly relevant to Draft SA Youth Action Plan Priority Area 2. Fair and Inclusive. **Strong Futures Project 2.** Grow opportunities for young people to engage in intercultural understanding and respect for the histories, cultures and languages of Aboriginal communities.

In collaboration with Reconciliation SA and Tauondi Aboriginal College, our [Aboriginal Youth Engagement Project](#) explored the feasibility of establishing an Aboriginal Youth Council (AYC) in South Australia. Building on the findings from this project, CCYP is planning to hold a young Aboriginal Voices Summit, similar to the Koorie Youth Summit held in Victoria, where Aboriginal young people in South Australia will come together in a safe and supportive space to build connections and networks, and express their concerns and views on a range of issues that are important to them.

The following projects are particularly relevant to Priority Area 3. Wellbeing and Environment. **Strong Futures Project 5.** Invest in prevention approaches that tackle the key issues affecting young people's wellbeing.

Leave No One Behind and the 2030 SDG Action Plan by South Australian Young People: What children and young people think about poverty.

While many children and young people lead active and happy lives, many of these children and young people are concerned about those who are less included, less well and less financially secure. My poverty project set out to engage directly with children and young people to explore the issue of poverty from their diverse perspectives. I heard from children and young people directly in many different ways. Through a survey, a series of workshops and focus groups with children and young people who have lived experience of poverty, and a poverty summit that was organised, in collaboration with UN Youth, and brought together more than 200 South Australian students in years 10 to 12.

Overall, more than 2,000 South Australian children and young people told us in their own words:

- what they think poverty looks like
- what they think the impact of poverty is
- what factors they think are contributing to recurring poverty
- what they think current responses to addressing poverty are
- what more they think should or could be done and by whom, to address poverty
- what South Australia would look like if no child or young person lived in poverty.

Overwhelmingly, the children of South Australia want to help those children “doing it tough” so that they can have the same opportunities as those children who are more well off. They would like government to invest earlier in these children so that they have the same opportunities as all other South Australian children. The results of this project are reported in CCYP’s [Leave No One Behind Report](#) and the [2030 SDG Action Plan](#) report.

School exclusions

A good education is critical to the future of every young person and access to education is a fundamental right enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Despite this, I continue to hear from children, young people and their families that our education system is failing to include every child and young person. Therefore, I set out to better understand the prevalence and effects of formal and informal processes of exclusion in South Australia’s education system.

Through focus groups and online surveys, I consulted with young people with first-hand experience of school exclusions and their families. I heard about the major causes and experiences surrounding exclusions and the impacts of exclusion on a young person’s development, learning, relationships and family life.

I have heard about how informal and formal processes of exclusion can compound pre-existing disadvantage and vulnerabilities, and how exclusionary practices make young people and their families feel unwelcome, unsupported and voiceless. A focus on symptoms often means that the context and causes of young people’s disengagement from school often go ignored. Young people and their families also shared with me their ideas for how exclusions can be reduced and avoided, and how the system can change in order to better meet the needs of all children and young people.

Making Change in Youth Justice

This is particularly relevant to Priority Area 4. Connect and Grow. Strong Futures Project 7. Provide young people with opportunities to influence decision making in their life and communities.

CCYP launched the Youth Justice Leadership and Advisory Group (YJLAG) pilot program in 2019, to listen to and act upon the voices of a group of young people with lived experience and involvement in South Australia’s youth justice system. The YJLAG program supported this group of young people to identify what they saw as some of the biggest issues with the youth justice system. They were given the opportunity to advise on system change that would influence key decision makers while also being supported to develop leadership skills.

The young people recommended eight key changes that they believed would significantly improve the system. These recommendations form part of [Making Change in Youth Justice: A User's Guide to Building a Better South Australian Youth Justice System](#) and include:

- addressing cell hygiene
- reducing court waiting times
- supplying information that is easy to understand about the people and procedures that will face young people
- arranging the courtroom to be less intimidating
- making bail conditions more realistic.

Few of these young people had ever been given an opportunity to have their views heard. None had been asked for ideas about ways to improve the youth justice system or have input into decisions being made about them. Young people said that because of the circumstances that led to their offending behaviour they had been 'written off'. Being involved in the Making Change in Youth Justice project gave them hope that they could make change for the benefit of other young people who might come into contact with the youth justice system in the future.