

Young People not the face of the pandemic but maybe the eyes and ears

Commissioner releases new report *Reflections on COVID-19* reflecting on the experience of more than 300 young people from diverse backgrounds throughout March, April and May to hear their thoughts, ideas and concerns regarding the impact of COVID-19 on their lives, now and into the future, as well as their appetite for innovation, adaptation and change.

Young People reflect on their experiences of feeling hopeless and helpless and discuss the impact on their identity and opportunities; on their participation and motivation; relationships and connection; and what it has meant in relation to accessing services and increasing inequality.

'In terms of my future, as a year 12 student, I do think that COVID-19 will impact my future and the rest of my life, and the next few years. It has already impacted my final year of school, not just in terms of my education, but simply enjoying year 12 and everything that comes with it. I have missed so many opportunities that would have been amazing but unfortunately, I'll never get to have those memories.' (Amy, 16)

While I was video calling with teachers every lesson and being given constant support, my brother's school was struggling to maintain regular contact with their students. Moreover, for some students at his school, they couldn't access the stable internet connection and technological resources my brother and I are lucky enough to have.' (Holly, 16)

More than anything young South Australians hope the global pandemic experience will change the way things are done here. Although they fear a business as usual approach may prevail, they're hopeful we will take this moment to look with fresh eyes at the ways in which we plan, create and sustain our economy and society, so that it is more grounded in kindness, fairness, listening and trust, values they hold high.

They also expressed a strong desire that lessons learned through COVID-19 be applied to other critical issues such as climate change, inequality, racism and discrimination. Having witnessed firsthand how effective it can be when leaders and decision-makers

listen, trust and act upon the advice of experts and professionals to bring about rapid and important change, they want more of this to follow.

Gathered during a period that for many is likely to be one of the most formative experiences of their lives, their reflections demonstrate how the experience redefined their outlook and priorities as they coped with interruptions to travel and study plans, loss of jobs and incomes, social distancing and isolation constraints, and learning via digital interfaces that relied upon state-of-the-art access to technology. Neither was there live music, social gatherings, sport or recreational activities to attend, as most of the activities and events which might have previously filled-up a young person's calendar were either postponed or cancelled.

Gathering their collective stories through various consultations and conversations, and via a journaling project which they embraced with great enthusiasm, the Commissioner's report helps us better understand the unique experiences young people had in relation to COVID-19 as told to her in their own words.

Quotes attributable to Commissioner for Children and Young People, Helen Connolly:

In this defining moment, I see a significant opportunity for change; one that involves young people's ideas and aspirations in plans for our post-COVID response, and allows them to take their place as valued citizens, contributing in meaningful ways to creation of a better future than the one previously envisaged. Our young people must be connected, engaged and able to participate in society. They are calling upon us to take a sharper focus through a lens that integrates economic, social and environmental issues with their input and ideas. They want respect shown for future generations, challenging those with 'short termism' to apply thinking which considers the impact post-COVID decisions will have on future generations of young South Australians – not just those alive now.

To download your copy of *Reflections on COVID-19* go to:

www.ccyp.com.au/ccyp-reports

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