

It's time to look through the eyes of the child to see what they say makes an organisation child safe

On the 30th anniversary of National Child Protection Week (6 – 12 September, 2020) Commissioner Helen Connolly has released *'Trust is a Must' – what does it take to be child friendly and child safe?'*

The Commissioner's latest report examines findings from an online survey of more than 260 South Australian children and young people, the majority of whom were between 12 and 17 years of age (94%) in which the Commissioner asked what they think it takes to be child safe.

The survey followed on from a series of conversations the Commissioner had with more than 80 children aged 10 to 22 years who she asked to contribute their ideas on what feedback mechanisms could be put in place to make organisations more child friendly and child safe.

The Commissioner's findings underline the fact that if any child or young person should feel unsafe or insecure in their interactions with adults, whether at home, while in care, at school, or in other community settings, it is our responsibility to do something about it. Doing the right thing and ensuring our systems and services are child friendly and child safe must go beyond funky posters and murals on the walls or suggestion boxes on the counter. In the 21st Century the bedrock of society must be that children trust adults to believe what they are saying and then act in ways that reflect this.

Children and young people understand intuitively that trust is an essential element of a well-functioning society. They know their collective trust in civil society is built when they are valued, listened to, and respected for their own views and insights. However, for some time now, children and young people have been vocalising increasing concern about how they are treated, how they are spoken to, and how they are ignored – all issues that negatively affect intergenerational trust. Unsurprisingly when governments and leaders dismiss children and young people's concerns and take limited or no action to address them, they lose trust in those adults and institutions.

Whether it's bullying at school, finding support for mental health challenges, or issues at home, children and young people usually only reach out to organisations for support when they have exhausted all other avenues. They often need confidentiality and help to find a resolution quickly. Being able to trust the adults to whom they have reached out is therefore of paramount importance. These urgent interactions with organisations are key to determining whether or not the foundations upon which the organisation is built are child friendly and child safe, and therefore worth the child or young person connecting to in the first place.

Children and young people told the Commissioner that the little things also matter, like employing friendly staff who are relatable and approachable, and who are interested to get to know them and understand their lives. If an adult makes a mistake they want them to admit it and try to rectify it quickly, keeping them informed of progress by updating them via the platforms they like to use.

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They also want opportunities to have a say in the design and delivery of services before they are introduced, as well as provide feedback when the experience they have does not match with their expectations.

Children and young people told the Commissioner they want adults to set-up up processes that create a cycle of continuous feedback. They will begin to believe adults are taking them seriously when their complaints, issues and concerns are acted upon in ways children and young people have suggested will work best; not based on assumptions adults have made about a child or young person's life or situation.

Quotes attributable to Commissioner for Children & Young People, Helen Connolly
It's a two way street. Children must be able to trust adults and adults must trust children. At what point will we stop and actively listen to what children and young people tell us is happening in their lives including what they would like us to do about it. For far too long we have focussed on sorting out the nuts and bolts of child safety, rather than take a more values centred approach. This requires us to walk our talk, matching what we say with what we do. Listening and believing is key to providing the right kind of support at the right time. Only by developing policies and procedures that are informed by experiences and feedback can children and young people be confident we are providing the protection they seek – not placing our own ideas ahead of theirs. If organisations providing services to children and young people cannot be trusted by the stakeholders they are designed to service, then the adults in those organisations are failing. Until individuals within organisations express their honesty, empathy and genuine good intention toward them, children and young people will not seek out their services. Leaders and decision-makers who are committed to creating an organisation that is child friendly and child safe, should reflect on the comments made by children and young people contained in this report. Doing so will provide a deeper understanding of the values, views and positive experiences children and young people have identified as priorities.

To download your copy of *Trust is a Must* go to: www.ccyp.com.au/ccyp-reports

NAPCAN Webinar – Putting Children First – From Rhetoric to Reality

Commissioner Helen Connolly will be joining a panel of child advocates who include New Zealand's Children's Commissioner Judge Andrew Becroft, Children's Guardian of NSW, Janet Schorer and Tasmania's Commissioner for Children and Young People, Leanne McLean, as part of this NAPCAN webinar taking place on Thursday 10 September, 2020 (see full details at napcan.org.au)

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information about the work of the South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People go to www.ccyp.com.au

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