

WORD ON THE STREET WITH HELEN CONNOLLY: NOTICING YOUR CHILD'S CAREER INTERESTS EARLY

by **Olivia Williams** | Aug 30, 2021 | **Featured**



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with **Helen Connolly**

Commissioner for Children & Young People



Helen Connolly, Commissioner for Children & Young People

My Student Voice Postcard initiative is currently being rolled out across South Australia.

So that I can find out what matters to them most, I've been asking South Australian children aged 8 – 12 years to respond to four key questions about their lives. One of these relates to what job they would like to do 'when they grow up'. Their responses reveal more needs to be done to balance some old gender biases, but also that they're already thinking about what career will suit them best.

When it comes to jobs, skills and the future, South Australian children have told me there are three key things that matter to them most – getting a good job, helping others, and keeping on learning. These responses are significant in that they tell a story about the understanding primary school children have of their place in the world, how important work will become in their lives, and what they understand it means to belong to a community that has each others interests at heart.

South Australian children have told me they want to work in sports, with animals, in education and teaching, and in art, design and creativity. They're also very interested to work in health and STEM areas. They wrote about wanting to become police officers, firefighters and paramedics, so that they could help people feel safe, especially after environmental disasters such as the summer bushfires. Others told me they want to build things, be creative, and fix problems to make people happy.

Some children see themselves as designers, artists or architects, builders, tradies, or mechanics. Still others have dreams about making discoveries and solving problems in the way astronauts and detectives do, or about doing something to "be remembered" for, like "finding a cure for spider bites".

Gendered differences, stereotypes, and expectations were reflected in children's broader aspirations around their future family and working lives. Girls were more likely to write about "being mums" and wanting to "prove" that women can be successful, while boys were more likely to want to be athletes, farmers, tradies and builders, engineers, YouTubers or gamers. Although a higher proportion of boys wanted to be YouTubers and gamers, being a YouTuber also came in the top ten job aspirations for girls.

Boys were more likely to look up to their dads, with this reflected in their job aspirations to be a builder, mechanic, tradie, miner, or farmer "like my dad". Girls wrote about who inspired them, and while this was sometimes family members, their role models were more likely to be famous women in sport, politics, music, or media.

Many parents might be surprised to know that children start thinking about their careers so early. Their ideas come from interactions they have with adults working in different settings – health providers, educators, law enforcement, sports coaches, art and performance teachers. Their choices are impacted by what parents, teachers and other adults tell them they're good at, what they themselves think they're good at, and what captures their imagination as they navigate the hyperconnected, fast-paced world they

find themselves growing up in. Parents and grandparents have a huge influence on what children see as worthwhile work. Providing them with exposure and information about what is involved in different careers early can really help set young imaginations on fire.

Encourage your child to get involved with the **Commissioner's Student Voice Postcard initiative**, rolling out to all SA primary schools over the coming weeks.

To read more about SA children's career aspirations read the **Commissioner's Snapshot Guide to the Job Aspirations of 8-12yr olds:**

ccyp.com.au/ccyp-reports

If you're a child or young person, parent or grandparent who would like to get in touch with me, send an email to:

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Helen Connolly