

Teens crave face-time

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AS “digital natives”, it’s often assumed young people want to do everything online.

But a report by the state’s Commissioner for Children and Young People has found they are saying “loud and clear” they want face-to-face services.

Commissioner Helen Connolly surveyed 253 people aged 10-20 and ran workshops on the issue.

Her report, *My Digital Life*, found young people regarded technology as simply part of life and “don’t make a hard distinction” between online and offline.

But services such as opening a bank account or applying for a driver’s licence may be better done in person, especially for those with limited internet access.

That meant a need to re-think the relentless push by governments and businesses to push services online.

“Organisations are actively transferring some parts of their face-to-face services onto a website or smart phone app,” Ms Connolly said.

“The business case for doing so is based on the belief that customers will prefer this.

“(However) young people have said loud and clear that not everything needs to be online, and they often want face-to-face customer service.”

Ms Connolly said young people’s access to technology varied markedly.

For some it was always available, while others were permanently disadvantaged and were at risk of being left behind. This had been highlighted by Covid-19 restrictions pushing education online, Ms Connolly said.

And some young people had intermittent access problems as their circumstances changed, meaning a nuanced strategy was needed, she said.

Of those surveyed, 77 per cent said the cost of digital de-

vices was a problem. Many young people shared an unstable internet connection at home or had to go to a library or McDonald’s for free Wi-Fi.

Ms Connolly has made recommendations including expanding free Wi-Fi to public transport and more public buildings and community spaces.

She also wants free laptops and data packs provided to all 62,000 South Australian students on School Card and a review of the state government’s “digital first” strategy.

Peoples Choice Credit Union customer Mackenzie Revitt, 18, valued talking through her car loan options face-to-face.

“There’s a lot I don’t know about loans and I feel like I have a much better opportunity to really unpack it a lot deeper if I’m having a proper meeting ... the conversation can naturally evolve and allow me to clarify things as I go,” she said.



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Helen Connolly

Mackenzie Revitt, 18, discusses a car loan with Tim Cornelius of People's Choice Credit Union. Picture: Emma Brasier