



The Job Aspirations of 8-12 year olds

A Snapshot View



**'I want to be a
athlete, teacher
and a actor'**

Introduction

Children aged 8-12 are often referred to as 'tweens' – a stage of life between childhood and adolescence characterised by major physical development and social and emotional changes happening all at once.

It can also be when behavioural and emotional challenges emerge and children can start to struggle with engaging in school and building and maintaining friendships.

It is a stage where their values are set, where early intervention can have the greatest impact and benefit, and where constructs of fairness and respect are forged. It is also a time when adult validation, approval and advice is both respected and sought.

Importantly, it is also a stage when significant adults, in addition to parents and carers, can, and do, have great impact on shaping and framing how children aged 8 to 12 years deal with the concerns and challenges they face.



The tween years creates a real opportunity for community leaders and educators to connect with this age group on those things that matter to them most. By establishing the lines of communication and trust at this time, adults can understand the world from the perspective of a child in this age group. It means sitting down with them and really listening to what their concerns are, and then addressing the specific things they name. It requires a combined approach – addressing their concerns as well as acknowledging and validating their hopes and dreams.

In School Term 4, 2019, I sent thousands of postcards to schools all around South Australia to hear firsthand the views of 8-12 year olds; a group whose voices are rarely heard.

The 8429 postcards that came back to me from the length and breadth of the State, provide an opportunity for community and school leaders to hear what our 8 – 12 year old children have to say about what is worrying them, what they think is important to change, and what matters most to them across their community.

In this snapshot I am interested in sharing what children told me about their hopes for the future and in particular their early career aspirations.

We know that jobs and careers are generally explored in the middle-senior years of school, allowing for the fact that obviously initial preparation for work includes learning general capabilities such as literacy and numeracy. However, many children often learn the basics about some jobs much earlier. Examples of this include school visits made by Emergency Services and Police personnel. Children also learn about work through play and through their relationships with peers, as well as through their broader family and social environment.

Research has found that career aspirations are formed early on, with a majority of 7 year olds able to provide a considered answer to the question of what they would like to be when they grow up.¹ Another study found that over 80% of year four students could state with a degree of accuracy what type of work they wanted to do.²

Prior to careers exploration in high school, much of the knowledge children and young people attain in relation to careers depends on the informal exposure they have had to various jobs, combined with the environments in which they are raised.

Research shows that children who are not interested in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM subjects) at age 10, are unlikely to pursue these subjects later in their schooling.³ More formalised contact points with careers education, early on in children's lives, can create potential for better long term engagement in learning areas that relate to their interests and passions.

Formal contact with the world of work can also help demystify and debunk commonly held misconceptions about the types of jobs available in particular industries, including gender stereotypes. These efforts⁴ can support education alignment with future skill demands and better prepare young people for post school opportunities.



So what have South Australian children said about their future aspirations?

Our children aged 8 – 12 years have told us that in the future they want to:

- Get a good Job
- Be a good person
- Learn and do well
- See the world

It should be of great interest to anyone interested in the future of this State, that when our children speak about their hopes, dreams and aspirations, getting a good job is at the top of the list. More than half of all children wrote about their dream jobs, with the top dream jobs being in the following areas:

- 1 Arts, Design and Creative
- 2 Sports
- 3 Animals
- 4 Health
- 5 STEM

Not that surprisingly, being a professional athlete was the single most popular choice, as it combined work and passion. But teaching was also popular, as was being a 'youtuber'.

'I want to play hocky for australia, cricket for australia, swim in thr Olympiccs be a Nascar driver and proffesional sooterer and fammos youtuber.'

(11 year old, Regional SA)

' I want to have lots of friends, be a youtuber*, fly, have fun, and be cool! *w/ some subs'

(11 year old, Adelaide Hills)

'I want be a vet or teacher when I am older. I also want to travelle the world.'

(9 year old, Western Suburbs)

I want to be a athlete, teacher and a actor. –

(10 year old, Southern Suburbs)



Many of the jobs that children wrote about reflect their desire to help others, especially those having a hard life. In addition, they want to help the environment, animals, and other people, particularly those who are homeless, poor, or disadvantaged. Children also wrote about being kind to others, being a good friend, and being a good person.

For some, simply to be happy and to have a good life was their dream, with having a good job and a happy family in the future being the most common description of what living this dream entailed. Others wrote about being rich and happy. Some children listed all the 'cool' things they would like to have ranging from new shoes to toys, from a pet to a business, and a house of their own. Some described having more extravagant things like mansions, Porsches and 'cool things rich Youtubers have'. Reference to the 'cost of things' was a common response, with many children wanting everyone to have enough to afford the basics, plus a bit more.

Children wrote about wanting to study, learn and do well. They wrote about wanting to improve their schoolwork. Children see clear links between their education and their aspirations for the future in terms of further education and employment opportunities, and in terms of the health and wellbeing of themselves and their families. Children also spoke generally about wanting to improve their gymnastics, soccer, swimming, and many other sporting skills. One child's dream was to 'be one of the best flippers in the world' while others simply wrote about being successful.

Children had big dreams and aspirations about travel, seeing this as an exciting opportunity to experience life in another part of Australia or overseas. For others, travel was a way to see and connect with their family members or friends who live far away. Some children wrote about holidays and adventure, and some wrote about spending time with people.



South Australia summary

Overall sport and being a professional athlete ranked number one across all regions, with a common interest in sport shown to be a uniting feature for all SA children.

While the type of sport of interest may change between regions, children's interest in sport remains strongest. There were even children who wrote about being coaches, umpires, personal trainers, and two children who wrote about being sports commentators. Other common interests included working as teachers and working with animals. These are common elements in all of the children's lives - all regions have schools and pets. The interest in animals varied a little from region to region, with children from some regions being particularly interested in farm work and horse riding. In fact, working with animals consistently appeared within the top five of choice across all regions.

Top 15 jobs

1. Professional athlete
2. Teacher
3. Vet
4. Scientist
5. Youtuber
6. Artist
7. Doctor
8. Actor
9. Police
10. Farm work
11. Have a job
12. Engineer
13. Singer
14. Zookeeper
15. Author / writer



Metro SA

Metro SA children at this age are more interested in pursuing jobs with a university qualification than their Country SA counterparts, with teacher, doctor, vet, scientist and engineer, all ranking within the top 10 jobs they would like to do.

Arts also seems to be more popular with Metro SA children. This is possibly because children this age living in the city have more exposure to the arts. But also because the reality of actually achieving a successful arts job is more likely to be something they observe in the city than in Country SA. Events and markets are commonplace in Adelaide and allow artists to have visibility as well as the ability to sell their artwork on a regular basis. The city has the festival theatre, as well as number of other suburban theatres that operate, and there is the Fringe Festival where children see actors and performers working in ways that can inspire them to pursue careers in the arts. Also, the main sources of news and media relating to the arts in South Australia are all based in the city.

Top 10 jobs

1. Professional athlete
2. Teacher
3. Doctor
4. Artist
5. Vet
6. Scientist
7. Youtuber
8. Actor
9. Engineer
10. Police



Country SA

Jobs in manual labour and the trades were stand out areas of interest for Country SA children, not even making the top 10 for Metro SA children.

The majority of responses within this category were in relation to farm work and ranged from working on and owning farms, to shearing and working on stations. There were also responses about a variety of trades, with mechanic, builder, electrician, and more generally just being a 'tradie' all popular choices.

Business owner / family business was a popular job choice for children living in Country SA with responses in this group ranging from opening a business of their own to taking over the family business and working within it. These are responses that could be said to reflect Country SA children's desire to stay and contribute to it through their future career choice. For example, being a business owner can be a good job with decent earning capacity that does not require them to leave their communities for university study.

Youtuber was also a job that ranked higher for country SA with responses across the postcards showing that a number of country regions are very technology focussed. There is an element of the importance of connectivity to this, with many children living far away from their friends so that socialising through gaming and the internet becomes more important. The Internet provides entertainment to Country SA children where there may be a lack of activities for them to engage with otherwise. As such, aspirations to be a youtuber make sense. It is another job that they can do from their communities without the need to move away to study or work.

Top 10 jobs

1. Professional athlete
2. Teacher
3. Vet
4. Farm work
5. Youtuber
6. Scientist
7. Artist
8. Police
9. Business owner / family business
10. Doctor



Endnotes

- 1 Moulton, V, et al. Fantasy, unrealistic and uncertain aspirations and children's emotional and behavioural adjustment in primary school. Longitudinal and Life Course Studies, [S.l.], v. 6, n. 1, 2014. p. 107 – 119.
- 2 Gore, J., Holmes, K., Smith, M. et al. Socioeconomic status and the career aspirations of Australian school students: Testing enduring assumptions. Aust. Educ. Res. 2015. 42: 155.
- 3 Torii, K. Connecting the worlds of learning and work: Prioritising school-industry partnerships in Australia's education system, Mitchell Institute, Melbourne. 2018.
- 4 For Example: Department of Education and Training, 'Future Ready: A student focused National Career Education Strategy', Australian Government, February 2019. <https://docs.education.gov.au/documents/future-ready-student-focused-national-career-education-strategy>

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