



# What SA Kids Have Told us About Civics and Leadership

Commissioner for  
Children & Young People  
September 2019

Young people in South Australia want to stay in the State, particularly within the communities they are connected to, but they don't see decision makers taking their future prospects seriously. Many see their peers leaving for opportunities interstate and overseas.

They want to be engaged on the big-picture issues that will affect them well into the future, such as climate change and job creation. Young people told the Commissioner that they see themselves as a generation for change, and if given the chance, they could have positive impact on the world and its communities, including in particular their own local communities.

Young people's capacity for finding creative, innovative solutions to both big and small problems is enormous and should be taken very seriously. They are seeking programs which foster their innate curiosity and encourage them to take risks, build things, and use their imagination. They want to know where to take their ideas in order to develop them further.

Young people know that the educational and employment opportunities they have early in life affects their ability to achieve their dreams later. They want adults to help them get a foot in the door, so that they can make a start and have a fair go. They also want healthcare, mental health support, and other facilities that will enable them to approach their own futures from a solid standing of personal wellbeing and confidence.

## Voting

Many young people feel unprepared for voting. Despite this, they emphasise how important voting and other aspects of civic life is to them. They want more education on the legal and legislative systems, their rights as citizens, employees and taxpayers, and how to participate in the world of



- “ ‘Comprehensive civics education – what are taxes, what is voting, how do I vote, what is the point of democracy, why should I care?’
- “ ‘If we are able to empower the young of SA then they will believe in themselves and create a snowball effect and make the world a better place.’
- “ ‘You are not engaging or celebrating young people in the Barossa. Youth are the best asset you have, and we are not feeling included. We leave the Barossa due to lack of opportunities, and I truly hope you utilise YACs, youth groups and more before you lose us.’
- “ ‘The government needs to consider our future, they need to start making positive impacts on the environment, because at this rate, our job in the future will be to live with the impact that past generations have left on our Earth. The government needs to address things such as climate change and realise this isn't science fiction. It's real life & if we don't do anything about it soon, it will be too late.’
- “ ‘Sometimes kids do have good ideas, but just get told they're only ideas, coz [because] sometimes adults think we are not as wise or as experienced.’  
(Navigator College, Year 10 Student)

politics and news. They feel that they are left to 'figure these things out on their own' once they become a legal adult, and they want this education to happen during school, along with other 'life skills' they feel the [education] system is overlooking.

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Alongside this education, many want the voting age to be lowered to 16 years, and their ability to make political choices recognised. Others, however, want the voting age to be kept at the same level or even raised by a year or two as a result of feeling inadequately prepared to vote.

A common theme among young people in general is a feeling that their voices aren't being heard or taken seriously by political representatives. They felt that the adult population

who can vote, weren't taking their needs and views into account. They want the ability to determine their own future.

- “ ‘Voting laws – bring the age to vote down. But before this is done, people need to be educated on the political topics they will be voting about.’
- “ ‘Change the voting age... because it's unfair young people shouldn't have to be 18 [years to vote] ...kids should vote too - our opinions matter’.

## Leadership

Young people want more opportunities both to be leaders in their own right, and to be around mentors and leaders from whom they can learn. Most of the young people the Commissioner spoke to did not feel they could relate to politicians or other authority figures, though some did mention the power of a particularly good teacher or principal they looked up to.

Young people told the Commissioner that they want their leaders to engage with them directly, and to treat them with mutual respect and understanding. They want opportunities to become community leaders and to have a positive impact on the lives of others.

Young people see the degradation of the environment as a huge threat to their future. The Commissioner heard that they want urgent action on climate change, more renewable energy, and less fossil fuels. Key to young people's interest in the issue is their sense of justice; they recognise that poorer people, remote communities, and Indigenous people will be those who are most affected by the impacts of climate change. Further, they see that they as young people, are now growing up in a world that will be environmentally worse off through no fault of their own.

Young people recognise the benefit of green spaces and liveable cities. They want access to natural spaces for play and wellbeing, and they want to be involved in community events which protect these spaces. They are deeply protective

of their ability to be outdoors, and may want more parks and recreational facilities that take advantage of the largely sunny weather South Australia offers.

- “ ‘I believe there should be more inspirational/influential leadership courses in school. Students need to learn choices, and decisions start with them. It is their choice.’
- “ ‘SA looks very nice now I would like it to stay like that for future. This is very important because when I was little I used to always go to the hills with my family on walks and bike rides. I want others to have the same opportunities as me.’
- “ ‘The government needs to consider our future. They need to start making positive impacts on the environment, because at this rate, our job in the future will be to live with the impact that past generations have left on our Earth. The government needs to address things such as climate change and realise this isn't science fiction, it's real life & if we don't do anything about it soon, it will be too late.’
- “ ‘Nature and fresh air - I've always liked going outside to parks, the beach and being around everything that's natural and not man-made and made of concrete. I like being around the colours. Everything is so bright. Everything feels so fresh in your imagination. In real life... it makes me feel like I'm escaping from everything in that moment. Nothing else that bothers me, nothing from the past. It's just the sun and the plants.’