

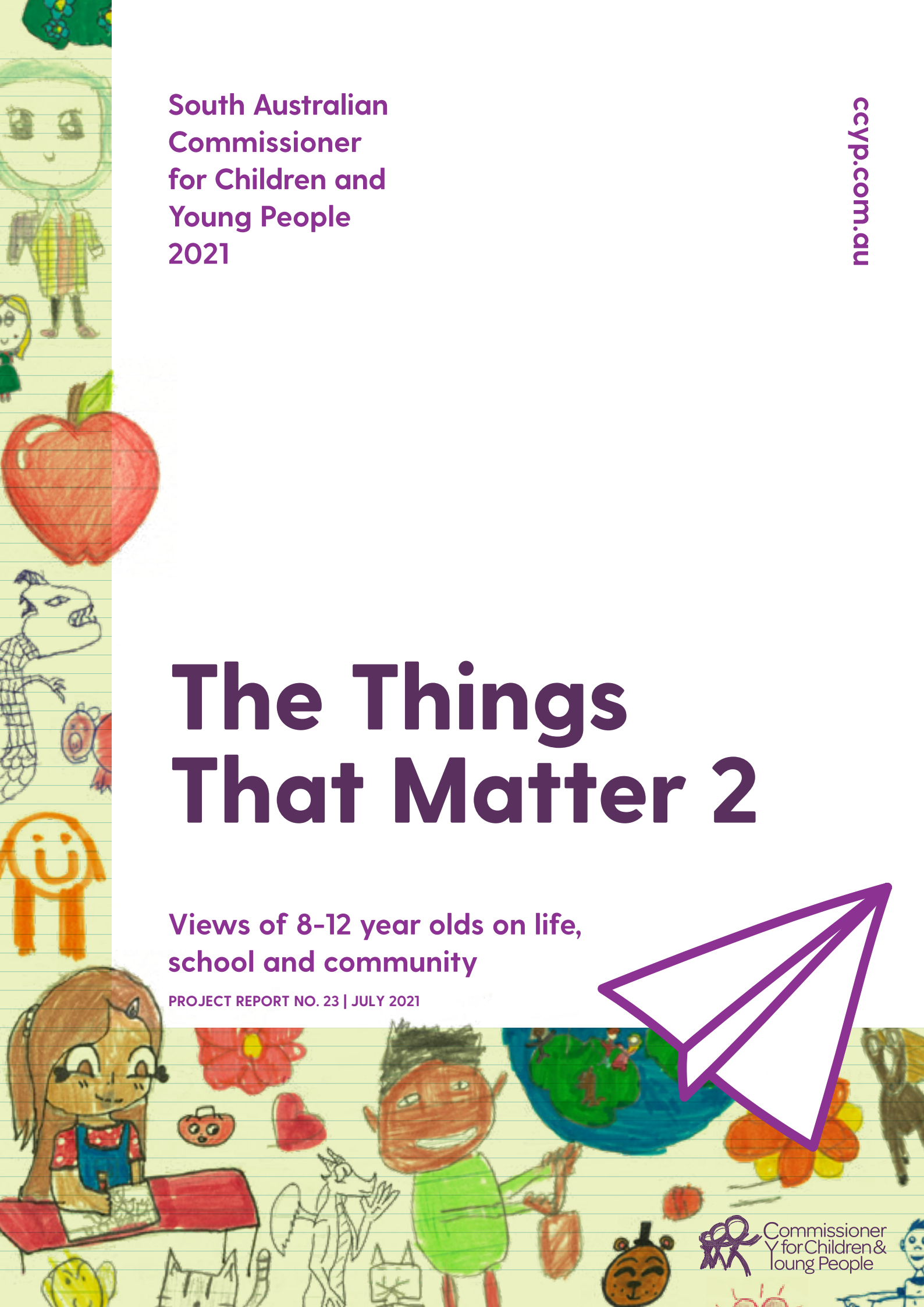
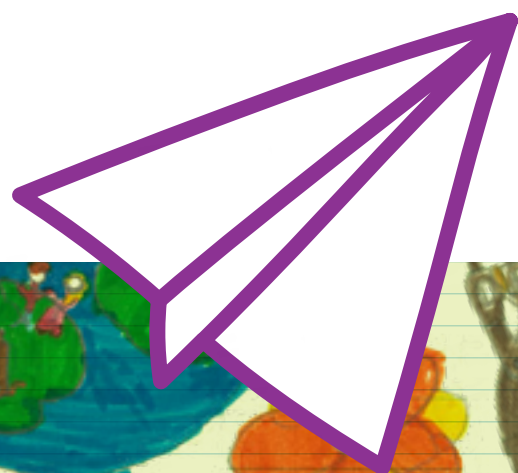
South Australian
Commissioner
for Children and
Young People
2021

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The Things That Matter 2

Views of 8-12 year olds on life,
school and community

PROJECT REPORT NO. 23 | JULY 2021



Commissioner
for Children &
Young People

The Commissioner's Role

The South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People is an independent statutory position, established under the *Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016* ('the Act').

The Commissioner's role includes advocating for systemic change to policies, programs and practices that impact the rights, development and wellbeing of South Australia's children and young people.

This work is informed by the experiences and issues of children and young people themselves, with a specific focus on those who struggle to have their voices heard.

The Commissioner's strategic agenda was formulated with direct input from children and young people. In particular children and young people asked the Commissioner to facilitate their involvement in decision making and to create opportunities for them to experience authentic participation in the adult world.

The Commissioner is working with a number of partners on this agenda including ways in which children and young people can have input into the design and delivery of policies, processes and practices that relate to delivery of services aimed directly at them.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the South Australian school students aged 8-12 years who participated in the 2020 Message to the Commissioner Postcard Project. Thanks also to the teachers and school staff who facilitated their participation and ensured their responses were received. They represent approximately 25% of the total number of 8 – 12 year olds, and have provided an excellent insight

into the things that matter most to South Australian children in this age group.

Please note: All quotes in this report are reproduced verbatim and along with illustrations are produced with permission.

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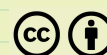
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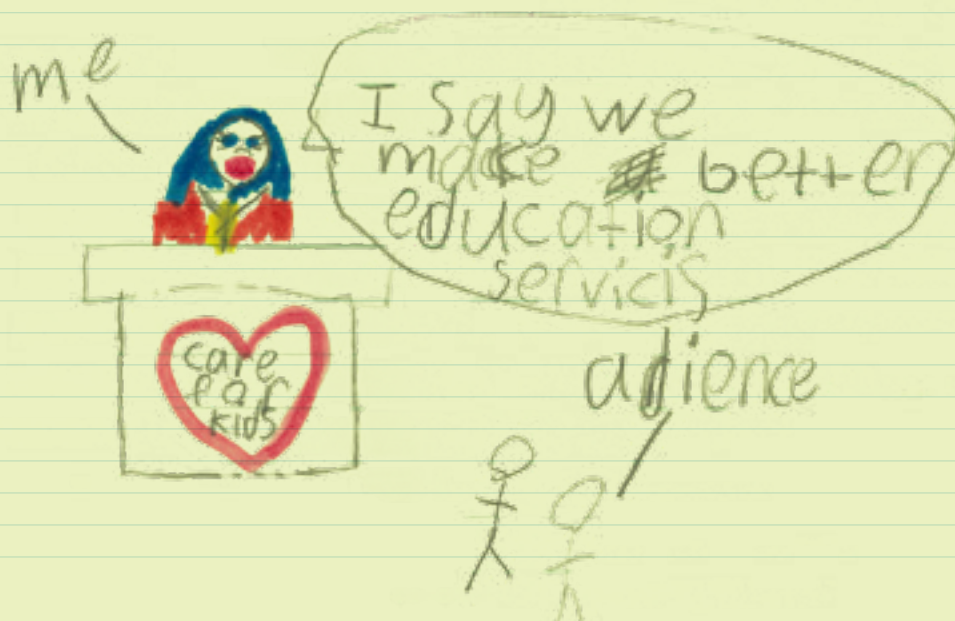
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Commissioner's Foreword

This second Things That Matter Report reflects responses from thousands of children to postcards completed during Term 4 in 2020 – a year like no other. The project again asked children to reflect on aspects of their life, their aspirations, and what they would do to make life better for all children in South Australia.

Children from diverse communities, backgrounds, and abilities, from across South Australia participated in the project. They were supported by educators and leaders committed to children having a voice and to amplifying their voice to decision makers.

The 8,379 children who completed a postcard reflect the enthusiasm, energy, optimism and idealism of children living throughout all regions of South Australia. They also reveal some of their frustrations, concerns, and fears. The postcards indicate that most children are living lives with strong families and adequate resources and with much hope for the future. They also show that some children are in situations where their needs are not being met, where their relationships are under pressure, and where they are not able to be living their best lives.

The experiences of children, both positive and negative, make and shape who they are. They impact on their sense of identity and on their belief in their own agency. When children are able to have experiences of mastery and achievement, and speak with others about the clubs, interests, events, performances, activities, skills and talents that bring joy and happiness into their lives they feel valued and connected, confident of their place in their community.

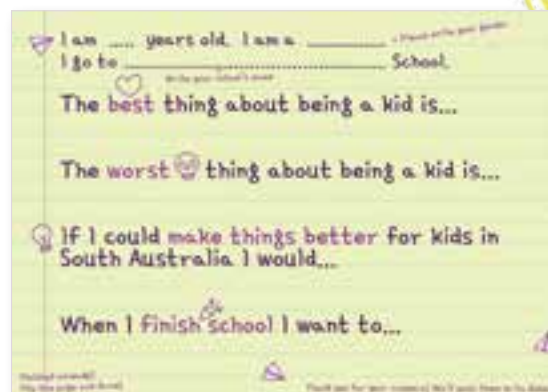
We know that wellbeing and participation are essential for learning. When parents and carers take an interest in these areas of their children's lives it matters. When teachers take an interest in their students it sends the message that they matter now, and that they have a valuable and unique place in our lives.

The importance of this is reflected in their responses to what is the worst thing about being a kid? The most common response is 'not being listened' to or 'not being taken seriously' about the things that affect them at home, school and in the community. They also said that after the basics of food, water, shelter, clothes and education have been covered, what they really want for life to be better is to have more of a say in what happens in their classrooms, schools and communities. This is reinforced in my face to face conversations with children who tell me they want to be understood, valued, have a voice, see the purpose of their experiences, and have something to look forward to everyday.

This annual Student Voice Postcard Project is one simple, yet effective way for children to know that someone is listening. From the added messages children write to me on the postcards, and the

Why are you happy about a paper plane in your head Helen?

(Because it's a paper plane and so it doesn't hurt!)



occasional messages of support I receive from educators, I know it is an approach that works, and one where children value the affirmation their views and perspectives are given.

Children in our primary schools born since 2010, have grown up in what is undeniably a period of significant social and technological transformation; change that has greatly influenced their lives. They live under the weight of the digital avalanche in a world that is dominated by complex issues of climate change, pandemic responses, and mental health. These themes permeate their lives and impact on how they view transitioning into adulthood.

The majority of children responding to the postcards regard adulthood as a fairly negative and stressful experience, dominated by worry and the stress of paying bills, rent, taxes, finding and keeping jobs, not being able to make time to have fun or use their imagination in ways that bring them happiness and a sense of fulfilment. Many children also see the inequality that exists around them and want a future where there is better treatment for those who they see are missing out.

We want our children to have hope and optimism for the future. We want them to see that change is possible and that adults can be effective in addressing the issues children see as important. Small steps are therefore important in building the foundations of trust. Trust is built over time and must be earned through everyday actions that bring experiences of inclusion and respect.

I remain committed to creating opportunities for this to occur with this postcards project one way in which I can demonstrate this every year. I urge all educators, parents, and leaders across our community to ensure the children in your lives have this opportunity to express their opinions and ideas and to have their voices heard.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Connolly

Commissioner for Children and Young People



Introduction

Building on the inaugural Things That Matter report, Things That Matter 2 provides an opportunity for leaders across schools and the community in South Australia to hear directly from a group whose voices are rarely heard: children aged between 8 and 12 years old.

Sometimes called ‘tweens’, children in this age group are growing up, learning and navigating relationships and major stages of social, emotional and physical development in a hyperconnected, fast-paced world. Their diverse and complex lives have been shaped by vast technological, cultural, political and environmental change.

While children’s lives have always been shaped by new and emerging trends, a comparison between the 2019 and 2020 postcards shows just how quickly the world is changing in the twenty-first century. The popular multiplayer PC and mobile game Among Us came up as one of the ‘best things about being a kid’ and its characters featured frequently in children’s drawings on the back of the 2020 postcards. Despite its release in mid-2018, the game did not get a mention in the 2019 postcards. Mainly as it only became viral in 2020, when popular video game streamers started live streaming their games on streaming platforms like Youtube and Twitch.

As was the case in 2019, many South Australian tweens are aspiring YouTubers and gamers, and TikTok’s popularity has also grown. Children see the power of these platforms to bring joy and connection to people’s lives, and to raise money for those who need it.

Children are also aware that the benefits of the digital world are not accessed or experienced equally by everyone. They have ideas to improve access to the Internet and devices alongside other essentials like education, transport, housing and healthcare.

Across all aspects of their lives, children seek and require support, guidance, trust and respect from the significant adults in their lives. They need this in order to feel safe, valued, confident and connected, now and as they get older.

While most 8-12 year olds wrote about the future with hope, they also shared their concerns about a lack of voice and opportunities to understand and address the various local and global issues that seem out of their control. In the words of one 11 year old boy, the worst thing about being a kid is that ‘you’re really small in this ever growing world.’

In the first postcard project undertaken in 2019, there were 8,429 postcards received from children attending 239 schools across South Australia. In 2020, this figure dropped slightly to 8,379 postcards from 219 schools across South Australia. Of the 219 schools who participated, 95 were participating for the first time. Postcards came from children in Catholic, Independent and government schools, from Aboriginal schools and



Special Education Units. These schools were located in metropolitan Adelaide, as well as in regional centres and rural and remote communities.

2020 was the first time the postcard project asked children about their gender. The split between boys and girls was fairly even, with slightly more girls participating. A small group of children identified as non-binary.

This report captures what South Australian 'tweens' have to say about what they think is the best thing about being a kid, the worst thing about being a kid, what they would change to make things better for kids in South Australia, and what their aspirations are for when they leave school.

While this report highlights notable differences in experiences, aspirations and ideas for change across gender, age, and geographic lines, it is also clear, that across South Australia, children share many of the same positive and negative experiences and perceptions – particularly in relation to their lack of opportunities to be heard.

Many of the key messages outlined in this report reinforce the importance of this project's ultimate goal; to increase the opportunity for primary school age children in South Australia to influence the Commissioner's agenda.

Two of the top 'worst things' about being a kid that came through in comments on the postcards in 2020 was 'not being able to have a say' and 'not being listened to' when it came to decisions being made – in households, in classrooms, in local communities and across all levels of government. One 10 year old described feeling 'left in the dust...' and others wrote about a lack of respect, and feeling ignored, and how this impacts on their feelings of belonging and safety.

Many of the children wrote direct genuine messages of thanks to the Commissioner for listening, confirming the premise of the postcard project; that the opportunity to be heard is a rare one for most tweens.





Key Messages



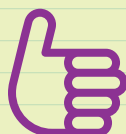
Children value their freedom to play, have fun and be active and creative. But they recognise however, that this will change as they get older and take on the ‘adults responsibilities’ of working, providing for others, and paying bills and taxes.



Children value fairness and equality, and they want everyone, no matter where they live and who they are, to have a home, a voice, kind friends and family, a good education, a rewarding job, and enough money to afford healthcare, food, transport, education and housing.



Children seek opportunities to make a positive change to their community or the world now and in the future, both online and offline, and helping animals and the environment is just as important as helping other people.



Despite differences across age, gender and geographic regions, children share many of the same experiences and perceptions. While many 8-12 year olds want to travel, others have aspirations closely tied to their home region.



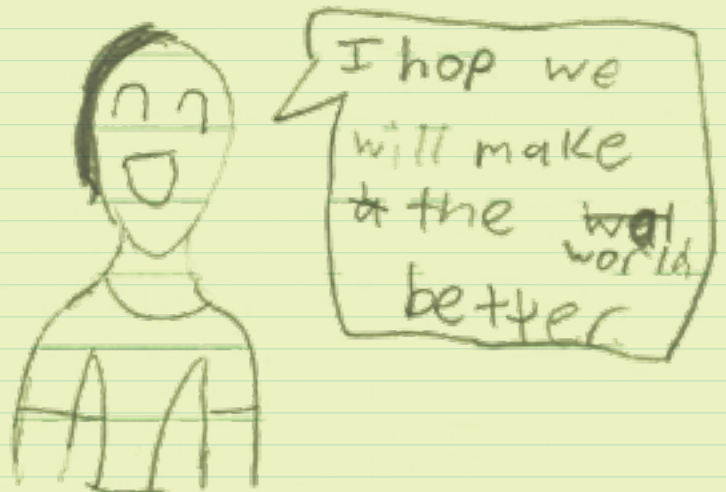
Children care about and are affected by issues both on a local and global scale. As in 2019, while most children are living happy and healthy lives, almost every 8-12 year old wrote about something they would like to change in their family, school, community, or the world.



To make things better for kids in South Australia, 8-12 year olds want to reduce the cost of living. They want to make transport, school, sport and other activities offered in their communities cheaper or free, and they want these places to be both fun and safe.



Many children feel ignored, mistrusted and misunderstood, and they want to have more of a say in decisions that affect them – at home, at school, and in the community.





Key Concerns

While many 8–12 year olds wrote about their present and future lives with excitement and hope, it is notable that many tweens believe the best thing about being a kid is not having to pay bills and taxes, not having to pay for food or housing, not having to work long hours, and not having as many ‘responsibilities’ to ‘stress’ about ‘like adults do’.

If the best thing about being a kid is effectively ‘not being an adult’, this raises concerns about the messages we’re sending to children about what adulthood entails. From the postcard responses it is clear that children are aware of the stress their parents and guardians are under, particularly stress that is linked to financial poverty and being time poor. They see, hear, and are affected by this adult stress in their everyday lives.

Alongside economic pressures, there was a real sense that children are worried about losing the confidence to play as they become ‘teenagers or adults’ and start to ‘look weird’ or be ‘judged’ for using their imagination and being creative and active. They also worry about losing friends because as one child put it ‘when you grow up, you don’t really have friends’.

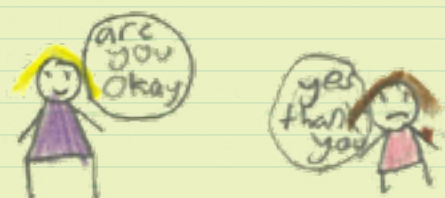
Although the freedom to ‘be silly’ and ‘do what you want’ came up as one of the best things about being a kid, many 8–12 year olds sent self-censoring and self-deprecating messages on their postcards.

These ranged from apologetic notes next to their drawings to say ‘Sorry I can’t draw’ or ‘I’m bad at drawing’ to commentary on their post-school aspirations that undermined

their dreams and goals. For example, one 12 year old added ‘silly dream I am aware’, after describing her dream to become a professional volleyball player in Japan when she finishes school.

This raises concerns about how we – as individuals, families, schools, the education system we’ve designed and other systems beyond this – set expectations, define success and failure, and place value and pressure on certain skills, sending messages about what’s worth trying and what’s not.

It is also concerning that a significant number of 8–12 year olds across South Australia do not feel as though they can talk to a trusted adult about their feelings and be taken seriously. This not only has potential implications for their emotional wellbeing and safety, but also for how well equipped they are to navigate relationships and major transitions, including the move into high school and beyond.





What is the best thing about being a kid?

Playing, having fun and being healthy, active and creative

Learning new things about yourself and the world

Spending time with friends, family and pets

Being free from adult responsibilities, particularly not paying bills and taxes

Most children in South Australia live happy and healthy lives, surrounded by friends, family and teachers who support them. Many 8-12 year olds did not limit themselves to identifying just one 'best thing' about being a kid, and instead provided a list of several 'best things'.

Whether at school, the park, pool or playground, whether indoors or outdoors, online or offline, children spoke about having the freedom to be active and creative, to express themselves and 'be silly' through play. Many chose to draw pictures of their favourite YouTube channels, toys, or online games, particularly *Among Us*, *Roblox* and *Minecraft*.

They wrote about 'having sugar rushes' and 'a big imagination', reading and drawing 'as much as you want', making slime and being able to see their friends regularly at school and on weekends, at parties, sleepovers and through other 'fun activities' and 'adventures'.

'I get to play online with my friends so we can help each other if we are stuck on a level' (9, male – Metropolitan Adelaide)

“ ‘you can play with your dogs and cats and run around with them’ (11, male – Metropolitan Adelaide)

Children wrote about being young, healthy, and active, both physically and mentally. While some children didn't enjoy being physically small, others described how their size meant they were 'good at hide and seek' and could 'jump in the swimming pool without touching the bottom'. They loved being able to play 'lots of sport' and do other physical activities like running, jumping, and flipping 'more than grownups'.

“ ‘I can do flips like back flips that most adults can't do.’ (11 year old, female – Adelaide Hills)



“ ‘Being free! Hanging out with friends! Not being as busy as an adult! Not being worried about financial problems and money! Yay!’ (10 year old, female – Barossa, Light and Lower North)

“ ‘...not paying for bills. Friends living close by, having fun, not being wrinkly and old’ (9 year old, female – Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island)

Tweens felt lucky because they can ‘get messy’ and ‘fall over during play without hurting themselves’. They can enjoy eating chocolate, ice-cream and other treats without being ‘on a diet’, have ‘no wrinkles’, and have energy rather than ‘being tired like my parents’.

“ ‘we get lollies and we don’t have to be on a diet’ (8 year old, female – Adelaide Hills)

“ ‘being agile fit and strong, being able to play with friends and having an amazing education and an understanding teacher’ (10 year old, female – Metropolitan Adelaide)

“ ‘that you can draw and make books about well anything you want’ (7 year old, female – Metropolitan Adelaide)

Many 8-12 year olds appreciate that childhood is relatively ‘carefree’, with free time to explore the things you like without needing to ‘work a lot’ or ‘drive kids places’ like adults. Many wrote about ‘being cute’ and ‘getting love and attention’, as well as experiencing milestones and ‘fun things like losing a tooth or waking up on Christmas’. They described the joy and anticipation that came with still having time to work out the kind of person you want to be and imagine the opportunities you might seek out in the future.

“ ‘you still have your holl life ahead of you. And you can amagin wat your life will be like wen you grow up’ (11 year old, female, Far North)

Many children described being grateful for what they have, particularly a home, an education, ‘free meals’, ‘easy access to the internet’, loving family and friends, and supportive teachers. They were aware that people do not enjoy these things equally.

“ ‘That I have opportunities to make friends, have a family and a roof over my head’ (11, female – Metropolitan Adelaide)

“ ‘the privilege of having things I enjoy witout paying the price’ (12 year old, male – Adelaide Hills)

“ ‘you don’t work all day but you do work for 6 hours at school’ (9 year old, female – Metropolitan Adelaide)

For many children, the best thing was being surrounded with people and places that made them feel safe and that they belong. They enjoyed having family who support them, teachers who help them, and ‘great friends’ from different parts of the world who they ‘will grow up with’ through ‘good times and hard times’.

“ ‘feeling like you belong and being comfortable and being treated with respet and kindly’ (10 year old, female – Murray and Mallee)

“ ‘being your mums cuddle buddy’ (12 year old, male – Metropolitan Adelaide)

“ ‘you can make new friends from diffrent countrys’ (9, female – Metropolitan Adelaide)

Many tweens are aware that childhood is relatively short-lived, and they want to make the most of a stage of life where they can engage in free and imaginative play ‘without people judging you’. There was an awareness that play changes as children get older, and that confidence can be lost and judgement becomes more common as certain activities that are central to childhood become less acceptable for adults.

“ ‘the freedom of being able to play outside without looking weird’ (12 year old, male – Metropolitan Adelaide)

“ ‘u can do sports but if you’re a teenager as you get older u will get lazy and you won’t be playing a sport’ (11 year old, male – Metropolitan Adelaide)

As was the case in 2019, children showed a real awareness of the costs of living. Not having to pay bills and taxes was one of the most common ‘best things’ about being a kid, followed by not having to pay for food, shopping, or rent, and not having to work to provide for children and/or partners. A small number thought the ‘best thing’ about being a kid was ‘not being able to be arrested’, ‘not going to prison’ and not ‘dying’.

There was a real sense of the adult responsibilities and ‘grown up stuff’ that is to come, and this was sometimes expressed with fear or dread. Many 8-12 year olds described how they felt witnessing the stress of their parent’s working hours, financial stress, and their small number of friends. Even though children consistently spoke about ‘not having to worry about money or ‘adult things’ as the ‘best thing about being a kid’, the volume of such responses make it clear that the cost of things is very much on their minds.

“ ‘not paying taxes because that can actually be very stressfull and I see my parents stressing over bills/taxes and I think that’s the best thing about being a kid’ (11 year old, male – Metropolitan Adelaide)

“ ‘Having a mum and dad who can provide me with food and love and shelter and water’ (10 year old, male – Limestone Coast)

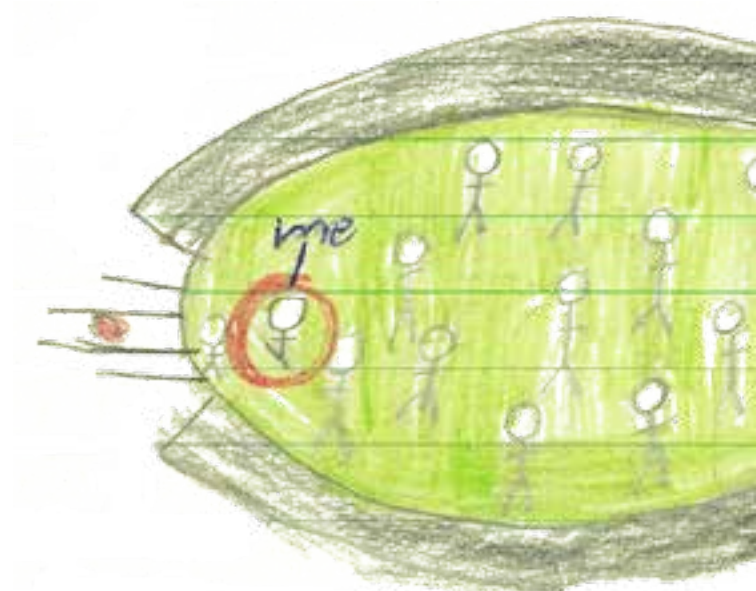
“ ‘you get to enjoy life being a kid before you get older and more mature and get a job and start working and paying bills. Just put on your mum or dad’s shoes. Think how hard they work.’ (11, male)

Children described their excitement at being able to explore and learn new things online and offline and both inside and outside of school, particularly learning about the world and different cultures. For those who described going to school as the ‘best’ thing, they often referred to great teachers, and practical and fun classes, including opportunities to be active and creative.

“ ‘learning heaps of cool stuff that will help me in my future!’ (11, female)

“ ‘kids can learn things easy because they have space in their brain’ (12, male)

The perspectives of 8-12 year olds on technology highlight the complex reality of their digital lives; some wanted to ‘make sure there is less time on laptops and screens for eyes’ while others wanted to ‘unban phones at schools during breaktime’. For some 8-12 year olds, the best thing about being a kid was the social connections and learning that takes place through gaming, or otherwise being online. For others, ‘growing up with technology’ was one of the worst things about being a kid, and they wanted to make sure their time on devices did not come at the expense of time spent outside in nature and being physically active.



What is the worst thing about being a kid?



Not having a say on things that affect you

Lack of freedom and independence

School and homework

Being bullied

Growing up

Across all regions, ages and genders, 8–12 year olds consistently raised not having a say on things that affect them as one of the worst things about being a kid. These responses ranged from ‘important things and family issues’ requiring decisions at home, to decisions being made in the classroom, such as not getting to choose what library books to borrow or not learning what you want to learn. They included not being able to wear what they want, or eat what they want, to ‘bigger decisions’ affecting their communities and the world – such as not being able to vote for prime minister or ‘share ideas on an international scale’.

“ ‘I feel like adults dont respect me or my opinion doesn't matter’ (12 year old, female – Far North)

“ ‘you don't get a say in some/most things that will affect you a lot. Like what perent you want to live with. [I would] make a law saying kids get a say in court when ever they want’ (12 year old, male – Metropolitan Adelaide)

“ ‘that we don't get to vote for Prime Minister! </3’ (9 year old, female – Eyre and Western)

Children wrote about not being trusted, taken seriously, or validated, about being ‘looked down upon’, and feeling ignored and misunderstood ‘just because you are a kid’. They also wrote about being ‘bossed around’, ‘blamed’ or ‘punished’ for ‘no reason’, or a reason they didn’t understand.

They wrote about being denied information because you’re ‘too young’ and ‘you’ll understand when you’re older’. They described how adults ‘think they rule the world’ and ‘assume they know everything’ and that kids are ‘incapable of making decisions’. All of this impacts on how children view the world, how they feel about themselves, their safety, and their relationships.

“ ‘No body things your idiers are good because you are a kid’ (10 year old, female – Murray and Mallee)

“ ‘you get bossed around a lot and you never get told important things’ (10 year old, female – Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island)

Even though being free from 'worrying about bills and adult problems' were some of the best things about being a kid, many children also wrote about a lack of freedom and independence as the worst thing about being a kid. They wrote about not being able to go where they want to go, or do things without supervision and permission, about having lots of rules to follow and about not being able to drive or work and earn money. This was particularly common among children who wanted to be able to help support their families financially.

- “ ‘having to ask parents permission for everything and not being able to drive or have a job or vote or go to public places alone’ (11 year old, female – Barossa, Light and Lower North)
- “ ‘some pre teens like 12 and 11 year olds don’t really get treated like proper teens do’ (12 year old, female – Metropolitan Adelaide)

Most children understand that restrictions on certain activities are in place to protect them from harm. Some 8-12 year olds wrote about how their small size and perceived 'weakness' or 'vulnerability' is the worst thing about being a kid, because it can make children 'targets' for strangers or adults who might 'abuse their power of being in control'.

- “ ‘can’t go to places without my parents like to the skate park but there doing it for my safety’ (10 year old, male – Metropolitan Adelaide)

While being physically small was helpful during games of hide and seek, many 8-12 year olds did not enjoy being unable to 'reach the top shelf' or go on rollercoasters and other rides due to their height. They also mentioned being prone to getting hurt because of all the physical activity they did. Others wrote about other things that were 'restricted' because of their age; from staying up late, eating whatever they want, or watching their choice of movie, to driving cars, skydiving, and swimming with sharks.

- “ ‘you have to watch your parents eat whatever they want in front of you’ (10 year old, male – Limestone Coast)

- “ ‘you don’t get the front seat’ (11 year old, male – Far North)

Some children wrote about some of the challenges that came with navigating their relationships with 'annoying siblings', living their lives 'back and forth' between two homes, and being separated from their families. Being lonely, bullied, and seeing your friends getting bullied, both by peers and adults, came up frequently, with descriptions of being 'teased', 'shamed', 'excluded' and 'picked on' also named, and occasionally physical abuse.

Children focused on how having good relationships with friends and family is particularly difficult when you're not listened to. They described adults at school who did not intervene effectively (if at all), and parents who didn't 'listen or understand' and therefore could not provide them with the support they need.

- “ ‘being lonely and having no friends/comfort/ someone to rely on’ (9 year old, female – Limestone Coast)
- “ ‘being lonely at school, knowing that at the moment people are living in poverty’ (10 year old, female – Eyre and Western)

A significant number of children spoke about feeling like their worries were dismissed. For example, being told they 'worry too much'. This meant they struggled to know what to do and what to say in order to help themselves and others around them. As one 12 year old put it, 'most adults think kids don't go through things like depression and anxiety, being involved in friendship or relationship problems'.

- “ ‘you don’t know how to control yourself when your sad’ (10 year old, female – Metropolitan Adelaide)

the
on the Inside



the
on the Outside



“ ‘people bossing me around and not listening to what I got to say and some of it is actually important to my mental health because sometimes I think about the world negatively’ (11 year old, male)

“ ‘parents always say you can’t do things because you’re too young or little, and girls don’t get treated the same as boys’ (9 year old, female)

Many children focused on the significant pressures and expectations they feel to do well at school and beyond, and know what they want to do in the future. While many enjoyed school and liked learning, many 8-12 year olds did not think school was set up in the best possible way to engage all students, and wanted school to be more inclusive than punitive.

Others described their ‘tough schedule’ as the worst thing about being a kid, and said that the amount of school work and homework they’re given leaves little time for family and friends, sport, or other extracurricular activities.

“ ‘getting sent to sit out during class and the environment getting killed’ (9 year old, male – Eyre and Western)

“ ‘learning pressure (some things are hard to understand) but I like learning’ (13 year old, male – Metropolitan Adelaide)

“ ‘It would be the pressure we have on our shoulders at the moment with every subject and heaps of tests’ (13 year old, female – Far North)

While some 8-12 year olds were frustrated by how often children are underestimated, others wrote about the impact of adults tending to overestimate their ability and maturity. Some felt that the worst thing about being a kid is when they are being compared to other kids, and made to feel they aren’t able to achieve their goals.

“ ‘some adults think that you can do more than your capable of doing. Can you please let adults know that sometimes they put too much pressure on us to act older than we are’ (10 year old, female – Metropolitan Adelaide)

“ ‘pressure to do well – parents don’t listen/ trust you – hard to stick up for yourself and for things that aren’t right’ (11 year old, female – Metropolitan Adelaide)

While learning about the world was one of the best things about being a kid, learning about ‘bad things’ and feeling uncertainty about the future also came up as one of the worst things about being a kid. In particular, some 8-12 year olds described the hopelessness they felt in response to overwhelming issues. They saw these things as being unjust or unequal in the world that their generation is inheriting, particularly in relation to climate change and the environment.

“ ‘not many people listen to us and climate change will be worse for us’ (12 year old, female – Metropolitan Adelaide)

As with the 2019 postcards, health and wellbeing was an important theme, with many 8-12 year olds worried about the health of their family and friends, as well as the prospect, or in some cases the reality, of losing a loved one.

While a few children wrote about ‘living through Covid’ as the worst thing, this wasn’t a top concern, perhaps reflecting South Australia’s relatively safe public health situation. The 8-12 year olds who did bring up Covid-19 focused on the impact of the lockdown on their connections with the people they care about most, and their participation in the things they love doing. In particular, they wrote that the worst thing about being a kid was sport being cancelled due to Covid-19, that children can ‘catch diseases easily’, that closed borders impact their ability to see family who live elsewhere, and that they can’t do more to help.

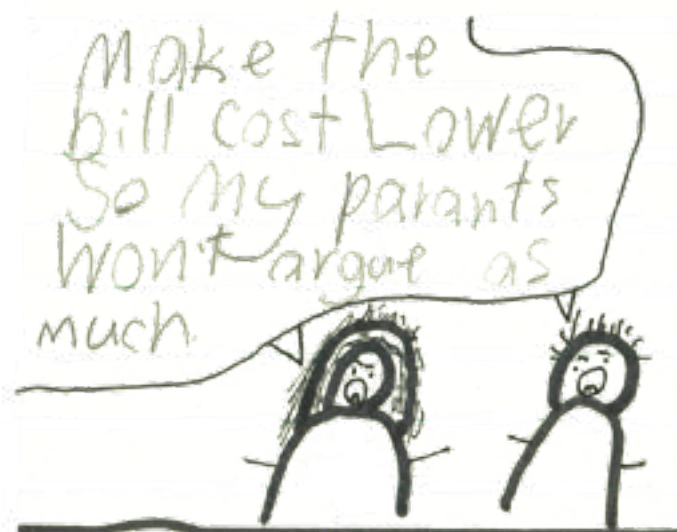
- “ ‘you can’t be an essential worker [When I finish school I want to...] make vaccines’
(9 year old, male – Metropolitan Adelaide)

Just as one of the best things about being a kid was freedom from ‘adult responsibilities’, one of the ‘worst things’ about being a kid was having to ‘grow up’ and ‘go through changes’. Some 8-12 year olds focused on difficulties with friendships and fears about losing opportunities to play, or losing friends as they move to high school or to other classes. Others were going through puberty, or were worried they were getting closer to puberty. There was a real sense that getting older meant they were only going to gain more responsibilities and pressures, particularly financial pressure to pay bills.

- “ ‘growing up and getting your montly bleed, and also having more often fights with your friends’ (13 year old, female – Metropolitan Adelaide)
- “ ‘it is less time until you haf to think about paying bills’ (11 year old, female – Far North)
- “ ‘knowing that you will have huge responsibilities when you are older and overthinking about things while having friends and family issues’
(11, female – Metropolitan Adelaide)

While most 8-12 year olds shared what they saw as the negative aspects of being a kid, a few children struggled to identify anything negative at all. They wrote about being happy with their lives and their only complaint was that they will only spend a ‘short time being a kid’.

- “ ‘you only get to be a kid once’
(8 year old, female)
- “ ‘nothing really bad. Kids are loveable creachers’
(10 year old, female – Metropolitan Adelaide)



What would make things better for kids in South Australia?



Help everyone have a home, food, education and enough money

Cheaper or free education and sport

Making school more interesting and practical

More free places, activities and transport for kids to have fun and be safe in the community

Adults listening more and being kinder

Help the environment and animals

The overwhelming majority of 8-12 year olds identified at least one thing they think would make things better for kids in South Australia. While a small number of children said they would 'do nothing because we are alright', others shared the sentiment of this child who wrote that they 'can't make things better because I don't have a choice'.

Children drew on their own lives and experiences, as well as their perceptions and observations of what they had seen others go through in their own communities, and in other parts of Australia and the world. Their ideas for improving children's lives were practical and compassionate, both addressing what they had identified as 'the worst things' about being a kid, and reflecting on the values that were important to them such as equality, diversity, inclusion and respect.

Regardless of gender, age, or where they live, 8-12 year olds wanted to help all children and for every family to have a 'roof over their head',

a good education, and enough money to go to school, pay the bills, pay for transport, food and treats, have toys, play sports and do other fun activities.

They wrote about all of these things as being key to a happy, healthy and safe life, along with having good friends and adults that they can trust to listen to them, believe in them, and support them. Children were worried about those who 'need help' and they wanted to make everyone 'feel welcome' and included in South Australia, whatever their age, cultural background, gender, or ability.

“ ‘make sure every kid is treated fairly no matter how much money they have’
(11 year old, female – Murray and Mallee)

“ ‘Make MPs at the parliament house give money to the poor people so they get a life that we get’ (9 year old, female – Murray and Mallee)

“ ‘let them know they aren't alone and create better environment for them to grow up in’ (13 year old, female – Barossa, Light and Lower North)

“ ‘Make sure every child with disabilities or not have every right to do whatever they want without getting bullied or stopped in some way. Also that every kid gets helped when they need it’ (11 year old, female – Metropolitan Adelaide)

Many 8-12 year olds wanted to give children more of a say in decisions that affect them – in their family life, at school, and in the community. As one 10 year old put it, ‘let them have a little bit more choice and more of a voice’. There was a real sense from 8-12 year olds that everyone across their community – adults, leaders, parents, teachers – would benefit if children were given more respect and opportunities to have a say and be taken seriously.

Some children focused on ensuring children's voices are heard in specific settings, most often the classroom or the court system. Other 8-12 year olds had ideas to engage children – including ‘the kids that don't go to school’ – on what's important to them and ensure they are heard by adults and decision makers. These ideas ranged from ‘talking to them’ to giving children a survey, or ‘getting them to write letters to the government’. Other children wrote about ‘changing the voting system so we have more input in our future.’ They explained the importance of having more of a say to improve their lives now, but also in the future: ‘because we're going to be future leaders someday’.

“ ‘that kids all get their ideas heard and they have part of what's best for Australia’ (10 year old, female – Limestone Coast)

“ ‘let kids have a say and for there to be a day for all kids to have a day where the kids were able to be in parliament’ (11 year old, female – Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island)

“ ‘Give them a say by getting kids to write letters to the government’ (11 year old, male – Murray and Mallee)

In particular, tweens wrote about the importance of kids having a say in how their communities look and feel, as well as seeing spaces built ‘by them and for them’. They wanted to ‘let kids design projects that go on around SA’ and ‘make sure that there are people in the council that listen to kids’. They wrote about building more parks, playgrounds, pools, and other places that are fun, safe and free, or affordable for children in their age group.

“ ‘build more playgrounds but get the kids to suggest equipment so that we know we will enjoy it’ – 12, male (Metropolitan Adelaide)

“ ‘Let them maybe have a say, eg. Saving a tennis court’ (10, female – Adelaide Hills)

Many children wrote that for this to be successful barriers to public transport and internet access also needed to be addressed, so that that can stay connected and get around independently, confidently and safely.

“ ‘make public pools and theme parks that you don't have to pay for so that kids can have fun without using a lot of money’ (9 year old, female – Metropolitan Adelaide)

“ ‘make more club activities rather than just sport stuff that is more mental because I'm one of the people who don't like sport’ (10 year old, male – Metropolitan Adelaide)

In response to concerns children had regarding how play changes as they get older, they want to increase the opportunities available to ‘older kids’ to play. This included putting playgrounds in high schools and making sure every school had an oval and ‘some kind of goal posts’.

Many tweens also wanted to encourage other children to play more sport, be active and spend time outdoors by creating time-flexible and free programs. Others wanted activities and opportunities beyond sport, highlighting the

importance of having hobbies, books and access to libraries, and bringing more ‘entertainment’ and child-friendly festivals or events – particularly sporting events and creative arts events, to their neighbourhoods and communities.

- “ ‘let them play whatever club sport they want by reducing the cost as it can be very expensive so some kids can participate’ (12 year old, female – Metropolitan Adelaide)
- “ ‘help kids with what they love (sports, reading and school work)’ (11 year old, male – Adelaide Hills)
- “ ‘Have a small public library per suburb where you can put books online and just drop in an pick them up’ (12 year old, male – Metropolitan Adelaide)
- “ ‘Open more fun free playgrounds like st kilda and open more doctor offices and therapists for kids to talk about their problems’ (12 year old, female – Barossa Light and Lower North)

Many 8-12 year olds wrote about how making ‘bills lower’ and how reducing the cost of living would improve their lives significantly. In particular, they wanted to make education and sport free or cheaper, so that no one would be ‘punished’ or left out for not being able to afford it. Children were very aware of the true cost of education beyond school fees, including the costs of uniforms, stationery and other equipment, activities and events.

- “ ‘send letters to the parent and write that they have a child then get cheap discount with like a loyalty card’ (9 year old, male – Yorke and Mid North)
- “ ‘lower the cost of all schools so all kids can go to school and have an education’ (12 year old, female – Yorke and Mid North)

In addition to making school more affordable, tweens offered a range of ideas to improve the school curriculum and the physical and social

environment of schools in ways that would benefit both their learning and their wellbeing. They wrote about wanting more help from teachers and SSOs (Students Support Officers) to help ‘kids feel safe and to learn’, along with introducing more flexible approaches to help those who ‘struggle’ or ‘learn differently’.

Specific suggestions included more opportunities to be active and creative at school, with more fitness lessons and music teachers. Others wrote about ‘making mindfulness part of the curriculum’, putting plants in classrooms, improving school toilets and air conditioning, creating spaces at school for students to relax, and letting people have a pet at school ‘so they have a good friend’ and ‘wouldn’t feel sad’.

- “ ‘I would give more funds to schools so they can get more SSO teachers to help stressed out kids’ (11 year old, male – Metropolitan Adelaide)
- “ ‘I would have a fitness subject at the end of the day. I would upgrade all school’s internet and building’s’ (11 year old, male – Metropolitan Adelaide)
- “ ‘like to have more outside learning time for kids in SA’ (12 year old, male – Barossa, Light and Lower North)

Children also wanted to have more choice in what they learnt at school. In particular, they wanted to see more opportunities to learn practical skills that would prepare them for adult life and the ‘real world’. This ranged from learning about ‘how to fix cars’ to learning about diverse cultures and identities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and histories, LGBTIQ+ young people, and people with disability.

- “ ‘give everyone a very good education and teach everyone important skills they will need later in life’ (10 year old, male – Metropolitan Adelaide)



Many children wanted school uniform policies to be more flexible, particularly considering how this might impact those who 'can't afford it'. They also wanted to change strict rules about going to the toilet, so that children could use the bathroom when they needed to without being told off or made to feel embarrassed.

“ ‘try to treat students fair and the same. When someone needs to go to the toilet let them’
(9 year old, female – Limestone Coast)

Other tweens focused on the structure of the school day, writing about how slightly shorter school days would allow them to play more sport, get more sleep, and connect with others.

A few children wanted more time at school, highlighting how it is an important and safe place where they learn, play and connect with peers and adults. While a few children wanted more homework 'to prepare for high school and college', most children wanted less homework so they could spend more time 'as kids' and connecting with family after what is already a long day at school.

“ ‘change it so kids have less homework and more leisure time to enjoy being a kid while they still can’ (10 year old, female – Adelaide Hills)

“ ‘make school tasks use more imagination so kids can do what they do best’ (11 year old, female – Eyre and Western)

Another common suggestion from 8–12 year olds on ways to improve children's lives was to help them express themselves, particularly in their relationships with friends and family, and 'through hard times'. Tweens wanted to give children more 'confidence' and opportunities to express their concerns, ideas, and dreams, not only in conversations but also through creative pursuits. For example, one 9 year old reported that they would give children a 'million pencils and texters for expanding their artistic feelings'.

More broadly, children wanted adults to provide conditions and situations that would make it easier to talk to adults and peers about how they are feeling. They wanted assurance that they would be taken seriously and supported appropriately by 'kind parents' and 'good friends'. This was seen as key to stopping bullying, along with ideas to change 'schools bully management system' and provide children with more opportunities to make friends.

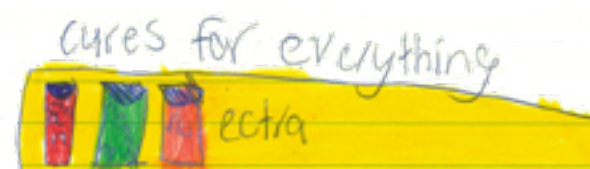
“ ‘make sure every kid has loving and caring parents and every kid has a family that they can talk to about their mental health and feelings’ (11 year old, female – Metropolitan Adelaide)

“ ‘make a place/online place for kids to talk with other kids to offer support for kids who aren't safe at home and don't want to talk to an adult yet’ (11 year old, female – Metropolitan Adelaide)

“ ‘give them better way to deal with bullying. I want adults to stop living in a fantasy world where you say 'stop I don't like it' and people will stop. If you walk away they follow, if you ignore them they keep going until you snap’
(10 year old, female – Metropolitan Adelaide)

Children wrote about how they would like to 'help sick kids' by making healthcare settings and hospital environments more welcoming and kinder to kids. They wanted to find cures for cancer and other illnesses, diseases and viruses, including Covid-19. Those who wrote about 'destroying' or 'stopping' Covid-19 mostly wanted to 'lift restrictions' so they could play sport and 'open up the borders', particularly so they could see their family and friends again.

“ ‘To open up the borders agen. So I can see my dad in Perth’ (10 year old, female – Eyre and Western)



Some 8-12 year olds wanted to ban smoking 'so people don't get sick' and 'can breathe' and they linked their own health and wellbeing to the health of the environment. They wanted to 'clean up the oceans' and stop littering at school with ideas that including establishing 'an environment crew at every school to pick up rubbish around the school'. They want to stop pollution, and invest in 'environmentally friendly' energy and electricity, and wrote about how this would help wildlife and animals, as well as humans.

“ ‘try and inforce more enviromently friendly electricity, so the world is healthy to live in when im older’ (11 year old, female – Limestone Coast)

Even though one of the best things about being a kid was 'not having to work' some children thought 'not working' was the worst thing that could happen and wanted to lower the age at which you could get a job to 13 or younger. For some, this was about being able to 'make their own money' to 'help their family' while for others it was because they wanted to have a source of money to 'spend on what they want'. There was a sense that more opportunities to learn about potential jobs would make things better for children both now and in the future.

“ ‘give them opportunities to do desired things such as desired jobs etc’ (13 year old, male – Adelaide Hills)

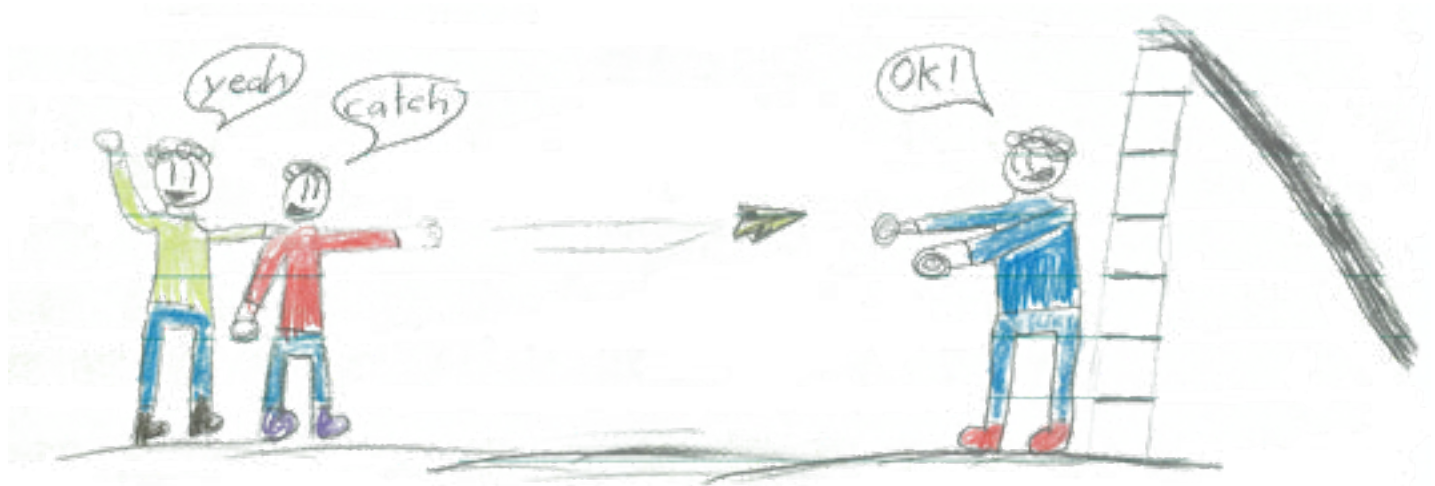
“ ‘make more work and career choices available for kids so their dreams can come true. I'm not 100% sure what I want to do yet. I don't have many choices as there are not many opportunities’ (13 year old, female – Metropolitan Adelaide)

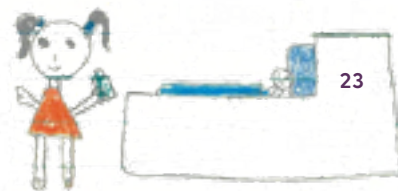
“ ‘make jobs for kids so they can get money just like adults so they can buy there own stuff’ (10 year old, female – Barossa, Light and Lower North)

Children wrote about making kids happy through creating and sharing more books, movies, TV shows, and other funny entertainment that is made by and for kids. An 8 year old child wanted to 'make a mythicle [mythical] pet so that no one has alagies [allergies]'. Many 8-12 year olds shared innovative ideas to respond to what they had described as the worst things about being a kid, including 'annoying siblings' and 'chores'.

“ ‘let every little sibling instal an off button on their older sibling’ (12 year old, female – Metropolitan Adelaide)

“ ‘invent a robot that can pack up your room and do the dishwasher’ (10 year old, male – Adelaide Hills)





What do 8-12 year olds want to do when they finish school?

Get a good job, do well
and help others

See the world

Have a happy and
healthy family

Keep learning

While children interpreted this question in different ways, they often focused on the type of person they want to be, what they want to achieve, the work they want to do, and the kinds of people they want to be surrounded by in the future.

Some focused on what they wanted to do when they finished school that day (ie the day they completed the postcard), including 'do homework', 'have a snack', or 'play'.

This interpretation was common among postcards that came from children in special education units. Other 8-12 year olds wrote about wanting to 'go to high school' after they finish primary school, or described their plans for what they would like to do immediately after graduating, including 'screaming freedom' and throwing a big party with all of their friends.

The majority of tweens took this question as an opportunity to share their job aspirations. While some children listed only one dream job, others listed up to ten different jobs, reflecting their diverse interests. Other children were not yet sure what they wanted to do and wrote about 'working it out when I get there'.

“ ‘I would want to be a teacher, baker, artist, singer or a dancer or mabey lawer [maybe a lawyer] and good mother oooh and news reporter’ (10 year old, female— Barossa, Light and Lower North)

The top six dream jobs for 8-12 year olds were in the following areas:

- 1 Sports
- 2 Animals
- 3 Education and teaching
- 4 Art, design and creativity
- 5 Health
- 6 STEM

As in 2019, the top dream job was to be a professional athlete, with some hoping to represent their region, the state, or the country at the Olympics or another 'international competition'. Many children wanted to pursue their passion for animals and become vets, zoologists, marine biologists and animal trainers or rescuers. Being a teacher was another popular choice, as was being a doctor or nurse, or working in the arts as an artist, designer, actor or musician.

Many 8-12 year olds do not distinguish between their online and offline lives. Many had aspirations to work with technology, reflecting how much they enjoy playing, learning and connecting online and offline. Being a YouTuber, particularly a 'gaming Youtuber', was the most popular choice, alongside working as coders, game developers or animators, social media influencers or as 'anything with computers'. It was common for children to write about being a YouTuber 'on the side' of other jobs, and they described how being a YouTuber would 'make kids entertained'

while others wanted to be a 'charity streamer' who 'raises money for charity'.

- “ ‘be a charity streamer wich is a youtube gamer who raises money for charity’
(9 year old, female – Metropolitan Adelaide)
- “ ‘a youtuber because I love playing video games and I want to show my pa[s]sion!’
(9 year old, female – Metropolitan Adelaide)
- “ ‘be a youtuber, to help others laugh and not commit suicide’ (12 year old, male – Barossa, Light and Lower North)

Children wanted to help 'the community' as well as help other people. This included 'anyone who needs it' but especially kids, older people, homeless people, and 'people feeling stressed and anxious'. Many children wrote about wanting to have a positive impact on other people, animals and the environment – as scientists and vets, as teachers and SSOs in schools, or as doctors and nurses, psychologists, dentists, or surgeons in healthcare. They also wanted to help their own families by working for them in a family business or on a farm, or by making money some other way to help them.

- “ ‘be a kid pscholygist and give kids help they deserve’ (11 year old, female – Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island)
- “ ‘help people who have a disability because my sister has a disability and it means a lot that she gets a good education’ (9 year old, female – Metropolitan Adelaide)
- “ ‘be a mechanic and fix cars for people to make them smile’ (11 year old, male – Metropolitan Adelaide)
- “ ‘be a doctor because when my family is sick I can give them medicine so they don't waste money’ (8 years old, female – Metropolitan Adelaide)

Children wrote about becoming police officers, firefighters and paramedics so they could help people feel safe, especially after disasters such as bushfires. Some wanted to build things, be creative and fix things to make people happy. Some saw themselves as designers, artists or architects, builders, tradies or mechanics. Others had dreams about making discoveries and solving problems in the way astronauts and detectives do, or doing something to 'be remembered' like 'find a cure for snake bikes and spider bites'.

- “ ‘Be an actress or painter and share my thoughts and creativity with the world’
(12 year old, female – Limestone Coast)
- “ ‘do something great and important so when I die I am remembered by it’ (11 year old, female – Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island)
- “ ‘either become the 2nd woman prime minister or become a deisel machanic in the army’
(12 year old, female – Adelaide Hills)

For many 8-12 year olds, their aspirations are closely tied to their family and the region in which they've grown up. They wrote about plans to 'stay at home to help mum and dad' or their siblings and grandparents. Many children were inspired by those around them and wrote about wanting to grow up to work in the same job as their family members, or simply 'be like' their parents. Some aspired to do what their older siblings did, or become teachers, sports stars, celebrities, actors, or characters they knew from movies or TV shows.

- “ ‘be a[n] engener [engineer] to follow in my Dad's footsteps’ (10 year old, male – Adelaide Hills)
- “ ‘have a sporting career in football (afl) or keep the family farm going’
(12 year old, male – Limestone Coast)
- “ ‘Go work on the station for 2 years and then go to university’
(10 year old, female – Far North)

It was common for 8-12 year olds to write about what they saw in their future. From 'starting a business' or 'making my own company' to 'travelling the world'. Children wrote about who they wanted to do these things with – most often best friends, but also siblings, cousins, and pets. Both their current pets as well as the pets they want to have in the future.

Children want to be a 'good person', 'stay friends with childhood friends', have 'a happy and healthy family', 'live in the moment', and find a 'job I find interesting and fun' so they can make enough money to live comfortably. They want this for themselves as well as for others, particularly those they saw as being more vulnerable. Some were worried that to make enough money to pursue their 'real passion' they would have to work in a job that didn't appeal to them as much as their dream job.

“ ‘be a dentist. I actually don't like it but I need a job can make money for me and then I would make game or movie. I want to make anime in the future’ (12 year old, male – Metropolitan Adelaide)

Learning new skills and doing well at school and beyond, frequently came up as something children wanted to do to get their dream job or into their preferred university course. While some tweens wanted to go to university, others wanted to start working as soon as they could. Some children, particularly those who were still figuring out what jobs appealed to them, highlighted what they were good at, while many more wrote about wanting to get better at the things they love, like reading and sport.

“ ‘not sure but Im good at tricking. I can do backflip, roundoff backflip, sideflip and frontflip and im okay at scooters’ (11 year old, male – Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island)

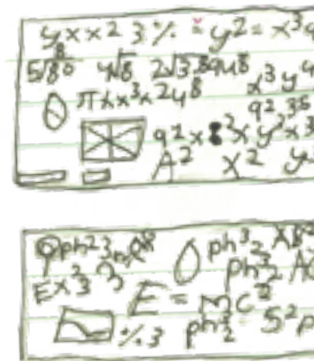
As with the 2019 postcards, children wrote about their aspirations to travel so they could see different parts of South Australia, Australia, and other countries. Covid-19 didn't seem to impact on their dreams to travel, with many children writing about travelling for study and work as well as to see their family and friends who live far away. Some wanted to travel to teach English or learn a different language so they could live overseas, or simply travel to have fun.

“ ‘travel the world then live on a farm with lots of animals and become a doctor or a vet. Stop pollution!’ (9 year old, female – Adelaide Hills)

“ ‘adventure around the world and discover things about culture's around the world’ (9 year old, male – Metropolitan Adelaide)

Top job aspirations

- 1 Athlete
- 2 Work with animals
- 3 Teacher
- 4 Artist
- 5 Doctor or nurse
- 6 YouTuber or gamer
- 7 Tradie or builder
- 8 Food and hospitality
- 9 Police or firefighter
- 10 Farmer
- 11 Engineer
- 12 Scientist
- 13 Lawyer
- 14 Navy, army or airforce
- 15 Work with computers or games



Gender

While the Commissioner's 2020 postcard project was the second time this project has been undertaken, it was the first time children had been asked about their gender. The split between boys and girls was fairly even, with slightly more girls participating in 2021. A small number of children identified as being non-binary.

This section provides an overview of postcard responses applying a gender lens. It also presents and reflects on children's specific perceptions and comments on gender, where these were specifically raised.

While boys and girls shared similar messages, there were also significant differences, particularly relating to their aspirations for the future, and their thoughts on being a kid generally, including what they would change to make things better for kids in South Australia.



The best thing by gender

For both boys and girls, having the freedom to play and have fun was the best thing about being a kid. While girls were more likely to focus on being with friends and family and learning new things, boys were more likely to focus on being active, healthy and young, and on their physical abilities.

Being free from adult responsibilities, especially 'not paying bills', came in the top three 'best things' for both boys and girls, though a slightly higher proportion of girls wrote about this freedom in particular.

Girls were more likely than boys to say that going to school was the best thing about being a kid. In fact, boys wrote about going to school, and homework especially, as the number one 'worst thing' about being a kid.

All children, regardless of gender identity, shared many ideas for changing some aspect of school, from the curriculum and structure of the school day to the nature of physical learning environments and uniforms. That said, a higher proportion of boys wanted to change some aspect of school to make lessons more engaging and find ways to provide more help for kids to learn, with more opportunities to have breaks and be active.

The worst thing by gender

While all children wrote about feeling ignored, misunderstood or underestimated 'just for being a kid', a higher proportion of girls wrote about having no voice as the worst thing about being a kid. Some children – particularly girls – also described the impact of gender stereotypes on their confidence, wellbeing, aspirations and participation, particularly in sport.

“ ‘being misunderstood, having your feelings/ opinions called invalid or ‘hormones’
(12 years old, female – Metropolitan Adelaide)

“ ‘Being underestimated but usually its good to be a kid. But sometimes when I’m a girl they think im to girly to play sport’ (11 years old, female – Adelaide Hills)

“ ‘when my nanny fat shames me or ...
When my aunty tells me things like
‘shave your legs’ or ‘act more like a lady’
(11 years old, female – Metropolitan Adelaide)

A lack of freedom to do what you want where and when you want, to as well as being 'bossed around' came in as the top three 'worst things' for both boys and girls. A higher proportion of girls wrote about not being able to go where you want to go, while boys were more likely to focus specifically on not being able to drive.

While 'not having a job' was often raised as one of the best things about being a kid, a similar proportion of boys and girls wrote 'not being able to work and earn money' as the worst thing about being a kid. Both boys and girls wrote that 'growing up' was the worst thing about being a kid, but in this context, girls were more likely to specifically mention going through puberty. They wrote about getting their period as something they are either already experiencing or soon to experience.

“ ‘puberty and period, worried, anger, anxiety, friend problems, failing maths’ (10 year old, female – Adelaide Hills)

“ ‘puberty, non-free will and gender norms’ (11 year old, male – Barossa, Light and Lower North)

A similar proportion of boys and girls rated 'being bullied' as the worst thing about being a kid, yet girls were more likely to reflect more broadly on the challenges of navigating 'troubles' or 'issues' in their friendships or family relationships.

Changes to make things better for kids by gender

Regardless of gender, all children wanted to help those who need it, and ensure everyone has a food, home, family, access to education and enough money to live comfortably. A relatively equal proportion of boys and girls wrote about making the cost of education and sports cheaper or free, and saw this as a key to improving children's lives.

Giving kids more of a say on things that affect them, and more freedom, was also consistently raised across genders. However, a higher proportion of girls related this to wanting to make things safer and more open to kids, particularly in relation to the lack of physical places and spaces available to children in their communities.

Boys were more likely to want to create parks and other fun things, to change an aspect of school, and create more jobs and opportunities for children. A higher proportion of girls wanted to give more voice to children, help the environment and animals, and help children maintain positive mental health. A slightly higher proportion of boys than girls wrote about wanting to stop or 'destroy' Covid-19, although this only made up a small proportion of total responses.

Both boys and girls reflected more broadly on the gendered norms, stereotypes and expectations – both implicit and explicit – that they receive as messages from significant adults in their lives, particularly from parents and teachers. They wrote about these messages as something they want to change or 'stop' to make children's lives better.

“ ‘stop parents from putting society's expectations on them (girls wear dresses, guys play football etc.).’ (11 year old, female – Metropolitan Adelaide)

“ ‘get teachers that treat different genders the same’ (10 year old, male – Adelaide Hills)

Children who identified as non-binary provided a range of responses, reflecting the diversity of this group of children. Like all children, they enjoyed playing and having fun, being with friends and family, learning new things, and being free from adult responsibilities. They said the worst things about their lives is having no voice, being ignored, and being bossed around, or told off. While non-binary children wanted to make similar changes to those suggested by all children, some wrote specifically about how more clubs for LGBTIQA+ kids would improve kids' lives.

Post-school aspirations by gender

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the most significant differences between boys and girls became evident in their aspirations for the future. In terms of specific job aspirations, there was a clear split by gender according to traditionally male-dominated industries and female-dominated industries. Gendered differences, stereotypes and expectations were also reflected in children's broader aspirations around their future family and working lives, with girls more likely to write about 'being mums' and wanting to 'prove' that women can be successful.

Boys were more likely to want to be athletes, farmers, tradies and builders, engineers, YouTubers or gamers, police officers and firefighters. 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.

A significantly higher proportion of girls than boys wanted to be teachers, and girls were more likely to have dream jobs involving animals, as well as being artists, nurses and

psychologists or counsellors. While science and marine biology were popular among girls, they were significantly less likely than boys to want to be engineers.

There was a real sense among young girls, particularly those aged 11 and 12 years old, that they want to do certain things in order to 'prove' that women can 'do anything' and 'be successful'.

- “ ‘create my own business to prove to people I can, and that other woman can do anything’
(12 year old, female – Metropolitan Adelaide)
- “ ‘[I want to] prove that woman can be successful and to promote LGBT issues’
(12 year old, female – Metropolitan Adelaide)

All children wrote about wanting to help their family, and their mum and dad in particular. 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 also 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.

- “ ‘be a tradie like my dad’
(9 year old, male – Limestone Coast)
- “ ‘be a[n] engener [engineer] to follow in my Dad’s footsteps’ (10 year old, male – Adelaide Hills)
- “ ‘Be a nurse or a jockey like Michelle Payne’
(11 year old, female – Limestone Coast)

While a similar proportion of boys and girls wanted to go on to further study after school, more girls wrote about wanting to travel. Both boys and girls wrote about wanting to rest and sleep when they finish school, with boys more likely to want to party and celebrate.

Girls mentioned wanting to be a parent or 'mum' in the future more than twice as many times as boys. Boys were less likely to mention being 'dads' specifically, but both boys and girls made general references to having a happy and healthy family.

Boys' top job aspirations:

- 1 Athlete
- 2 YouTuber or gamer
- 3 Tradie or builder
- 4 Engineer
- 5 Artist
- 6 Police officer or firefighter
- 7 Work with animals
- 8 Farmer
- 9 Doctor or nurse
- 10 Navy, army or airforce
- 11 Work with computers/game developments

Girls' top job aspirations:

- 1 Work with animals
- 2 Teacher
- 3 Artist
- 4 Doctor or nurse
- 5 Athlete
- 6 Food and hospitality (café, bakery)
- 7 Actor or singer
- 8 YouTuber or gamer
- 9 Hair and beauty
- 10 Police officer or firefighter
- 11 Own a business







Regional Breakdowns: Same, Same, but Different

Postcards came from 8-12 year olds attending schools across South Australia, from metropolitan Adelaide to regional centres, and in rural and remote communities.

Regardless of where they live, children shared many of the same experiences, interests, and ideas and aspirations for change. Nevertheless, as was the case in the 2019 postcards, there were some unique differences between children living in different communities. The diversity of responses reflect the diversity of children's ages, as well as the social, environmental and economic contexts in which they live.

Across all regions, 8-12 year olds wrote about giving children more of a voice and taking them seriously – in the classroom, in their homes, in the community and at government level – as key to making their own lives better and improving their whole communities. They consistently raised feelings of being misunderstood, unheard, and underestimated.

For 8-12 year olds living in metropolitan South Australia, ideas to make things better for children were focused on making spaces

in their community safer. For those in the regions, the focus was more on making their communities more connected – through better roads, and cheaper and more frequent transport and access to the Internet. Children in the regions also wanted more swimming pools, entertainment, and parks, and they wanted to get their driver's licence as soon as possible.

While animals were important to all children, tweens living in the country were more likely to write about farm animals, and about careers in farming or training animals. Those living in the city wrote more about zoo animals and job aspirations in zoology or animal shelters.

Being a YouTuber or gamer was popular across all schools, in both metropolitan and regional communities. Those in metropolitan schools were more likely to write a longer list of dream jobs than those in regional schools.

Most children who wrote about being a psychologist and counsellor attended schools in metropolitan SA, with engineer, scientist, or lawyer, also popular career choices amongst tweens living in the city. Children living in the regions were more inclined to be interested in working in active, 'hands-on' and community-facing jobs in agriculture and farming, or as firefighters, tradies and builders.

While aspirations to attend university and to see more of Australia and the world were raised by children in all regions, those living in metropolitan SA were slightly more likely to want to travel and do further study after school than those living in regional SA.

While children in regional centres and rural and remote communities also shared an interest in travel, their future aspirations were more closely tied to their region, and to the people they are familiar with there. They wrote about working on the farm or in the family business, 'helping mum and dad' or being 'like my dad'.

Compared to children in metropolitan schools, children in regional South Australia were more likely to write about Covid-19 and its impacts on their participation in activities, their connections with loved ones, and their concerns about the health and wellbeing of those around them.

Children in metropolitan SA: top job aspirations

- 1 Athlete
- 2 Work with animals
- 3 Artist
- 4 Teacher
- 5 Doctor or nurse
- 6 YouTuber or gamer
- 7 Actor or singer
- 8 Food and hospitality
- 9 Engineer
- 10 Tradie or builder
- 11 Police officer or fire fighter
- 12 Lawyer
- 13 Scientist
- 14 Own a business
- 15 Navy, army or air force

Children in regional SA: top job aspirations

- 1 Work with animals
- 2 Athlete
- 3 YouTuber or gamer
- 4 Teacher
- 5 Artist
- 6 Farmer
- 7 Doctor or nurse
- 8 Tradie or builder
- 9 Police officer or firefighter
- 10 Food and hospitality
- 11 Actor or singer
- 12 Hairdresser or beautician
- 13 Scientist
- 14 Engineer
- 15 Own a business



The following section highlights some of the key messages received from children attending schools in regional South Australia to provide further insight into their views and experiences.

Adelaide Hills

Children in the Adelaide Hills enjoy having the freedom and energy to play with their friends and family, particularly outdoors. Their ideas for making kids' lives better were focused on creating more opportunities for children to participate in sport, dance, and other fun, active and creative activities, as well as bringing some of the 'city entertainment to the hills'.

Children also wanted to address what they saw as the barriers to the above, particularly making transport more regular and affordable. More so than children in other regions of South Australia, children in the Hills wanted to ensure that technology did not impact their opportunities to spend time playing outside in nature.

Tweens in schools across the Adelaide Hills care deeply for the environment and they wrote about the impact of climate change and technology on their future. Some children reflected on how their communities have already been impacted by natural disasters, and their ideas for change included 'helping kids whose home got burned in the fires'.

They wrote about the future, and their excitement to learn about the world and make friends from different cultures. They also wrote about their concerns around the kinds of job opportunities that will be available to them, and how their move to high school will impact their friendships. Their top job aspirations were reflected in their passion for the environment and animals, with many writing about living, rescuing, or working 'with lots of animals' and becoming a vet, doctor or scientist.

Barossa, Light and Lower North

Children in schools across the Barossa, Light and Lower North wrote about their love for their community, with living in this region being one of the best things about being a kid. That said, the distance 'between where you live and where you want to do things' came up as one of the 'worst things' for kids in this region.

As such, their ideas to make things better for kids included bringing more fun activities and places to the region, along with safer roads and better transport. For 8-12 year olds living in this region stopping bullying, and making sure everyone is 'treated fairly', and receiving the help they need were high priorities.

After finishing school, children in this region wrote about helping people – as nurses, teachers, mechanics, police officers and firefighters – and helping animals, as vets, zoologists, animal protectors and rangers. Being a gamer, game developer, Twitch and Youtube streamer were also popular choices, combining their digital skills with their goals to help people. Others wanted to 'make a difference in the agriculture world' and wrote about how kids would benefit from being taught about 'agriculture, and how things were made' and other practical life skills at school.



Eyre and Western

The responses on postcards received from children attending schools across the Eyre Peninsula and Western region, included being outside in nature – near water in particular – both of which came up a lot. They wrote about swimming, going to the beach, climbing trees, and looking after the environment.

Stopping pollution and trying to stop fires were also important issues to children living in this region, as was raising the age of detention from 10 years sourcing money to help people who are experiencing homelessness, and getting more resources for school.

The 'cost of things' was another prevalent theme, with many 8-12 year olds eager to make school fees, sport, toys and other places cheaper or free. As one 10 year old put it, making things better for kids in South Australia would mean 'making everything 20c, even cars'. Other suggestions for making things better for kids, included having a party and letting kids have more beach time.

Job aspirations for children in schools across the Eyre and Western region ranged from zookeeping and tuna farming, to being an artist, pianist, doctor, nurse, video game tester to working at Kmart, Foodland, or KFC. Playing professional football was another popular choice, with one 11 year old girl wanting to 'make a port power women's team'. Others wanted to see Australia, move overseas with their family, or pursue their dream job.

Far North

For children in schools across the Far North, 'getting a good education', 'exploring life', not having to get a job, 'being cared for' and 'having all sorts of sporting opportunity' were some of the best things about being a kid.

In terms of the worst things about being a kid, children wrote about the pressure they feel to do well at school; about not being able to make your own decisions and feeling a lack of respect from adults for the 'opinions', 'freedom and privacy' of children.

Drought was a prevalent concern for 8-12 year olds across the Far North, with many wanting to 'get it to rain for the kids' and 'make water lines for farms'. They also placed importance on making sure everyone had enough money to go to school, along with the need to offer more sports, the desire for a big water park, and changes to schools that included improving the 'Bully management system', providing 'more music teachers', 'more stem buildings' and 'more learning opportunities'.

Like all children throughout South Australia, those in schools across the Far North had diverse aspirations for when they finish school. These ranged running a small business to being in the army, from becoming an astronaut to being a paramedic, or someone who 'helps other kids with their mental health'. Other 8-12 year olds wanted to go to university after working 'on the station'.



Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island

Children in schools across the Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island wrote about helping the environment, animals, and people, particularly those affected by the bushfires or experiencing any kind of disadvantage. They value the time they get to spend outside, and they wanted to have more excursions, activities, 'entertainment places' and 'stuff cheaper for kids to have fun'. They also thought that improving roads and internet access, giving kids school uniforms and more of a say, and making it 'easier for people to play sport' would make things better for kids, helping them 'get around and be healthy, confident and connected'.

While some children in schools across the Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island wrote about travelling around Australia or the world, many had post-school plans closely tied to their family and region. Running the farm, working in the family business, or with animals – as a zoologist in an animal sanctuary – or as a vet, horse, or dog trainer, were popular ideas. Children living in this region said 'having a good imagination' was one of the best things about being a kid. Many were curious about the lives of other children their age, with one 10 year old asking for 'all the schools have a swap day so you can see how other kids lurne [learn]'.

- “ ‘dirt roads to bitumen so I can ride to school’ (10 year old, male – Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island)
- “ ‘donat[e] food to the people who do not have an[y]thing to eat from the bushfires’ (8 year old, female – Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island)



Limestone Coast

For children attending schools located in the Limestone Coast region, the best things about being a kid is having the freedom to play, having friends who live nearby, and having time to 'think about things' and work out 'who you want to be'.

Children from this region wanted more of a say in what their communities do, particularly in relation to what 'playgrounds and pools should be like'. It was common for tweens living on the Limestone Coast to want to encourage kids to get outside more. Some linked this with 'getting kids off devices', and yet 'doing something around electronics' was a popular post-school aspiration.

Even though one of the best things was 'not having to work or worry about work', some 8-12 year olds wanted to 'let kids get more jobs like walking dogs'. Others were looking forward to being able to get a car or motorbike, or 'drive the yoot [ute]', as it was common for tweens in this region to mention that they have experienced driving cars 'off road'.

Many children living on the Limestone Coast saw a future for themselves within their communities. Other 8-12 year olds were worried about their high school being in another area. Beyond school, many were keen to follow in their older family members' footsteps and run the farm or be a shearer. Sporting careers were also popular with many wanting more 'opportunities' and more 'help to pursue dreams'. One 11 year old suggested a 'country day for all of us kids to get outside with the cattle and sheep'.



Murray and Mallee

For children attending schools across the Murray and Mallee region, the 'best things about being a kid' included having fun, 'knowing that I have great friends', and space around for the things they love doing, such as horse riding and motorbike riding, kicking the footy and going swimming and fishing.

Some of the 'worst' things for children in this region were not being able to drive or make their own choices. To make things better for kids they wanted to have 'more things to do in public' and give each school a pool, create more dog parks, and build an 'amusement park in the country' as well as 'keep kids safe' and 'teach people to stop littering'.

Fairness and kindness came up a lot in postcards from this region, with many 8-12 year olds writing about giving money to the poor so kids can 'have a life' and do anything 'no matter how much money they have'. They also wrote about 'speaking up for kids' and allowing kids to vote, being friends with everyone, making sure everyone has good friends, and finding out what help they need to learn and have a good life, particularly children with disability. Some wanted improved transport for kids who live far away from school, and others wanted 'funner ways to learn instead of tests'.

Spending time with their besties, working with animals, and farming, were popular post-school plans, with some children drawing pictures of their friends, wheat, and other crops, as well as of their pets and the animals they want to help. Professional sports player or sports physiotherapist, police officer, hairdresser, teacher, or vet, were some of the common post-school aspirations children held. It was common for 8-12 year olds in this region to want to 'have a YouTube channel', often alongside their 'day jobs' as chefs, business owners, tradies, or builders.

Yorke and Mid North

Children in schools across the Yorke and Mid North region treasure having time to play. They love having 'water fights' and 'fun in mud' and 'out on the farm' without having to work, 'pay for things' or cook dinner.

On the other hand, being 'bossed around' and 'told off', not getting to drive a car on the roads, 'worrying about the planet', and their relationships, were some of the worst things they named about being a kid.

For 8-12 year olds living in this region 'making the world a better place' involved giving kids more freedom and more of a say – 'in parliament' as well as in their subject choices and library books. They wrote that finding a friend 'for every kid, or being their friend if they don't have one', giving clothes and food to anyone who can't afford it, making toys and electronics cheaper, and giving all parents 'cheap discounts' were important. They also wanted to see their communities build better playgrounds, keep things clean, stop bullying, raise money to 'buy cool things' for schools, and make homework 'more like video games'.

Many 8-12 year olds had plans to work hard when they finish school. One 10 year old shared plans to 'work at a café all day and be a nurse all night'. Others wrote about their hopes to have a 'balanced life' where they can 'make time for friends and other things'.

Popular job aspirations ranged from being an astronaut, scientist, or paramedic, to being a diesel mechanic, builder, and mountain biker. Like many other regions, subjects such as Youtube, sports and animals came up a lot, with many children aspiring to become YouTubers, vets, farmers, trainers, or 'horse girls'.



Conclusion

If we build a future where leaders listen to children and young people, consider their ideas, validate their contributions, and implement strategies that reflect their input, then the big social and environmental issues we know we must address, may well move within our reach.

One of the consequences of a global world is that young people's connections to their local community are decreasing. More children feel less attached to where they live, with public investment in the local community infrastructure that young people need for their wellbeing at an all-time low. Children are being actively dissuaded from having a physical presence in their own neighbourhoods. Through a lack of resources and meeting places designed specifically for them, they don't see or experience how valued they are or where they belong or fit in.

Those of us who have contact with children and young people must do all we can to create the opportunities that will help build positive associations with their local communities. Our role is to equip young people with the skills and knowledge they need to successfully participate in the community, and ideally through firsthand experiences where they can learn to understand what having an 'active' Australian citizenship involves.

We will only achieve this by continuing to seek ways to open up a dialogue that encourages kids in this age group to share what is happening and what matters most to them from their point of view, remembering that children are the experts in their own lives.

One of the opportunities for student voice is via a civic actions resource I recently launched called yChange. yChange has been specifically designed with direct input from students, educators and civics experts to support educators to act as a bridge to local communities, creating pathways for students to learn how they can actively contribute outside the classroom to make positive change in their local neighbourhood. Young people want their teachers to encourage them to take risks and to use their imaginations to address things that matter to them most. They want adults to help them get a foot in the door, so they can make a start on creating a fairer world.

My hope is that in addition to the **Student Voice Postcards Project**, which we will continue to rollout on an annual basis, we can also encourage engagement with **yChange** to nurture young people's active citizenship and to help ensure South Australia's children and young people are ready and equipped with the skills they'll need today to face the uncertainties of tomorrow.

