

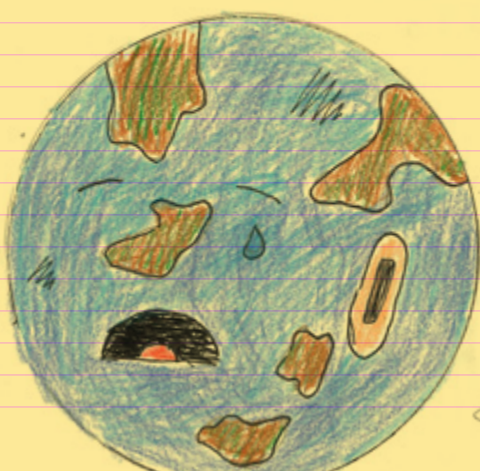
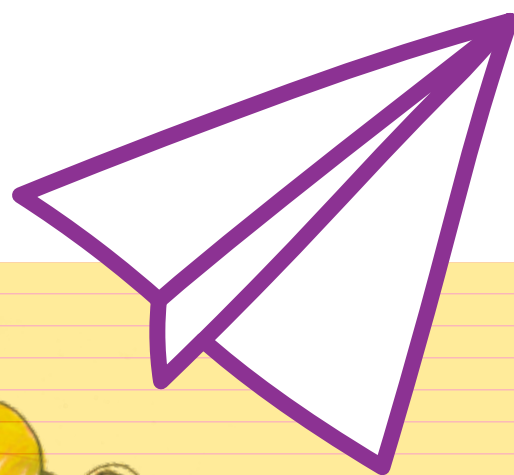
South Australian  
Commissioner  
for Children and  
Young People  
2020

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# The Things That Matter

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

PROJECT REPORT NO. 19 | OCTOBER 2020





## 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 2019 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.*

Map illustration by Peter Chiong


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## Commissioner's Foreword

As South Australia's Commissioner for Children and Young People, I am committed to creating opportunities and environments that best support children to learn and develop, realise their talents and take their place in our community. Central to this is improving children's participation in the decisions that impact their lives.

This is enshrined in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which states that 'all children and young people have a right to have a say on all issues that affect them and for their views to be taken seriously.'

Fulfilling this commitment can involve a variety of activities ranging from providing child friendly information to directly engaging with children and young people, from listening to their views to monitoring the involvement of children and young people in everyday decision making at a policy and programme level.

Whichever way I seek to maximise their engagement and participation, children and young people always respond positively. This is because when adults take the time and make the investment to involve children, they say they feel valued and respected, and that they have a greater sense of their own agency and capacity for change.

This direct engagement with children to seek their views on the policies, processes and practices that affect their lives is the most important and enjoyable part of my role as Commissioner. Given that children are directly impacted by so many decisions made by schools, health and transport planners and providers, sporting clubs, urban planners, architects, and police – to name a few – it seems logical for them to have a say about how these decisions actually work for them on the ground, as well as invite their suggestions on how to shape, design, and make improvements.

At the core of what it means to take a child's rights approach is commitment to listening to the voices of children, amplifying these voices to decision makers, and legitimatising the view that they are critical stakeholders who have a valuable and unique contribution to make. However, many children and young people do not even know that they have rights that are specific to them, let alone that they can affect change in their situations when these rights are not being upheld.

Draw a picture for Helen here when you're done.

 **Tell Helen**

Who are you and what do you care about?  
Helen, The Commissioner for Children and Young People, wants to know!  
Please flip the postcard over and answer a few questions.

Please circle your age

I am 8 9 10 11 12 other years old.

I go to \_\_\_\_\_  
Write your School's name

I like to \_\_\_\_\_

I want to \_\_\_\_\_

I worry about \_\_\_\_\_

If I were the boss of South Australia, I would... 

Finished already?  
Flip the page and draw!

Thank you for your answers! We'll pass them on to Helen.

Children have told me that they want to have a say, especially on matters that are important to them. They want to be heard and to be treated equally and with respect. They want their rights to be upheld, and they want opportunities to express themselves without fear of being judged.

Children between the ages of 8 and 12 routinely tell me that they have few opportunities to have a say. Adults often underestimate their competencies and rely heavily upon their own assumptions about children's perspectives and experiences. Policymakers and advocates also tell me that 8-12 year olds are overlooked from a policy and programme perspective. The focus on the importance of early brain development and early years learning, as well as an increasing focus on adolescent mental health, has meant that public policy for 8-12 year olds is not a high priority.

When I ask children what they want from adults, they tell me they want to be understood, listened to, be given a voice, and be able to influence decisions. My postcards project is a child focussed way of connecting with children to find out about their lives at a State level, and have them shape and influence my advocacy agenda.

This report is the first in what will be a series of annual reports on this project. Its release coincides with the distribution of my 2020 Postcards. I look forward to reading this next set of postcards and gaining a deeper insight into the experiences of children across the State during this unprecedented year.

As a community, we know that engaging with children is pivotal to being an active democracy. We must ensure that children feel valued and respected as citizens by asking them about their lives and by acting upon their contributions. By taking the time to reflect on the contributions in this report, you can be part of improving outcomes for South Australian children.

Yours sincerely,



**Helen Connolly**

Commissioner for Children  
and Young People



## Introduction

Children aged 8–12 are often referred to as ‘tweens’. These years between childhood and adolescence are marked by major physical development and social and emotional change. As puberty kicks in, these are years that can also be when behavioural and emotional challenges emerge and when children start to struggle with engaging with school and building and maintaining friendships.

It is also a time when significant adults, in addition to parents and carers, can and do have great impact on shaping and framing how children deal with the concerns and challenges they face.

The ‘tween’ years, are a stage when early intervention can have the greatest positive impact and where constructs of fairness and respect are forged. Importantly, it is also the time when adult validation, approval and advice is both respected and sought.

These are the years in which there is a rare opportunity for community leaders, and educators to really connect with children on things that matter to them. By establishing the lines of communication and trust at this time, adults can understand the world from the perspective of a child. This means sitting down and really listening to their concerns and addressing their specific challenges, as well as acknowledging and validating their hopes and dreams.

In 2019, thousands of postcards were sent to 8 to 12 year olds in schools all around South Australia. The 8,429 completed postcards that were returned provide an

opportunity for community and school leaders to hear directly from a group whose voices and opinions are rarely heard.

The responses provided by 8–12 year olds came from 239 Catholic, Independent, Government, Special Education Units and Aboriginal schools from the Greater Adelaide Region, as well as from regional centres and rural and remote communities across South Australia.

This report summarises what our 8 to 12 year old children have to say about what is important to them (what they like to do), their aspirations (what they want to do), their concerns (what they worry about) and what they would change (what they would do if they were the boss of South Australia).

The postcards will be sent out annually at the same time each year, to build our understanding of the lives of 8 to 12 year olds over time. They will have a slightly different focus each year, with the ultimate goal being to increase the opportunity for South Australian children of primary school age to influence the Commissioner’s agenda.







Me as the  
Prime Minister  
of Australia, making  
a difference to the  
world.



As leaders of South Australia, children said helping animals and the environment would be just as important as helping people.



Children value kindness, fairness and equality in leaders and 'doing the right thing' ensuring 'everyone', regardless of age or background, can afford healthcare, education, housing and transport.



While most children are doing well, almost all children wrote about something that they would like to change in their own community, school, and family, or in the world.





Children see a direct link between their education and learning now, to their present and future wellbeing and prospects.



While some children are focused on global solutions to global issues, almost all children focused on the importance of their connections at a local level.



Children want to have a voice and a promise of a job in the future and to be connected online and offline – to places, information and opportunities.



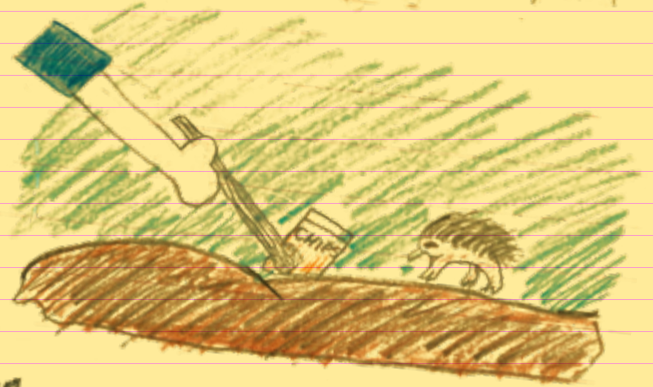
Children want to learn, play, do well and be happy, healthy, active and creative, and they want this for other people as well as themselves.



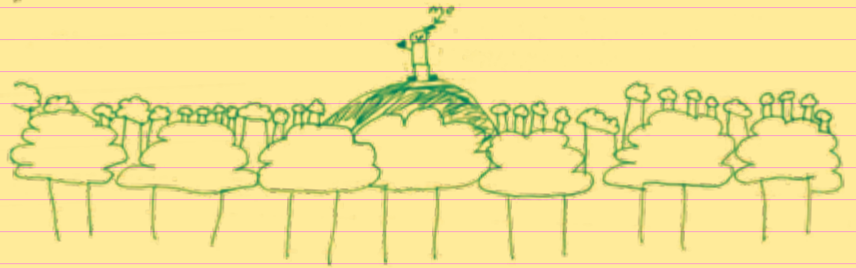
For children, safety is social as well as physical – it means feeling accepted, listened to and valued, as well as being able to express themselves and be creative without fear of judgment.



Relationships with friends, family, teachers – and their sense of belonging at home, school and in public spaces, is central to wellbeing and their hopes and dreams for the future.



cows fart cause pollution



## What is important to 8-12 year olds?

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Being active

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Being creative

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Being with friends and family

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Most 8-12 year olds described their favourite ways to be active and creative through sport, art, gaming and other activities, reflecting the central role of play in their lives. Children spoke about simply enjoying time with friends and family, but also with teachers, pets or other animals. Whether it's through a game or a visit to the park, having an opportunity to 'talk', hanging out with people their own age, being with the people they care about is central to having fun and feeling good.

“ *spend time with my family/friends and pets also I love to listen to music and go camping.* ” – 12 year old, Southern Suburbs

“ *Travel with my family and do H.A.S.S with my teacher* ” – 11 year old, Limestone Coast

The importance of sport among this age group is palpable. Children are passionate about a variety of sports, the most popular being soccer, netball, football, basketball and swimming. They spoke about being active and outdoors beyond playing sport as key to their overall sense of wellbeing. They like to ride their bikes, 'build things', 'go on adventures' and explore, go fishing and camping.

Children not only enjoy reading, singing, dancing and listening to music, but also playing their own music and creating their

own drawings, games, characters, songs and dances. Others who spoke about having fun with technology described the online world as an extension of their daily offline lives, where they enjoyed playing, watching and learning, particularly through video games or Youtube.

“ *play netball, read books, play football, soccer and dance.* ” – 12 year old, Southern Suburbs

“ *dance, play footy, play netball and play tennis. I love sports! I also like going on adventures.* ” – 11 year old, Yorke and Mid North

School is a significant place in the daily lives of 8-12 year olds, and it means much more to them than just learning. School is generally a safe place where they can play and connect with friends, be active and creative, learn new things, 'get better' at things they care about, and share this knowledge with others. Some enjoyed school so much that they wanted to 'have a sleepover at school'.

“ *Read to receptions to help them read and learn words* ” – 10 year old, Northern Suburbs

“ *Play with my friend at the break. And do Art, PE, health and science* ” – 11 year old, Yorke and Mid North

## What are the aspirations of 8-12 year olds?

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Get a good job

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Be a good person

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Learn and do well

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See the world

Children told us about the type of person they want to be when they grow up, including the kinds of relationships they want to have with other people, the kinds of jobs they want to do, and what they want to achieve.

It should be of great interest to anyone with a focus on the future of South Australia that when our children speak about their hopes and dreams, 'getting a good job' is at the top of the list. More than half of the children who responded wrote about their dream jobs, with their top dream jobs being in the following areas:

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

Unsurprisingly, being a professional athlete was the single most popular choice, as it combined work with a passion for sport. Being a teacher was another popular choice, as was being a doctor, vet, actor, scientist or 'Youtuber'.

Many of the jobs that children wrote about reflected their current interests in sport and creative arts, as well as their current relationships with teachers who many children look up to. Their job aspirations also reflected their desire to help animals, the environment, and other people, particularly those who are poor, disadvantaged or experiencing homelessness.

I want to:

“ ‘Play hockey for Australia, cricket for Australia, swim in the Olympics be a Nascar driver and proffesional sooterer and fammos youtuber.’ – 11 year old, Barossa, Light and Lower North

“ ‘have lots of friends, be a youtuber\*, fly, have fun, and be cool! \*w/ some subs’ – 11 year old, Adelaide Hills

“ ‘be a vet or teacher when I am older. I also want to travelle the world. ‘ – 9 year old, Western Suburbs

*'be a athlete,  
teacher and a actor'.*

*— 10 year old, Southern Suburbs*

Children also wrote generally about how they want to relate to others. They wanted to be kind. To 'make people feel welcome' and be a 'good friend' and a 'good person'. For some children, their singular dream was simply to 'be happy and have a good life'. This often entailed having a good job, good friends and a happy family in the future.

The 'cost of things' came up a lot, with many children wanting to have enough to afford 'the basics', plus a bit more. They not only wanted this for themselves, but for all people. Other children wrote about being rich and happy. Some listed all the 'cool things' that they would like to have, ranging from new shoes, toys and pets, to a business, or a house

of their own. Others described having more extravagant things like mansions, Porsches and the 'things rich Youtubers have'.

Children see clear links between their education and their aspirations for the future in terms of further education and employment opportunities, as well as in terms of the health and wellbeing of themselves and their families. Many children wrote about wanting to improve their school work, do well and learn new skills; most commonly sporting skills. One child's dream was to 'be one of the best flippers in the world' while others wrote generally about 'being successful'.

While 8-12 year olds enjoy 'going on adventures' in their own backyards, many also had bigger dreams and aspirations to travel. Some saw this as an exciting opportunity to explore their curiosity about the world, experience life in Australia or overseas and 'try new foods from every culture'. Some wrote about holidays, while others saw travel as a way to connect with friends and family who live far away.



## What are 8-12 year olds worried about?

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The environment

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Schoolwork and school transitions

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The health and wellbeing of the people they love

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While many children's worries were very specific to their own circumstances and situations, many of their concerns were global as well as local ranging from 'my farm' and 'my family' to 'how many more wars there will be?' Children described worries in their own lives – about their families, their schools and the future – as well as the needs and wellbeing of other people 'doing it tough'.

Some children focused on their worries in the present while others focused on their fears for the future. The unknown is a scary thing for children and their concerns touched on many different aspects of the future. These ranged from transitioning into the next year level at school to starting high school; from the future of their family to the future of the environment. Many were concerned about the future of work and whether they'll be able to find a job and make enough money when they're an adult.

The most commonly reported worry for 8-12 year olds is the environment. Children wrote about climate change, pollution, the ocean, waste, plastics, drought, deforestation and bushfires. Although the postcards were returned before the catastrophic 2020 bushfire season, many children were already worried about bushfires and wrote about wanting to help fire-affected people and animals.

Many 8-12 year olds described a diverse range of worries they had about school. They wrote

about changing classes, transitioning to high school and being separated from their current classmates. Their concerns focused on what this would mean for their relationships with peers, again highlighting the importance of the social aspect of school. Others were worried about tests, due dates and the volume of school work and homework they were given, and whether they could 'do well enough' or get the grades they would like or needed.

Children worry about their relationships with others, particularly the health and wellbeing of their family and friends, and all those they love. Many children also describe wanting to make their family proud of them and wanting to make changes in their communities including the availability of jobs for family members and 'reducing the cost of things needed to live'. The prospect of not being able to achieve family goals or meet the expectations of others is a source of concern for some children.

A significant number of children were also concerned about how their peers perceive them in terms of popularity, school work, sporting abilities, and appearance. They described the 'FOMO' (fear of missing out) on what their friends are doing, as well as worries they have about dealing with bullying or conflict in their relationships with friends.

## What would 8-12 year olds change if they were the boss of South Australia?

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Help everyone to be healthy, happy and connected, particularly those who 'need it the most'

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Care for the environment

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Make school more fun, inclusive and interesting

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Children had practical and thoughtful suggestions about what they would change if they were the leaders of South Australia. Overwhelmingly, 8-12 year olds believe that everyone deserves to have a 'good life' and 'feel safe and happy being who they are'.

Their visions for change highlight the values they want to see in leaders: kindness, fairness and equality. For many children, putting these values into practice and 'doing the right thing' as a leader means listening and ensuring that everyone is given a voice and opportunities to share their ideas and thoughts, particularly children.

Many 8-12 year olds had a variety of compassionate solutions to issues that they care about and worry about. These commonly involved providing help and support to charities and people who are 'in need', including those

who are homeless, or 'poor' such as 'farmers, refugees and children'. Children want to make sure that everyone has enough food, water and money to be able to afford what they described as 'basic' and 'essential' – ie housing, healthcare and education.

There was a real sense among 8-12 year olds that being connected to places, information and opportunities to socialise, is very important. They wrote about wanting to remove barriers to transport and accessing the internet so that everyone can have freedom and independence, regardless of where they live.

Children were very aware of the 'costs of living'. Many of their ideas for change focused on 'making things cheaper', particularly bills and the costs of rent and housing, medications, healthcare and other essential items. They also wanted to make 'more jobs', reduce taxes,

and increase wages, as well as make wages across different jobs more equal. Some children wrote about lowering the minimum working age so that they could help support their families financially.

Children identified a number of ideas to take better care of the environment and to address environmental issues ranging from reducing plastic waste, and addressing pollution and deforestation to minimise climate change. Their ideas include planting more trees and investing in renewable resources, manufacturing more electric vehicles and making more non-plastic alternatives available, as well as recycling soft plastic and introducing different recycling systems.

**If I were the boss of SA, I would:**

- “ ‘Try and improve things like the internet in more remote places and also help public transport by adding more buses to different places and towns, which could give people opportunities for work and fun. Also improve the education system to help kids in the future. - 12 year old, Adelaide Hills
- “ ‘Make more jobs so people can work to get a house and helpful resouises they need.’  
– 9 year old, Northern Suburbs
- “ ‘make bills shorter’ – 9 year old, Yorke and Mid North
- “ ‘give free internet’ – 12 year old, Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island
- “ ‘for uni to be free’ – 10 year old, Southern Suburbs
- “ ‘decrease the number of rubbish entering our oceans by only having landfill bins out once a fortnight and increasing the number of metal, glass, plastic and paper/cardboard getting recycled into something new.’ – 12 year old, Eastern Suburbs

*‘try to get lots of  
windmills runin in the  
Energy and grow  
more trees fusa for  
the environment’*

– 8 year old, Northern Suburbs



While many children wrote about how they would ‘help everyone get an education’, just as many shared their ideas for changing aspects of school to make it more inclusive, fun and interesting for everyone.

Some of their ideas were about the structure of school and included changing start times so that children would not be late if they slept in and relaxing school uniform rules to create a more inclusive environment. Others who were stressed about homework and the NAPLAN tests had ideas for reconsidering how many tests and how much homework is necessary.

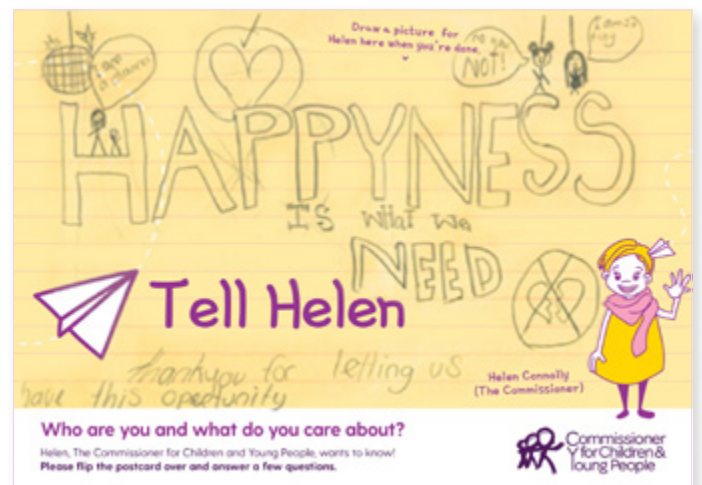
Others wanted to change the curriculum so that it was more personalised to each student and allowed greater subject choices. This involved broadening learning areas and creating

opportunities to learn more about cooking, gardening and 'life skills'. While some wanted to allow students to be more creative in class, others wanted to learn more about science and technology. Another suggested making a tech school to prepare children for careers in the ICT industry.

Children also had ideas to change the physical and social environment of the school, which included doing more to address bullying, having animals and meditation classes at school to help children relax, and teaching environmentally conscious behaviours by running schools on rainwater. Some children wanted to make sure that all schools have an oval, a canteen and that they offer PE lessons and swimming lessons.

Others wrote about creating more school sporting teams, improving school sporting equipment and having water activities at school, or having fishing and beach 'days' or excursions on hot days. While there were many ideas to improve playgrounds at school, others wrote about bigger plans to roll out theme parks and waterslides in schools and in the community.

Health and wellbeing was another important theme for 8-12 year olds in South Australia, with many children describing plans to fund more medical research to cure diseases like cancer, promote healthy lifestyles, and do something about drugs, including banning cigarettes. Mental health was just as important as physical health for many children, with plans for 'spreading laughter and happiness for everyone across the state', and putting on 'more wellbeing camps around SA'.



## Same Same But Different

Postcards came from children in schools across South Australia, from metropolitan Adelaide to regional centres and rural and remote communities.

Postcards came from children in schools across South Australia, from metropolitan Adelaide to regional centres and rural and remote communities. Although children wrote about similar interests no matter where they were from, there were some noticeable differences between communities worth mentioning. The responses reflect differences in age and diversity within social, environmental and economic contexts.

Children living in Adelaide and metropolitan SA, for example, were more likely to report reading and writing as something they like to do in their free time, in addition to sports, creative activities, and hanging out with friends both on and offline. Compared to children in regional SA, children in the city were also twice as likely to mention international issues such as world hunger, world peace and helping people in other countries. They were also more likely to describe global solutions to issues, with 'working together with other countries' a popular solution to addressing environmental issues.

The focus of children's worries also varied slightly between metropolitan and regional areas. Stranger danger was a more prominent

theme in the city, where a number of children wrote about robbers, kidnappers and 'bad' people, and wanting to reduce crime and keep their friends and family safe.

Even across regions within Greater Adelaide, there were subtle differences. While concern for climate change and plastic pollution was an important issue across all areas, children in the Eastern suburbs placed slightly more emphasis on this as criteria for what they consider will create a happy and successful future.

Children across the northern, southern and western suburbs of Adelaide wrote a lot about education and wanting to be successful at school and beyond. Children in northern and southern suburbs wrote about playing with their friends at recess and lunch, through sports and other activities. While many described their favourite subjects at school and what they loved to learn about, children also shared their concerns about school, including bullying, grades, testing and homework, as well as their fears around moving to high school. Many children wanted to be in their friend's classes next year and to be able to continue



friendships into high school. Children in the western suburbs wrote about their future in terms of work and described jobs as both a source of aspiration and concern, with many children writing about improving and updating the education system to keep up with an evolving world.

Compared to tweens who live in the city, 8-12 year olds in the country wrote more about outdoor activities, such as riding bikes, scooters, and skateboards, as well as about cars, motorbikes, fishing, camping and hunting.

They also wanted to help design more places to hang out and do 'fun things', including having better playgrounds, BMX tracks and skate parks, and having more shops and swimming pools. While very few children reported that they wanted to live elsewhere, many had ideas for change at a local level that would not only help them 'have more fun' but would also create exciting attractions that would bring tourism into their communities. Travel was also a big aspiration for some children, mostly seen as a way to have fun and see other parts of the country and world.

Keeping their families and communities safe and healthy was very important for regional children. Their ideas for creating healthier and happier communities ranged from improving local hospitals and taking a strong stance against cigarettes and drugs, to improving local sporting club facilities and playgrounds for their family and friends to enjoy.

Although the environment was one of the top issues for children across South Australia, the focus of their environmental concerns varied across regions. Overall 8-12 year olds in the country focused less on climate change and more on plastics, pollution, drought, and litter.

**The following section highlights a few of the key messages from children across regional South Australia to provide further insight into the views of regional children.**

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### Adelaide Hills

The children of the Adelaide Hills told us that they care very strongly about the environment and that spending time playing outside in nature and with animals is very important to them. Many of their ideas for change centred on sports opportunities, including wanting more girls' football teams and school improvements that allowed pets to be at school. They were also interested in more fun outdoor activities being offered at their school such as participating in a 'colour run'.

### Eyre and Western

Hanging out with friends and family was the most popular activity for children in the Eyre and Western region. Many children shared aspirations to help others, particularly farmers in drought, small business owners, children separated from their families, homeless people, and those who are struggling financially. They worried about pets without homes and animals feeling the effects of pollution and bushfires. The top dream jobs for children in this area were builders, farmers, mechanics and miners.

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### Barossa, Light and Lower North

More than children from other regions, children in the Barossa, Light and Lower North regions, showed great concern for people who are less fortunate than they are and for the health of their community.

Their visions for a healthy community focused on greater connections to facilities, the internet and public transport. This included making roads safer and reducing traffic around congested areas and schools, providing better public transport options and easy access to faster wifi. They also wanted access to more sporting clubs and improved sporting facilities along with more sporting options. They said better resources are needed for schools 'so that education sets them up well to follow their hopes and dreams'.

### Far North

Children from across the Far North focussed on the importance of the safety and health of their loved ones as well as hanging out with friends and family. Because many of the friends and family they want to hang out with more live far away, many children wrote about the importance of technology as a fun way to connect with the people they care about.

Spending time online was very popular in this region, with many children aspiring to be Youtubers and wanting to own the latest tech. Children in this region had less interest in leaving their communities, and many of them shared practical ideas to make their school and community more fun and active, including having more sports programs at schools and more shops.

### Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island

Children from schools across the Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island identified transport as a key issue with many reporting they wanted it to be easier to 'get around' within their own communities, between their communities and other regions. This included transport into Adelaide from Fleurieu and to the mainland from Kangaroo Island. Their ideas for better public transport reflected a need to provide options for people without cars, as well as access to environmentally-friendly alternatives to cars. Children in this region are very conscious of the cost of living and financial issues, with many writing about lowering the cost of bills and rent and reducing taxes. They were also worried about a lack of jobs in the region and what this meant for their own aspirations to get a job.

### Murray and Mallee

Children from the Murray and Mallee wrote about the importance of the role they played in their families and communities, which included helping out on their farms and around the house, and giving to their communities and to charity, particularly through volunteering. The biggest concern for many children was drought, with many fearing for farmers and their livelihoods, or that the Murray River would run out of water and there wouldn't be enough for the state. They were also concerned about bushfires affecting people and animals in their region.

Their visions for more exciting communities involved building local swimming pools, a trampoline park, an inflatable world, ten pin bowling alleys, skate parks and ice skating rinks. Others suggested bringing an AFL game to the region, and having more sporting events at school, including 'more SAPSASA events and running carnivals'.

### Limestone Coast

Children on the Limestone Coast wrote about all sorts of pets and animals that they like to play with, including riding horses, leading heifers, training dogs and playing with guinea pigs, cows, chickens and cats. Many of the jobs that children wrote about reflected their interest in animals, with many children aspiring to be vets, dog trainers, horse trainers, professional horse riders and animal foster carers.

Children were worried about bushfires in their communities, and about their family members and friends who volunteer for the Country Fire Service. Their less immediate concerns related to growing up, what their high school will be like, and whether they will be able to find jobs and afford the basics. As leaders, their visions involved addressing unemployment and the affordability of school to ensure everyone's right to an education.

### Yorke and Mid North

Children in schools across the Yorke and Mid North region wrote about following their dreams, mastering skills and doing well at school. For some this was about scholarships to schools in Adelaide, or improving their sporting skills and excel in competitions. While many children aspired to be professional athletes, others had smaller goals, like being able to backflip or 'be really fast'. Working with animals or working as teachers were popular dream jobs, as was working in the creative arts, in a trade, or doing manual labour.

The health and safety of their families, friends and communities was a significant concern for these children. They wrote about supporting hospitals and the Royal Flying Doctor Service, as well as helping children to live healthy lives with better support for mental health. For many this meant banning cigarettes and drugs. Others prioritised upgrading roads in order to 'avoid the number of people and animals that get hit by cars'.

## Where To Next?

Article 12 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)* says ‘Children and young people have a right to have a say on all issues that affect them and for their views to be taken seriously’.

We know that by improving children’s participation we strengthen our democratic institutions and structures, and help to build a strong state for the future.

Creative ways to find out the views and experiences of children such as my Postcards Project are one way of providing a platform to engage children and build their expectations and experiences of having input. Through this project schools can support children to see they have agency and a voice. This is essential for learning and wellbeing.

Schools that participated in this project have demonstrated their commitment to supporting children’s evolving capacity as capable citizens, able to meaningfully contribute to their communities.

These schools have put children front and centre in their thinking and have provided them with an opportunity to tell the adults in their lives what is important to them, as well as how they want to contribute to those things that matter most to them.

I believe that when children participate in projects of this kind they develop greater awareness of their rights, enjoy improved self-confidence, a heightened sense of self-esteem and gain valuable leadership skills.

At a community level, participation is the building block of democracy. By empowering children and young people to have a say about issues that affect their lives and the lives of others including the environment, we reinforce the message that children are valuable stakeholders and citizens who have a right to be heard. Participation creates active citizens who are part of thriving civil societies.

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