

Commissioner seeks to amplify voices of children and young people with disability

South Australia's Commissioner for Children and Young People, Helen Connolly, will today launch her latest report – *From Checkbox to Commitment: what children and young people with disability said about identity, inclusion, and independence*.

The report launch will take place at a forum examining our understanding of what these topics mean to the almost 49,700 (7.4%) of South Australian children and young people living with disability between the ages of 0-24 years, of which 21,644 are registered as NDIS recipients.

[The Forum](#), hosted by Healthy Development Adelaide (HDA), will feature a panel of experts who will discuss the current knowledge gaps that exist in relation to services being provided to children and young people with disability, shining a light on where change must be made.

From Checkbox to Commitment is the culmination of a targeted listening project Commissioner Connolly undertook throughout 2020/21, specifically aimed at hearing directly from children and young people with disability aged 9-22 years.

The Commissioner's report aims to amplify the voices of children and young people living with disability and in their words documents their diverse and unique perspectives on their own lives, and on the world around them. Although many are similar to those of other young South Australians, children and young people living with disability raised issues that reflect their own particular priorities.

The children and young people who participated in the consultation told the Commissioner that one of their main barriers to being heard is not being taken seriously. They said they feel they are often considered all the same, or as objects being supported by adults who think they know better than they do what they need or who have poor attitudes, display stigma and stereotyping, and carry expectations of ableism that lead to them being seen as 'abnormal'.

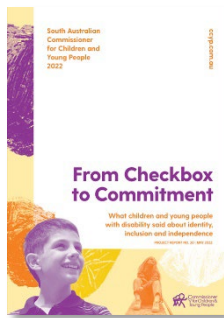
Key messages include ensuring that children and young people living with disability are more than their disability. They want opportunities to participate in decisions and share their views on a broad range of topics not limited to disability. They also want support to build friendships and attend social outings on their own terms, as well as more opportunities to interact with "mainstream kids". Educating service providers and the wider community on living with disability should be a priority to avoid ongoing exclusion.

Quotes attributable to the Commissioner:

Amongst the most vulnerable and marginalised citizens in South Australia, the views of children and young people living with disability are rarely being sought, let alone acted upon. They are rarely chosen to represent their schools, attend summits and forums, or be members of student representative councils, youth advisory committees, or other participatory structures. Those who work in service delivery must develop a greater understanding of how children and young people experience disability.

System-crises will continue until we recognise, respect, and act upon the experiences, needs, and wishes of the children and young people with disability who these systems were created to support. Systemic responses must cater for delivery of tailored services that enable children and young people with disability to not only lead safe lives, but to also live fulfilling lives. This will increase their individual confidence and capabilities, as well as their physical and emotional safety.

It is simply not enough to put inclusion policies in place and provide wheelchair access. That is the bare minimum. Service providers must go beyond a checkbox mentality to genuine and meaningful commitment to supporting and enabling children and young people with disability be heard and supported in ways they have told us they most want and need.



Download the report: <https://www.ccyp.com.au/ccyp-reports>

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