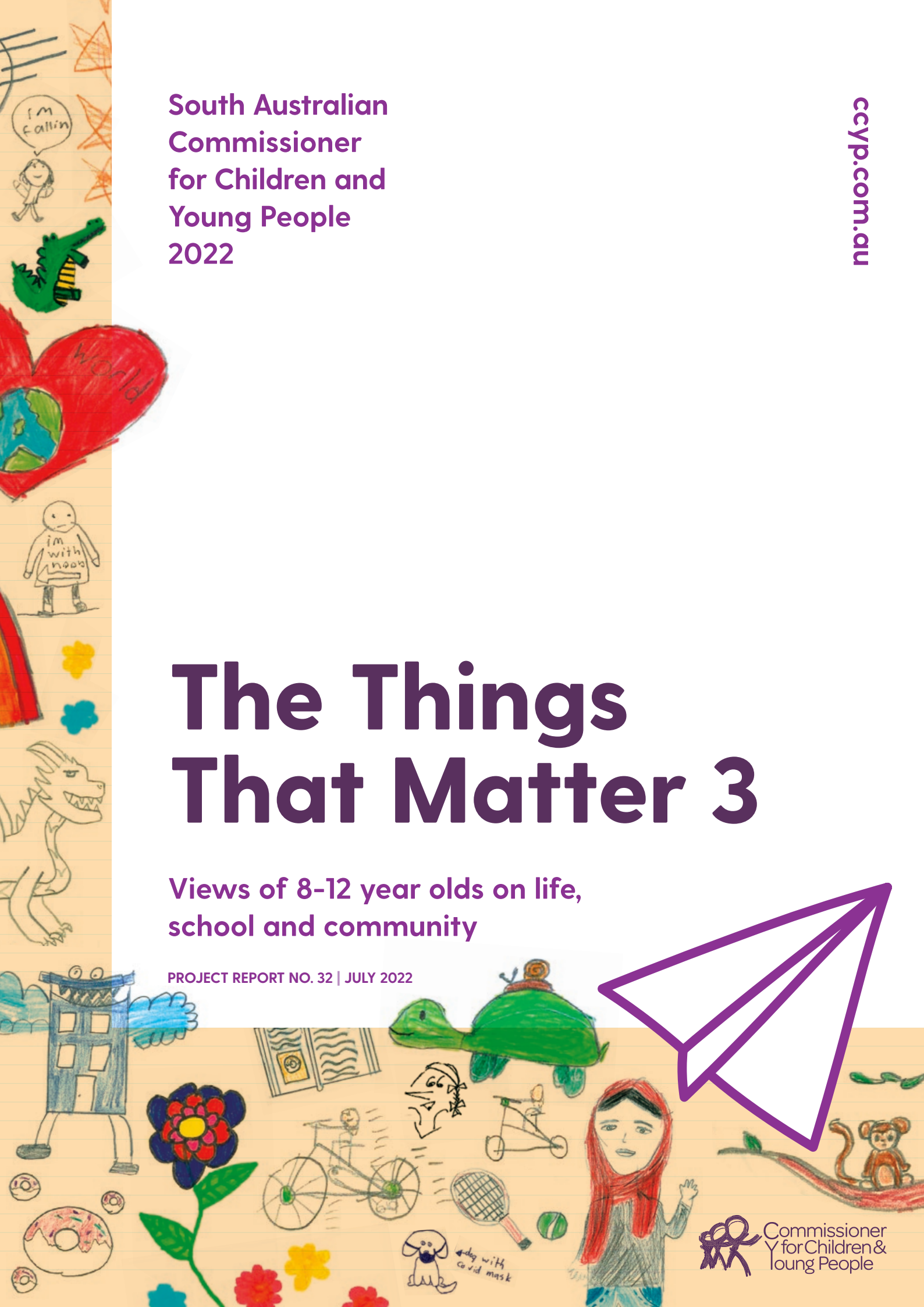


South Australian
Commissioner
for Children and
Young People
2022

The Things That Matter 3

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

PROJECT REPORT NO. 32 | JULY 2022



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 the 13,868 South Australian school students aged 8–12 years who participated in the Commissioner's Student Voice Postcard Project in 2021. Thanks also to the teachers and school staff who supported their participation. This figure represents approximately 40% of all SA 8–12 year olds thereby providing an excellent insight into what matters most to this age group.

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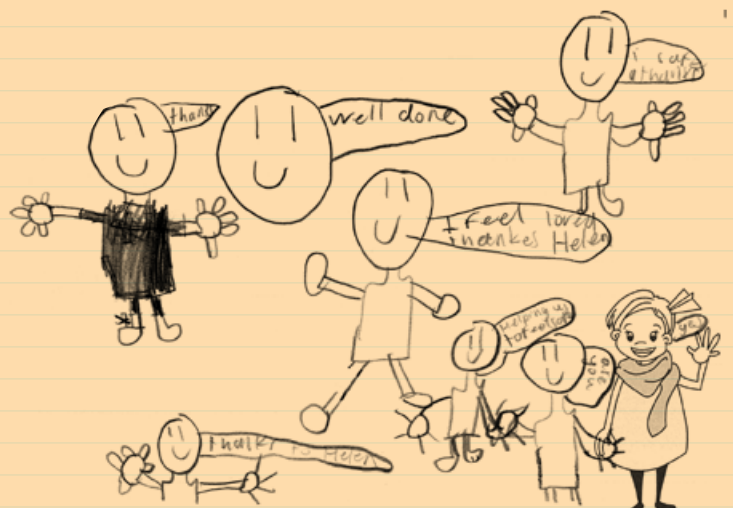
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Commissioner's Foreword

This is the third in the series of annual Things That Matter reports reflecting responses from thousands of South Australian children who completed a 'Commissioner's Postcard' in the second half of 2021.



Supported by educators and leaders who are committed to ensuring children have voice and agency, this year's report includes responses from children from diverse communities and backgrounds, and with varying abilities from across the whole of South Australia. They have reflected on their lives, aspirations, and ideas for changes they think will help make South Australia a better place for all.

The 13,868 children who completed a postcard in 2021 wrote about the importance of family and friends and how much pride they take in being kind and caring, and in looking after people, the environment and animals. They also enjoy making people laugh! The challenge to the grownups in their world is for them to be as interested as they are in the things children enjoy and care about.

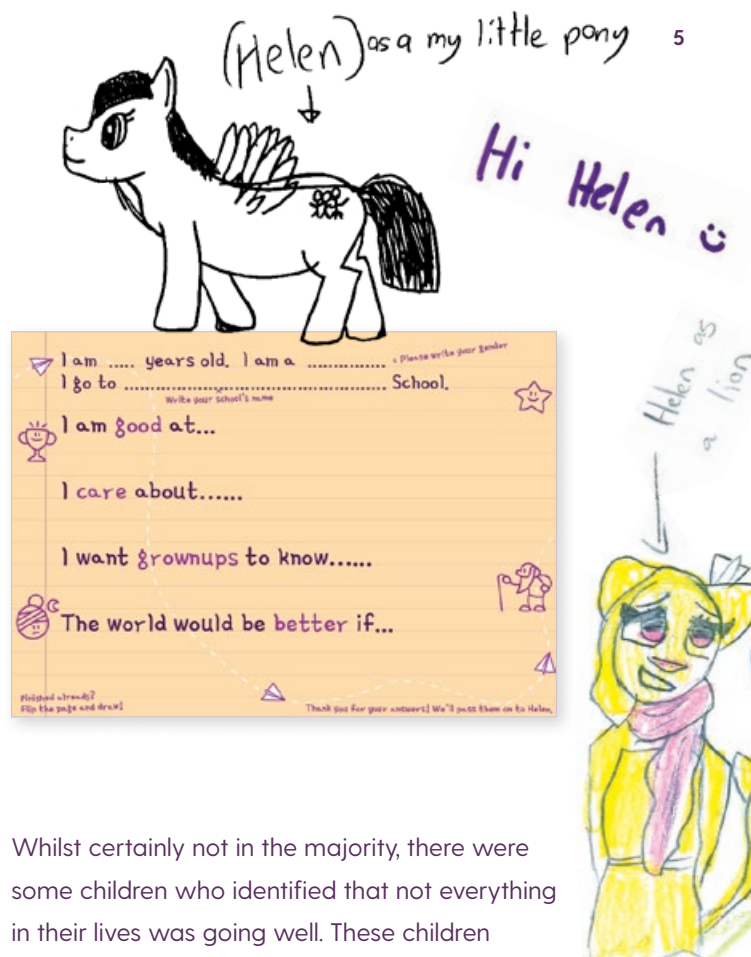


They also want grownups to know that they have "our back", and that whilst it may not always be obvious, they love and appreciate all that we do for them.

Most of the postcards received this year came from children born since 2010. This is a new generation sometimes referred to as 'Generation Alpha'. This group of children has had access to WiFi and the Internet their whole lives.

Consequently, they are very socially connected and consume much more visual information than previous generations. They have access to information at their fingertips. And their world – just like the world of adults – seems to have become busier with much less 'down time' available than at any other time in human history. They also consider themselves to be smarter and more capable than most adults give them credit for, and although they acknowledge they have much to learn, they don't want this to mean they're overlooked or not listened to.

Children in this generation also want adults to recognise that being a child today is vastly different to the childhood their parents experienced last century. They want us to value



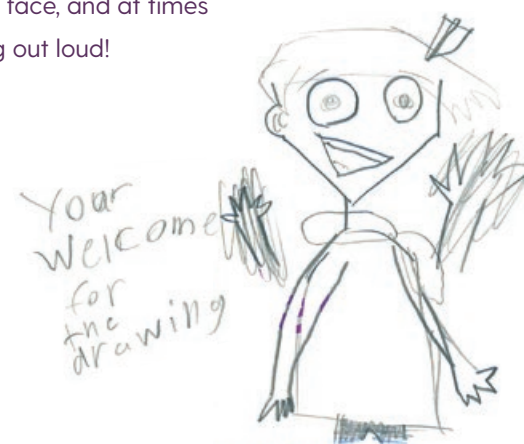
equality, inclusiveness, and kindness in the same way they do, and to celebrate the diverse abilities, learning styles, languages, cultures, and gender identities of all people. They see a real disconnect between the views they have on many of these issues, and those expressed by their teachers and parents. They want every child to be loved and cared for, to get a good education, to have the freedom of spaces and opportunities to play actively and creatively.

As in previous years, many children are very concerned about the planet. They have many environmental concerns and suggestions they think will stop pollution and address climate change, preventing or limiting the natural disasters that are now occurring. They're calling on adults to do much better on climate and to take this issue more seriously.

As we might expect, children wrote about the pandemic and its continuing impact on their lives. This commentary was more prevalent in regional areas than in Adelaide, with children who raised COVID-19 as an issue saying they wanted to find a cure or a prevention for the coronavirus. Others were sad about the fact that the pandemic has kept them apart from the people, activities, and experiences that bring joy to their lives.

Whilst certainly not in the majority, there were some children who identified that not everything in their lives was going well. These children said they wanted adults to stop yelling at kids, and that they didn't want to see adults fighting in front of them, or smacking them, or not explaining things to them. Others wanted more support with their mental health and thought there could be better community facilities for grownups. They also wanted them to know that what grownups say and do is powerful and can have a real impact on children's wellbeing.

Children's responses to the four questions posed on the postcards provide a detailed insight into their lives. Children have been generous in their responses, and this continues to enable me to learn a great deal about their lives; in particular, what they value most and what their relationships mean to them. Many of their responses have brought a smile to my face, and at times have had me laughing out loud!



With respect to my Postcards project and its future, my hopes are threefold:

1. It is my hope that adults in positions of power and influence will really hear what children have said and use the information gathered via Postcards in very practical ways, knowing it is a source of genuine, rare, and authentic data that comes direct from children themselves. (There are very few opportunities for children in this age-group to express their points of view, let alone have their views heard and acted upon, or made to feel like what they have to say matters to people who don't know them personally.)
2. It is my hope that educators will use Postcards to better understand their students, whilst continuing to ensure children are being allowed to respond to the questions being posed in the ways they want to.
3. It is my hope that through Postcards, grownups will gain a better understanding of the lives of South Australian children in this age-group across a range of families, and that through this they will develop a deeper level of care for and commitment to creating South Australian communities in which all children feel loved, respected, valued, and included.

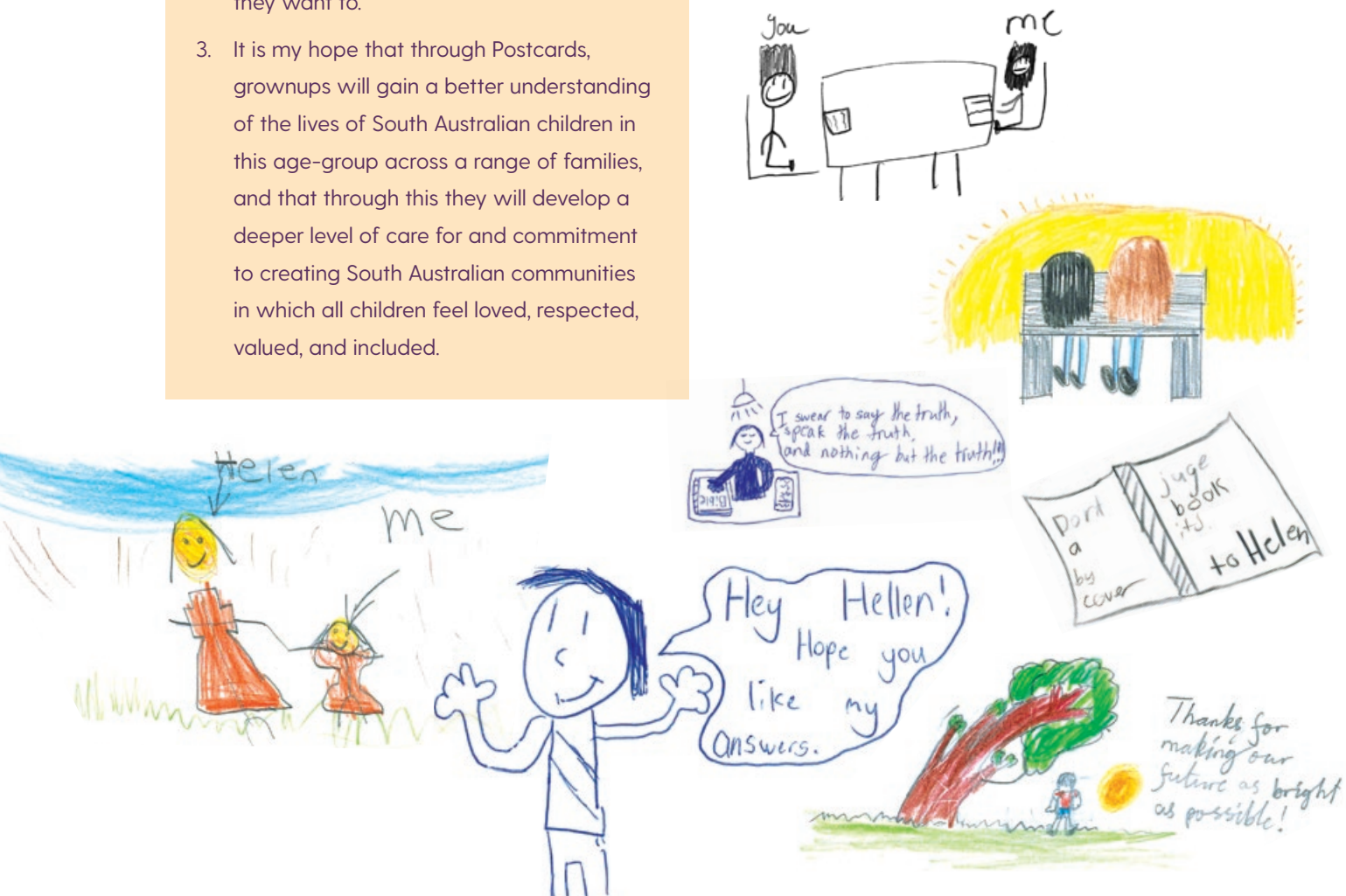
To all the children who completed one my of Postcards in 2021, and to those who wrote direct messages of thanks for the opportunity to be heard – a very big thank you! Thanks also to the many teachers and educators who supported their students' participation again this year. And to those schools yet to join in – we can't wait to hear from your students this year too!

I look forward to distributing a new set of Postcard questions for 2022, and to an increasing number of children and schools participating in this ambitious yet important voice and agency project.

Enjoy.



Helen Connolly
Commissioner for Children and Young People



Introduction

The Commissioner's annual Student Voice Postcards Project provides an opportunity for leaders across schools and the community to hear directly from a group of children whose voices are rarely heard; South Australian 8 to 12-year-olds.



This is the third report in the Things That Matter series, presenting the responses from more than 13,868 South Australian children who completed their postcards during Terms 3 and 4 of the 2021 school year.

Postcards were received from 289 schools across South Australia coming from metropolitan, regional, rural, and remote communities. Compared to 2020, this is an increase of over 5,400 (38%). The number of participating schools also increased from 209 to 289 – 80 more than participated in 2020. This brings the number of South Australian schools who have participated in Postcards since its inception in 2019 to a total of 435 primary schools.

The postcards are being completed by children attending Government, Catholic and Independent schools, including students attending Aboriginal and Anangu schools as well as Special Education schools and units.

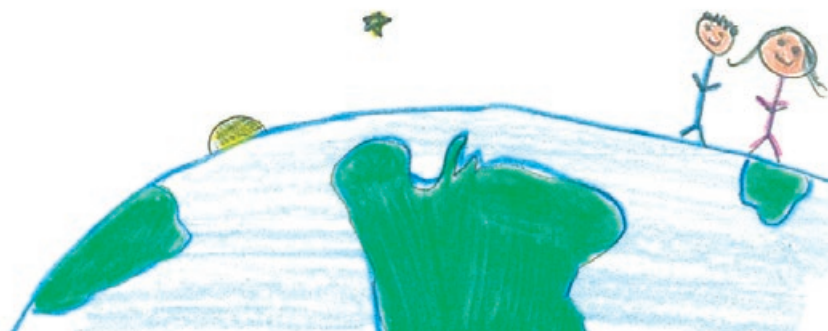
Of the 289 schools that participated in 2021, 78 were participating for the third consecutive year with students from 106 schools participating in Postcards for the first time. ★

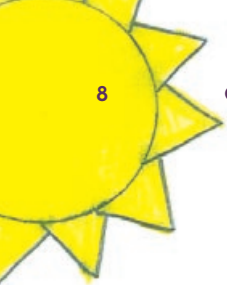
Although 2021 was the third year of the project, it was the second time the postcards asked children about their gender. The split between

boys and girls was fairly even, with slightly more girls participating overall. A small group of children identified as non-binary or gender diverse.

Sometimes called 'tweens', children aged 8 to 12 years are growing up and navigating major stages of social, emotional and physical development in a hyper-connected world. This report captures what more than 13,800 children in this age group have to say about what they're good at, what they care about, what they want grownups to know, and what they think would make the world a better place for everyone.

Climate change, natural disasters, mental health, and a global pandemic, are just some of the complex issues that permeate the lives of children attending our primary schools today. While new and emerging trends have always shaped children's lives, the differences between the responses on the 2021 postcards compared to those in 2019 and 2020 reveal just how fast the pace of technological, cultural, political and environmental change is in the twenty-first century.





Compared to the 2020 postcards, those completed in 2021 reflect a different stage of the COVID-19 pandemic and its ongoing impact on their relationships, education, connection to community, and participation in activities that bring joy to their lives.

COVID-19 vaccinations became available in 2021, and children expressed diverse views that echoed the broader public debate. These ranged from welcoming vaccinations as an important part of protecting people's health to voicing concerns about the lack of information made specially for children that explained how they might access or be affected by the vaccine.

Some 8 to 12-year-olds reflected on their feelings of fear and anticipation at the prospect of South Australia's borders opening at the end of 2021. Alongside views about mask-wearing, they also shared concerns about people's health as well as their isolation and separation from loved ones.

While this report highlights differences in their perspectives, experiences, and ideas for change across gender, age, and geographic lines, it is also clear that children across the state share many of the same experiences and aspirations as their peers, particularly in relation to a lack of opportunities to be heard.

While the 2021 postcard responses again show that most 8 to 12-year-olds are doing okay, they also show that some children in this age group are in situations where their needs are not being met, and where they are not able to reach their full potential and thrive.

The 'tween' years are a time when adults have a great impact on children's wellbeing, hopes and aspirations for the future. When children can speak with others about the activities, interests, skills and achievements they care about, it makes them feel valued, connected, and confident of their place in their community. Indeed, one of the most common responses from children in relation to the question about what children want grownups to know was 'more about me'; their lives, personalities, interests and aspirations.

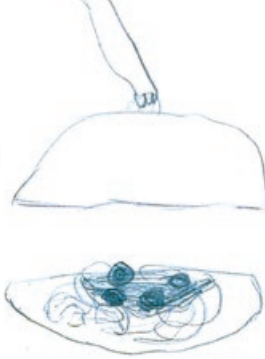
Many 8 to 12-year-olds wrote direct messages of thanks to the Commissioner. They thanked her for providing them with an opportunity to be heard and for advocating for their rights, reinforcing the importance of this project's ultimate goal: to increase the opportunity for primary school aged children in South Australia to influence the Commissioner's agenda.

If we fail to listen to what children in this age group share with us, we risk alienating them at a time in their lives when they are seeking reassurance that they can trust the adults who are in their lives. By listening, empathising, and validating their experiences, we build enduring relationships that are grounded in trust and hope for the future, reinforcing the message that children are valuable stakeholders and citizens who each have a right to be heard.





I hope you like Pasta!



Dear Helen

I hope that you see this message and the things I care about, I am good at, what I want grows up to know and how the world can be a better place.



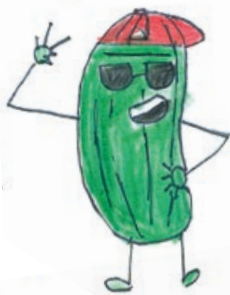
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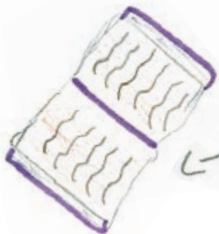
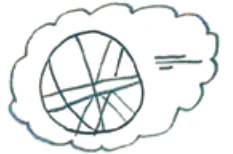
A VOICE



I can't draw! but I wanted to say thank you for taking all of these letters from us and taking our opinion into consideration.



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Book because I love reading.



Feather (My pet bird)



Key Messages



Children across South Australia value their friendships and family relationships and take pride in being kind and caring and in making people laugh.



They care deeply about the environment and about the health of the people, animals, and places that make up their communities.



Children often feel underestimated and overlooked, and want opportunities to have more of a say in decisions that directly affect them.



Children want grownups to show more interest in the things they love, care about, and enjoy, as well as ask how they are feeling. They also want them to get better at knowing when they need more help and when they need to be left alone.





Although many children look to the future with hope, many are deeply frustrated and fearful that they're inheriting an unequal world, and a 'sick' planet.



While most children are happy and healthy, and take pride in where they live and go to school, almost every 8 to 12-year-old identified something they would like to see change in their family, school, community, or the world.



Regardless of where they live, children want to be in communities where everyone has access to a variety of fun, affordable, and safe places to go with interesting things to do. They want every child to be loved and cared for, to get a good education, and to have the freedom, spaces, and opportunities to play and be active and creative.



Children are tired of being affected by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which has kept them apart from the people they love and the activities and experiences that bring them joy and connection with others.



Key Messages



They also want grownups to know that even though they will make mistakes, they are always learning and trying to do their best. They are smarter and more capable than adults give them credit for, and they don't want to be underestimated or compared with others.



Many 8 to 12-year-olds want grownups to know that they will always be there for them, and that they love and appreciate what they do for them even though they don't always make this obvious.



They feel an incredible weight of pressure and expectation from the adults around them.



Children value kindness, equality, and inclusion. Their vision for a better world focuses on all people being able to share in a greater understanding and celebration of diverse abilities, languages and cultures, learning styles, ages, and gender identities.



Tweens also want grownups to know that being a child today is very different from what it was like for previous generations.



What are 8 to 12-year-olds good at?

Playing sport and being active

Using their imagination; playing games and being creative

Being kind and treating other people well

Looking after animals and the environment

Learning new things and solving problems

Almost all children who answered this question were able to identify at least one thing they are good at, with many 8 to 12-year-olds not limiting themselves to writing about just one thing, but instead listing off several things they believe they are good at.

Their responses reflected their diverse interests inside and outside of school and highlighted the importance of active and creative play in their lives, as well as kindness and friendship. Some children connected their interests and strengths in the present to their hopes for the future, including aspirations for further education and work, and the health and wellbeing of members of their family.

“ Basketball, cricket, soccer, computer gaming, guitar & caring for my dogs.” – 10 year old, male, Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island

“ Saying my times tables very fast, riding my scooter and bike on the skatepark and gaming.” – 9 year old, male, Barossa, Light and Lower North

Being good at sport was the most common response to this question, with some children writing about sports in general, and others describing their passion for specific sports. While football, soccer, basketball, and netball were the most popular sports, swimming, tennis, gymnastics, cricket, hockey, Taekwondo, and lacrosse were also mentioned.

Some children elaborated on what makes them good at sport, including that they play well in a team, practice regularly, and work hard ‘to get better’, or to learn particular skills that help them ‘win the ball’, ‘keep the ball close to my feet’, or score ‘lots of goals’.



“ Playing netball, drawing, riding my bike and my schoolwork. I’m good at playing netball because I don’t get distracted when I’m playing.” – 11 year old, female, Southern Adelaide



“ Soccer because of all the hard work I do to get better.” – 11 year old, male, Far North

Beyond participation in organised sports, many 8 to 12-year-olds wrote about being active in other ways, such as riding bikes, skateboarding, and roller-skating, running, and playing chasey ‘because I rarely get tagged’ as well as jumping and skipping. Many said they enjoy horse riding, fishing, rock climbing and climbing trees. Others said they were good at ‘helping out on the farm’, and ‘fixing things’ or ‘lifting things’, particularly bikes and cars.

“ Roller skating. I love doing spins and jumps the most and it is always fun learning a new skill in class.” – 11 year old, female, Eastern Adelaide

“ Writing narratives, drawing cartoons and fishing. I would go fishing everyday if I could.” – 12 year old, female, Yorke and Mid North

“ Getting arund in my wheelchair.” – 7 year old, male, Barossa, Light and Lower North

Children also took pride in how well they ‘use their imagination’ through art and stories – from drawing, colouring in, and painting, to ‘narrative writing’ and ‘cutting and gluing’. While some children wrote generally about ‘creating different things’, others focused on their particular interest in anime characters, Lego, or knitting.



Children offered a range of explanations for their strengths and passion for art, including how much they ‘enjoy it’, and that they were ‘born to be an artist’, through to others having complimented them on their creativity.

“ Lego, running, and making things look cool.” – 8 year old, male, Adelaide Hills

“ Writing stories and playing some sports. I am also good at creating different things.” – 12 year old, male, Murray and Mallee

For many children, how well they treat other people was just as important as how well they do at school, or at sport and other activities. Many 8 to 12-year-olds wrote about how good they are at listening and caring for others, giving advice, helping people, ‘giving hugs’ or simply ‘being there’ when someone needs them. Along with ‘seeing the good in everyone’, children wrote that being kind and funny is what makes them a good friend.

Some children wrote about being good at ‘helping out’ at home, or on the farm. This not only involved cleaning and doing chores; it included looking after younger siblings, or a parent, grandparent, or other family member. As well as looking after people, children also wrote about looking after animals and the environment.

“ Tennis, art and caring for eldrly and cleaning up the earth.” – 10 year old, female, Southern Adelaide

“ Helping people when they’re sad.” – 8 year old, male, Northern Adelaide

“ Being an awesome funny friend!” – 9 year old, female, Yorke and Mid North

Maths was consistently raised as something children are good at, both as a subject at school and in life more broadly. Children wrote about how much they ‘love to solve problems’ or how fast they can say their times-tables.



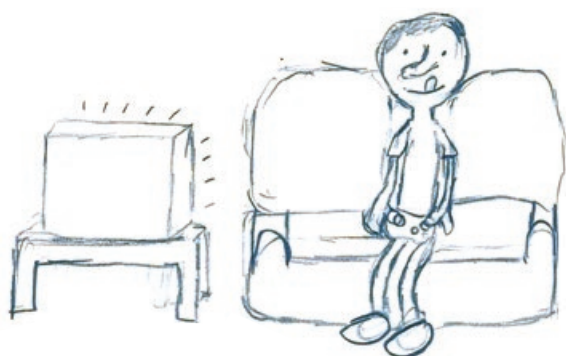
Other popular school subjects included Art and Physical Education (P.E.) along with Science, Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) and English. Some children described trying hard at schoolwork generally, while others highlighted specific skills they had in writing, spelling, or 'managing time'. Being good at reading was another common response, with some children listing their current favourite books to read.

Children's responses to this question also highlighted the importance of gaming in their lives, particularly as a way to connect with and make new friends. Many 8 to 12-year-olds described themselves as being good at 'being a gamer' or at playing video games and computer games with friends in their free time outside of school. They wrote about their favourite consoles or games, with Minecraft, Roblox, and Fortnite being among the most popular. Alongside gaming, children often wrote about how good they are at 'using technology' in general, and about particular computer-based activities like coding or designing models for 3D printing.

“ Soccer, video games like Nintendo, Mario, Rocket League/ fun fact I have some of the most expensive items in rocket league.”
– 10 year old, male, Northern Adelaide

“ Drawing Loxton (which is my town I live in) and farming and gaming which I am an expert at.” – 11 year old, male, Murray and Mallee

“ Rubix cube, making friends and video gaming with my friends.” – 9 year old, male, Eastern Adelaide



Some 8 to 12-year-olds wrote about being good at dancing – for fun as well as for fitness and competitions. For some children dancing is a way to express culture, alongside 'speaking my language' and 'learning about culture'. Singing, acting, playing musical instruments, and performing were also raised as things that children are not only good at, but which make them feel happy, empowered, and free. Some children wrote about being good at relaxing and sleeping in, while others said they were good at cooking and eating food.

“ Music because I love to play music, because it makes me feel good.” – 11 year old, male, Eastern Adelaide

“ Swimming and especially eating! :D”
– 10 year old, female, Northern Adelaide



Although a few children provided self-deprecating responses, including that they were good at 'forgetting things' or 'not concentrating', most responses showed that the majority of children are aware and proud of their diverse interests, achievements, and relationships.

Many children described themselves as being good at 'being myself', 'being happy', being a leader, 'challenging myself', 'speaking up' and 'standing up' for what they believe in, with these responses sometimes linked to aspirations for a future job where they could help people and make a difference.

“ At speaking up, saying what I mean, I want to be an advocate like Helen one day.”
– 11 year old, male, Western Adelaide



What do 8 to 12-year-olds care about?



Family and friends

Pets and other animals

The environment

School, teachers, and getting a good education

Equality, fairness and living in kind, healthy and happy communities

What is going on around the world and what the future will look like

Having opportunities, time, and spaces to play

South Australian 8 to 12-year-olds wrote about the wide range of people, opportunities, experiences, and places they care about at home, at school, in their local community and globally.

Caring about their family was by far the most common response to this question, with most 8 to 12-year-olds writing about their parents, siblings, cousins, grandparents, aunts, and uncles. Many children went on to explain what makes them care so much about their family: 'I love them and they love me', 'they are nice to me' and they are 'there for me when I need them'; they 'play with me' or are 'a big part of my life' and are 'everything to me'. Others talked about particular family members who they wanted to support because they are unwell or otherwise struggling.

“ My grampar cause he is all shakey when he holds stuff.” – 8 year old, female, Western Adelaide

“ My family because they give the things that I need to be healthy and strong through my life.” – 11 year old, male, Far North

Children also showed deep affection and appreciation for their friendships. They wrote that they love spending time with their friends, including looking out for their friends' wellbeing and being committed to 'being there for friends'. Some children listed off many of their friends' names, while others shared their fears about whether they will be able to maintain friendships, or make new friends, as they transition into new classes, year levels, or schools. Many noted that it can take a while to find good friends.

“ My family and friends not being able to find any friends at my knew highschool because it took long for me to find some at primary school.” – 11 year old, female, Eastern Adelaide





- “ My family, friends, my pets. I care about my family because they are like my best friends. I care about my friends because they help me when I am down.” – 11 year old, female, Southern Adelaide



Many children described their pets as important family members, from their dogs and cats to rabbits, fish, birds, chickens and guinea pigs. Even where children did not have a pet of their own, they wrote about or drew pictures of other people's pets or their favourite animals.

Many 8 to 12-year-olds described their wish to look after 'all animals' or their favourite animals. They wrote about 'protecting endangered species' and 'ending animal cruelty' because animals need to 'be looked after' and 'deserve to have a habitat'. Some children expressed particular concern that animals and their habitat are at risk 'if we keep doing what we're doing now'.

- “ Animals, like lots! Especially dogs as I have 2 of them. Griffin (Jack Russell) and Buddy (Pug).” – 12 year old, male, Yorke and Mid North
- “ Animals, my parents and littel sister becasse my sister learns how to be kind and learns it from Me.” – 8 year old, female, Eastern Adelaide

The environment was a top concern, with many mentions of nature, the planet, climate change and global warming. Many 8 to 12-year-olds are worried about pollution and the impacts of natural disasters on their community. They worry about the weather and the impact it has on the places, people, plants, and animals they care about. There was a sense of frustration that their generation is and will continue to live with the consequences of a lack of action on climate change from adults and leaders today, and that they will be left with the responsibility of fixing the 'mess' left behind.

The things we want!

Drawings of planet Earth were common. Some children depicted Earth as happy and smiling, surrounded by love hearts or with people holding hands. Others drew the planet on fire, or with contrasting pictures of their ideal 'healthy' planet drawn alongside a more grim 'reality' of a 'dying' planet.

- “ The environment. Adults aren't taking care of the environment any more.” – 11 year old, male, Western Adelaide
- “ My family, my grades and the world and pollution. I love to hang out with my little sister and whenever i come home she makes me happy.” – 10 year old, female, Northern Adelaide

Beyond their connections with friends, family and their culture, children wrote more generally about their relationships with the 'people I know' or the 'people who care about me'. This included their relationships at school such as those with their teachers and with a school 'buddy'.

Many children said they value having access to a good education, both for themselves and for others. They also care about how they are going at school. Other 8 to 12-year-olds reflected on how lucky they are to not only have access to education but also to food, water, shelter, and healthcare, as well as support from family, friends, and the broader community.

- “ How covid will change and the future of SA.” – 11 year old, female, Far North
- “ School and what is going on in the world and what is my future going to be like.” – 10 year old, male, Murray and Mallee



we only have one
so look after it people!





Tweens care deeply about the health, safety, and wellbeing of the people in their community and 'neighbourhood'. They want to ensure everyone – particularly those doing it tough – have the things that they believe will lead to a happy, healthy life. Along with the basic necessities of shelter, food and water, some children shared more specific hopes, including in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, that those 'people who are sick can get tested.'

“ My belives and how much we have compared to other people and how we should be grateful for what we have.”
– 10 year old, female, Murray and Mallee

“ Everybody getting an equal go at live and family and friends.”– 9 year old, female, Barossa, Light and Lower North

Tweens value kindness, peace, equality and inclusion, with many responses highlighting how much they care about 'looking after others' as well as 'being treated fairly' and feeling supported by those around them. Children wrote about issues they care about with these ranging

from the inequity and discrimination they see in their own communities, to what is happening nationally and globally.

South Australian 8 to 12-year-olds value other people's health and happiness as much as they do their own. They care deeply about the future, from 'what my job is going to be' to the 'future of SA', 'the world' and 'life' and 'everyone and everything'. They also care about 'who runs certain things' and 'how decisions are made' today, including how this might affect their and other peoples' futures.

Whether through making art or music, or by playing sport or videogames, children care about having time, opportunity, and space in which to relax, play, and participate in the activities they enjoy and are 'good at'. Many of their responses mentioned important spaces and places – from homes and farms to sports clubs and skate parks. They also made mention of the people and 'stuff' they care about, such as their favourite toys and equipment; fidgets, bikes, instruments and 'gaming setup'.

“ my martialarts, my mates at the gym, my friends, family, young people, people in the world, rights for young women and men, I also really care about freedom in hair and what you want to do.” – 12 year old, female, Western Adelaide



What do 8 to 12-year-olds want grownups to know?



More about who they are, what they care about, their feelings and aspirations

Kids have ideas and rights too and can be trusted and should be taken seriously

Kids really love and appreciate what grownups do for them

Grownups need to look after the environment, children, and each other better

Kids need more help at times, but they also need independence and privacy

More about what happens to kids at school

What it's like being a kid in the 21st century

How important it is to play and spend time with children

How the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact on their lives

“ that we may be small but we have big ideas and ways to make them work.” – 12 year old, female, Yorke and Mid North

“ kids aren't just for show we have so much to do in this world.” – 10 year old, female, Northern Adelaide

Across regions, ages, and genders, children want grownups to know more about them as individuals and to show greater interest in their lives. Common responses included knowing ‘who I am’, ‘what I can do’, ‘what I love’ and ‘what is going on in my life’ at school and at home. This involved knowing and valuing children’s interests, hobbies, and ‘favourite things’ – what they’re good at and what they care about.

Children also want grownups to know more about the kind of person they are, with many 8 to 12-year-olds describing themselves as

caring, kind, funny, powerful, strong, and brave – highlighting their roles as good friends and caring siblings. They also emphasised that they’re ‘smarter than most grownups think’, that they ‘can be trusted’ and that they’re ‘always willing to help’. They also want grownups to know more about ‘who their friends are’ and ‘who other important people in their life are’, including family members and teachers.

“ That I'm more than a little girl I'm not only a girl. I'm a sister a daughter and a friendly friend.” – 10 year old, female, Adelaide Hills

“ that I'm good at sports I like to create things read books and that I like nature. I really want parents to know its not good to litter.” – 9 year old, female, Yorke and Mid North

“ that I will help anyone in need and you can trust me.” – 12 year old, male, Northern Adelaide



Others wanted grownups to know their birthday and how old they are. They wanted them to know their gender identity and what pronouns they prefer, as well as the importance of their culture and language. For a few respondents this included knowing how to spell and pronounce their name correctly, particularly when English is not their first language.

“ how to say my chinese name!”
– 7 year old, female, Eastern Adelaide

Wanting grownups to know ‘how I feel’ was another common response. This included both when kids feel safe and happy, as well as when they are scared or uncomfortable, hurt, upset, or feeling sick. For many 8 to 12-year-olds, it was important for grownups to show interest in their day to day lives, and to regularly be asked ‘how I’m going at school’; especially by those closest to them.

Children living with diverse chronic illnesses and disabilities wrote about wanting grownups to better understand their illness or disability, including how it affects their education, relationships, engagement, and participation in learning, sport and other activities at school, home and in the community.

“ I have asthma and I don’t like running.”
– 10 year old, female, Southern Adelaide

“ I have autism and that I need help with specific things.” – 12 year old, female, Northern Adelaide

“ That im shy unless im around people I trust, I have anxiety and autism.” – 11 year old, female, Northern Adelaide

In addition to knowing children for who they are now, many 8 to 12-year-olds also want grownups to know ‘who’ and ‘what’ they want to be when they grow up. These responses ranged from a general wish for adults to see their ‘skills’ and ‘potential’ in particular areas to their more specific aspirations for future jobs.

One of the most common things that kids wanted adults to know was that ‘kids have ideas’, ‘kids have a voice’, ‘kids have rights’, we are ‘our own people’ and ‘our opinions count too’. Many 8 to 12-year-olds describe often feeling ‘underestimated’ and wrote that they want adults to listen to them, take them seriously and to ‘let kids do things’, ‘know things’ and ‘speak for themselves’.

They wanted to emphasise that they are ‘trying their best’ and that it can be difficult to live up to the expectations, comparisons, and pressure that is placed on them by even the most well-meaning of grownups.

“ that kids have a voice about things and we will try our hardest to show & express the voice we have that we get told to hide.”
– 13 year old, female, Murray and Mallee

“ kids can make mistakes too, but they may also be right so you need to consider their opinions.” – 12 year old, female, Northern Adelaide

“ that they are not always right and that school is very hard for us and that we know when you talk about us and it hurts.” – 11 year old, female, Limestone Coast

They wanted grownups to understand that the decisions made by adults don’t only affect them, but also affect younger generations. Given that children are ‘the future’, they want to be provided with information and more opportunities to influence decision-making, including ‘about family things’, things at school, and management of the COVID-19 pandemic.





They wanted adults to recognise that ‘grownups aren’t always right’ and that ‘kids aren’t always wrong’ so they should ‘believe us’ and ‘appreciate us’ rather than ‘speak for us’ or ‘treat us like we know nothing’.

“ that they shouldnt go ahead and do things without me nowing.” – 10 year old, male, Southern Adelaide

“ that if they expect me to act mature, they need to stop treating me like a kid.” – 13 year old, female, Adelaide Hills

Many children wanted to let adults know how much they care about and love grownups and that they appreciate everything they do for them. They want grownups to know this is the case even if ‘it’s not always obvious’ or ‘even when they fight’. Some children wrote reassuring and inspiring messages for the adults in their lives, showing that many children worry about the wellbeing of their family, parents, teachers and peers. Such messages included their willingness to help – ‘they can do anything and help the world’, ‘it’s going to be okay’, ‘they are not alone, and you can ask kids for advice’ and that ‘if you be nice to someone you don’t know you might become friends’.

“ you are amazing and you are very good at helping us, you make me smile and I appreciate you being there when I need you.” – 10 year old, female, Yorke and Mid North

At the same time, there were many children who highlighted the need for grownups to ‘do better’, particularly when it comes to looking after the environment. They also want grownups to look after children, and each other. Some 8 to 12-year-olds wrote explicitly about how much kids look up to adults as powerful role models ‘for better or worse’, especially when it comes to how they should treat other people and the planet. They wanted grownups to care for them, and to avoid or stop doing certain things,

including ‘bossing kids around’ and ‘yelling at kids’. They were also concerned about health, with some children looking to remind adults that ‘smoking is bad for you’.

“ that when we are upset or feeling not our best. when you help that feeling still stays with us!” – 11 year old, female, Limestone Coast

“ that they can do anything even though they are really old.” – 8 year old, female, Northern Adelaide

“ the world is a good and fun place, not every one is bad and everyone is good at something.” – 12 year old, female, Northern Adelaide

Some 8 to 12-year-olds used this question as an opportunity to express their fears and concerns about the future, particularly the future of the planet. They wanted grownups to know that ‘the world is dying’, that it’s ‘not good to litter’ and that ‘we won’t survive’, ‘there will be no water’ and the ‘ice caps will melt’. They wanted grownups to know ‘how to save the planet’, including how to ‘save vulnerable animal species and plant species’, to ‘stop pollution’ and ‘stop cutting down trees’. There was a sense that if only adults knew about these things, then they would surely do more to address these issues.

“ that life is to short. dont make it shorter from pollution.” – 11 year old, female, Western Adelaide

“ about what happens at school they don’t know about, and that climate change is happening and it feels like nobodys doing anything about it.” – 10 year old, female, Southern Adelaide





- “ That they better fix climate change cause Im the next generation and i dont want to die.” – 9 year old, male, Barossa, Light and Lower North

Children also want grownups to know that it can be difficult to deal with the amount of pressure they have, and to live up to the expectations grownups place on them. Many 8 to 12-year-olds said that comparing one child to another or having ‘favourites’ is the ‘worst thing’ a grownup can do. They stressed that kids ‘can’t always be what grownups want them to be’. Some children described how overwhelmed they can get as they try to balance different parts of their lives, including ‘too much homework’ that can mean they have ‘barely got any time to do what I love’.

- “ that saying sorry loses its purpose if you keep doing the same mistake you’re saying sorry for.” – 10 year old, female, Southern Adelaide
- “ That kids care and have dreams.”
– 11 year old, male, Southern Adelaide

They noted that ‘we can’t all be the same’, that ‘everyone is good at something, and that ‘we all have different ways of coping’. Some children said it was important for grownups to avoid making assumptions about kids based on stereotypes or children’s behaviour.

As much as children want grownups to show greater interest in their lives, responses also highlight how much children value their privacy, freedom and independence. They want adults to respect those times when they need some space to rest or some ‘alone time’. They want grownups to know that they are not a baby, and don’t want to be ‘treated like a baby’; they can be independent, responsible, mature, and take care of themselves. They also raised the issue of wanting adults to trust kids to be able to do certain activities without adult supervision, particularly among older children aged 11 to 12 years old.

- “ the world is ours and not just theirs.”
– 10 year old, Port Elliot Primary School

At the same time, children also want grownups to be able to sense when they do need more support and to be able to provide it. This includes extra support with their learning, with controlling their emotions, with making and keeping friends, with getting bullied or even ‘sometimes being a bully’, including knowing where they should go for help. Some children expressed concerns about school transitions, with one child as young as 8 years old reporting that they are ‘scared about year 12’.

- “ that kids need some support sometimes, we know that your going through stuff too but were only kids.” – 10 year old, female, Northern Adelaide
- “ that young carers need just as much support as the person they care for.” – 10 year old, female, Adelaide Hills
- “ sometimes I get upset about something, but I don’t know what to do about it” – year old,



What kids wanted grownups to know about school varied. Some children wrote that school is too hard, while others said they were finding certain subjects too easy. Others were eager to express that they’re a ‘good kid’ and ‘not naughty’, that they’re ‘trying their best’, and ‘getting better’ at certain sports, school subjects, or other activities. Others focused on their relationships at school, including how they are treated, with some children sharing that they are sometimes being bullied or find themselves being a bully.



“ how rudely and how bad boys mainly treat girls at school because it can make you feel embarrassed scared and upset.” – 11 year old, female, Eastern Adelaide

“ that I am not a boy who has bad marks or who is very naughty.” – 10 year old, male, Eastern Adelaide

A small number of children focused on how much they enjoyed or did not enjoy home schooling in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Others wrote about where they want to go when they reach high school. One child wanted whoever their teacher is next year to know that they are 'not afraid of a challenge'.

There was also a real sense that it is important for grownups to better understand 'what it's like being a kid' today, and that being a kid in the twenty-first century is very different to the childhood of previous generations. This included wanting grownups to know more about their experiences at school, particularly in relation to the crucial role having access to technology plays in their capacity to keep up with their learning and socialising.

“ Grownups don't always understand, because they don't necessarily listen, but only hear what they want to hear (it's frustrating).” – 12 year old, female, Barossa, Light and Lower North

“ that kids are not invisible they can hear and see.” – 11 year old, female, Adelaide Hills

Many 8 to 12-year-olds said that grownups shouldn't blame everything on phones and devices, highlighting that 'our phones are our way of communicating'. They also want to remind grownups of the reality that 'you can have a successful life behind a screen' and that many adults spend just as much time as kids do on their devices.



Children's perspective on technology was nuanced, highlighting the positive and negative impacts it can have on their lives, depending on how it is used. Some wanted grownups to appreciate children's online activities and friendships, while others wanted grownups to spend less time on social media and more time with their child. One of the most common things children wanted adults to know about video games was that 'you can't pause an online game'.



“ being on a device does not affect someone's behaviour. its just if they stay up late on them.” – 12 year old, female, Eyre and Western

“ that if my stomach is sore it is not because of the phone.” – 13 year old, male, Eyre and Western

A number of 8 to 12-year-olds took this question as an opportunity to remind grownups that they were kids once too, and that they could or 'should treat us how they WISH they were treated'. They also wanted grownups to know that 'just because they're grownups doesn't mean they can't have fun'. They wanted grownups to make more time to 'say yes' and to spend more time playing and just 'being' with their children and family.

“ that you kid is more important than other stuff.” – 9 year old, female, Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island

“ kids want to be with them longer.” – 7 year old, male, Murray and Mallee

Some 8 to 12-year-olds want grownups to know more about how children are feeling during the COVID-19 pandemic; how 'frustrating and stupid this covid thing is'. Some children focused on how adults are responding to the pandemic, including how they should do more to 'get rid of covid' and 'need to social distance' and 'take the covid vaccine'. Others wrote about missing family members and friends who live overseas or interstate, and who they have not been able to see in the last two years.



Other children want grownups to be aware that their lives 'aren't always as they seem'; that some kids act differently around adults compared to when they are with their peers or can be struggling even if they look happy 'from the outside'. They stressed the importance of grownups listening to 'two sides of a story' rather than jumping to conclusions and punishing children based on an incomplete understanding of what happened. Some 8 to 12-year-olds wanted to explain that when kids talk back, they don't intend to be rude or annoying, but would like more of an explanation when they don't understand something.



“ just because your small or have glasses doesnt mean your not good at sports.”

– 11 year old, male

“ that there is more to things that meet the eye and many sides to stories and never jump to conclusions.” – 12 year old, Female, Southern Adelaide



What do 8 to 12-year-olds think would make the world better?



Helping the environment and animals

Showing more kindness, equality, and respect for diversity

Getting rid of COVID-19

Giving kids more of a say

Making school more flexible and engaging

Getting rid of poverty and homelessness and make things cost less

Being more kid-friendly and playful with more community spaces and opportunities

“ there was no climate change or covid 19 and if grownups listened to childrens ideas and opinions more.” – 11 year old, female, Eyre and Western

“ the government and grownups cared about our future, and didn't just ignore the fact that we are ruining earth, and basically just making a bad future for the next generation.” – 11 year old, female, Adelaide Hills

Across all ages, genders and regions, children identified changes at the family, school, community, and systemic levels that they believe will make the world a better place. Their postcards reflected how much they care for the people and environment around them, and articulated a clear vision for a fair, inclusive, and kind world, where everyone belongs and has a say.

The state of the environment is a top concern for 8 to 12-year-olds, with the overwhelming majority writing that the world would be better if people – particularly grownups and governments – ‘cared more about the environment’ and ‘acknowledged climate change’ or, as some children put it, ‘stopped destroying the planet’.

“ we used less fossil fuels we found more sustainable energy sources, sexism and racism rates go down, we stopped destroying the land, water, air.” – 12 year old, male, Barossa, Light and Lower North

It was common for children to want to ‘clean up all the rubbish’ and stop littering as one of the most visible and tangible signs of environmental damage. Children also wrote more generally about climate change or global warming, with many outlining specific actions they believe must be taken to protect animals, oceans, and the planet if we are to make a better and ‘more sustainable future’.





Proposed actions ranged from stopping pollution and not cutting down trees, to reducing plastic use and ensuring 'most things like cars and food products were more environmentally friendly and sustainable'. For other 8 to 12-year-olds a better world would use more renewable and sustainable energy sources – not 'greenhouse gases' or 'fossil fuels'. They suggested changing the transport system to reduce carbon emissions and increasing the affordability and uptake of push bikes and electric cars.

“ you used bikes not cars or if you take the polution out of cars.” – 9 year old, female, Northern Adelaide

Just as 8 to 12-year-olds care deeply about their relationships with humans and the planet, they also care about how improving relationships with and between others will make a better world. For many children, a better world is one where everyone thinks about their words and actions, is friendly and caring, 'works together' and 'got along more'; a world where there was more 'smiling and understanding' and 'less hate'.

Children in this age group have a strong sense of equality and fairness. They described an ideal world where everyone 'could be themselves' and where there was greater respect for cultural differences as well as for those found across abilities, identity, age and socio-economic backgrounds. Their ideas included eliminating 'racism', 'sexism' 'homophobia and transphobia' to create a world where 'we are all equal', particularly 'men and women' and 'adults and kids'.

“ I wish I wouldn't be judged as a blind person first, but as a human first.” – 11 year old, female, Southern Adelaide



“ Schools would be cheaper. Know how to not litter, be nicer to others and if there was no racism and karens.” – 11 year old, female, Limestone Coast

While most children wrote about the kindness and respect they wanted to see in the world and within their community, others framed their responses in terms of eliminating negative behaviours that ranged from bullying and fighting to violence, war, and crime.

“ Racism ended, pollution stops, countries have peace (no war) and Government can increase wages.” – 9 year old, Eastern Adelaide

“ Afghanistan wasnt being taken over by the Taliban + no war. For covid to dissapeer. Us humans helping to increase the population of almost extinct animals. the world wasnt on fire.” – 11 year old, female, Southern Adelaide

Children's responses continued to talk about eliminating the impact of COVID-19 including references to the nature of the pandemic and how it had evolved between 2020 and 2021 in terms of case numbers, border and lockdown restrictions, and access to vaccinations.

A significant number of 8 to 12-year-olds said they felt the world would be better if COVID-19 'was gone', 'wasn't a thing' or 'never existed'. They wrote about wanting 'COVID to go away' so that 'I can see my nana', 'hug my friends at school' or 'so I could stop worrying about my dad dieing'.

Children shared a range of concerns, from the fear of 'lots of people getting really sick' to being sick and tired of wearing masks – from being distressed about being separated from loved ones to not being able to travel to their home country because of border closures.



South Australia's borders did not open until late November 2021, by which time most postcards had already been completed and returned.

“ Covid was gon. so that my step Dad could come back from India.” – 10 year old, female, Barossa, Light and Lower North

Others were frustrated by the ongoing impacts of the pandemic on their social lives. They wanted to be able to go to ‘more parties’ and ‘do the things I love’ again. Most 8 to 12-year-olds who wrote about COVID wanted the borders to open and the lockdowns to end, but some children felt that more should be done to ‘get rid of COVID’ altogether, including lockdowns if these were necessary.

Others wanted people to ‘take Covid more seriously’ and to do the ‘right thing’ to reduce COVID transmission. They wanted to see people distancing themselves from each other better, practising good hygiene and wearing masks correctly. Given that the distribution of the 2021 postcards coincided with the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccines in South Australia, some children wanted there to be ‘no anti-vaxxers’ and more people to ‘get jabbed’ to ‘protect the community’. Others were concerned about needing to get vaccinated and wanted COVID-19 vaccines to have been tested more before being given to children their age.

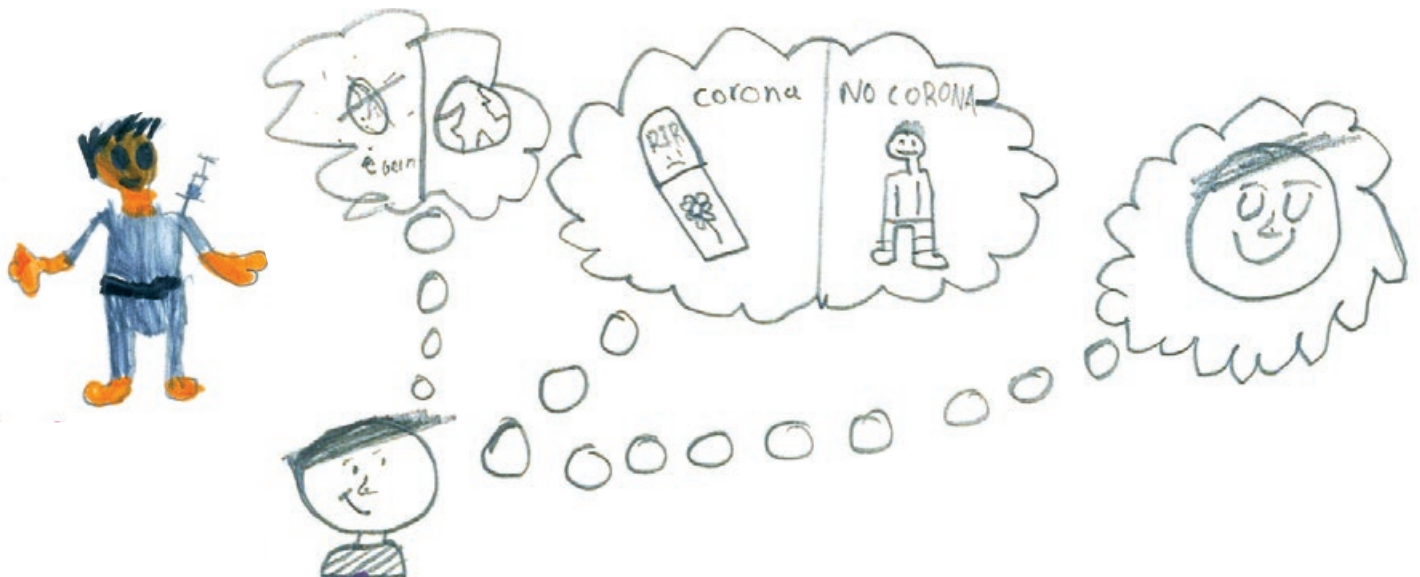
“ all virises including climate change where gone so then we can live happily without any of virises or climate effecting the planet”
– 9 year old, male, Southern Adelaide

For many tweens, ensuring that kids had more of a say was a key part of their vision for a fairer world. They wanted to be trusted, informed, and provided with opportunities to participate in conversations and decisions that affect their lives. This included having opportunities to have input into decisions relating to their family, where they live, and what their school and community looks like. They wanted to participate in making the bigger decisions about ‘our future’ or decisions that are likely to impact the whole of Australia or the world.

“ people would lisson to the smaller voices more, insted of the more powerful ones.”
– 12 year old, female, Eyre and Western

“ kids could talk back when they need to defend themselvs because sometimes adults think your the person in trouble but if kids had a chance to speak it would be a lot better.”
– 11 year old, male, Limestone Coast

They were also concerned about the cost of living and wanted to make things cheaper or free and be ‘less about money and power’.



They wrote that the world would be a better place if there were 'no poor people' and where everyone had enough to 'live well' beyond the basics of a home, food, clothes, and clean water. Rather than 'pretending poverty or homelessness doesn't exist', they wanted there to be affordable education, 'more jobs', 'higher wages', and 'more houses'.

Some children drew on their own experiences of doing it tough, describing how they wished that their family's bills would get paid and that they had more money to go out with friends. Others said they wished their family could afford to buy a house and that if 'no one is poor' then 'everyone has a chance to be great'.

“the cost of living was cheaper, it would be more fair and reduce homelessness. I wish I could walk freely on the streets without fear of strangers.” – 12 year old, female, Southern Adelaide

“more house because I used to not have a roof over my head and don't want people to struggle like I did. I want more jobs so don't struggle without money.” – 9 year old, female, Adelaide Hills

“People had more empathy for the people going through tough times with money, finances and poverty.” – 10 year old, male, Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island

Beyond children's reflections on the impact of COVID-19, many postcards highlighted the importance of health and wellbeing. Children envisioned a better world as one that offered easier access to services to support people's physical and mental health, including having more doctors and more 'suicide prevention websites and places'. Others wrote about a world that offered 'a cure for every sickness', particularly cancer, and 'no breaking bones', 'no drugs', 'no smoking' and 'less death'. It was common for responses relating to health issues

to also mention pollution and environmental concerns, even where these weren't explicitly linked.

“we all were nice. No breaking bones.

A cure for every sickness.” – 11 year old, male, Northern Adelaide

“that my nanny did not have lung disease.”

– 11 year old, male, Northern Adelaide

Some 8 to 12-year-olds were asking for changes to community infrastructure because of the positive effects this would have on children's health and wellbeing. Their ideas included making sure that every community has safe and kid-friendly playgrounds and places, as well as more affordable or free access to 'fun activities' that go beyond skate parks and bike tracks.

More accessible, 'cheaper' and 'less sketchy' public transport options were also raised, particularly from children living in regional areas. The need for safer roads with traffic lights and pedestrian crossings around schools was also raised.

“things were less expensive and kids could spend quality time with their family and friend without having to pay so much.” – 11 year old, female, Eastern Adelaide

“we stop littering, more skate parks, more free things at shops for kids.” – 9 year old, female, Southern Adelaide

For other children, school was the focus of their ideas for a better world, with a range of suggestions relating to access to education, support available, and structure of the school day and curriculum. This included the way time-tables and classrooms are decided upon, as well as the physical environment and school facilities made available to students. They wanted the cost of school to be far cheaper and for there to be 'more chances for people in need' to 'start at a school they can afford to stay at'.



While some students wished school was more challenging and 'grouped by skill not age', others wanted schoolwork to be a bit easier. Some children wanted longer breaks during the day, more long weekends, and holidays. Others wrote about wanting school to start later so they could sleep in a bit longer. Others wanted school to start and finish earlier so that kids could spend more time with family. Less homework or 'more time to do it' were common themes. Children also spoke about the need for more flexible learning along with better programs for students who move between schools, those living with disability, and those who have health issues such as anxiety or depression.

“ there is a program for people who are moving schools to make them feel better and for people with helth issuse and Anxiety and deppreshoin to have a person to help!”
– 9 year old, female, Northern Adelaide

Having more sport and PE lessons for those who want them was raised alongside other changes to the curriculum children said would help them 'be more prepared for when we leave school', such as 'cooking' or 'technology and gaming' courses incorporated into subjects offered earlier.

Other common suggestions to improve school facilities and classroom environments included ensuring every school had a 'proper canteen', an 'oval' and 'a swimming pool', 'less vandalism', 'less fights' and some or more 'class pets'.

“ every class in every school had a class pet and if the government made it easier to get class pets.” – 10 year old, female, Northern Adelaide

“ we were able to do things like good tech earlier on, so we would be more prepared for when we leave school.” – 11 year old, female, Southern Adelaide

Family relationships and home environments were another key element in children's lives that they wrote about. Some 8 to 12-year-olds said they wanted to live in a world where 'every child was loved'. Some children identified the changes they wanted to see related to both their living and care arrangements while others wanted to see family members who had passed away, or wished their parents were still together, or treated their kids well, including listening to them more, playing with them more and 'understanding how we (kids) felt'.

“ Adults didn't fight in front of children.”
– 10 year old, female, Barossa, Light and Lower North

A few children shared their dreams for a world where they had magical powers, ranging from humans who can teleport, fly, or 'be super clever' 'taller' or able to 'do more things'. Some kids wanted it to always be Summer or to have a packet of Tim Tams that never ran out. Others wanted certain celebrities and role models to still be alive, and for 'everyone's dreams to come true'.

“ my birthday was every day and Christmas was everyday.” – 9 year old, female, Northern Adelaide

“ you screamed out lout what you want. And it just come flying down from the sky.”
– 9 year old, female, Eastern Adelaide

“ every single person in the world was a transformer.” – 7 years old, male, Barossa, Light and Lower North



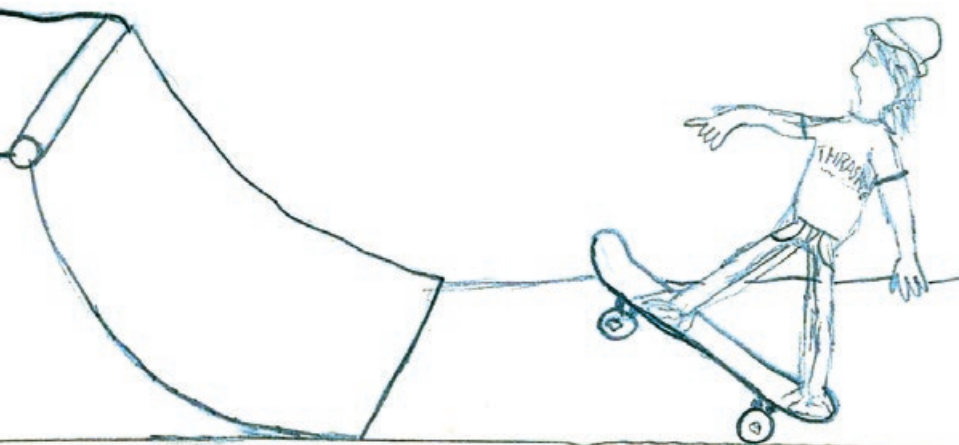


Gender differences

This section provides an overview of the responses received via the children's postcards through a gender lens. It also reflects on children's specific perceptions and comments relating to gender, including gender stereotypes, gender identity and diversity, and gender equality where such comments were made.

A fairly even proportion of boys and girls participated in 2021, with a small number of children who identified as non-binary, gender-fluid, or as being 'unsure' of their gender identity.

While boys and girls shared similar messages, there were several notable differences when it came to their interests and perceived strengths, what they care about, and their visions for a better world. Many of these differences reflected the significant ways in which gendered norms and expectations influence children's lives, particularly in relation to the choice of activities and aspirations children have from a young age.



What 8 to 12-year-olds are good at by gender

Sport was the number one activity both boys and girls wrote about being 'good at'. There were significant differences between genders when it came to which particular sport they were interested to pursue; football, soccer, basketball, and cricket were the most popular sports among boys, while netball was the most popular for girls, followed by swimming, basketball, and gymnastics. Children who identified as non-binary and gender-diverse were less likely to write about sport, and focused more on making art, reading, and other creative activities.

Both boys and girls wrote about school and identified subjects they were good at. While maths and PE were among the top responses for both boys and girls, a higher proportion of boys said they were good at Maths and PE. Girls were much more likely than boys to describe themselves being good at or interested in Art, while boys were more likely to mention Science. Girls were also more likely to report being good at reading, writing, and spelling.

When it came to physical activity outside of organised sport, a similar proportion of boys and girls mentioned running, bike-riding, skateboarding, rollerblading, and scootering. Only girls mentioned horse riding, whereas boys were more likely than girls to mention fishing and climbing.

Many children, regardless of gender identity, wrote about being kind and having a powerful imagination. The kinds of activities they embraced as individuals or with friends varied significantly by gender. Boys were far more likely to write about gaming and being a good gamer, with girls believing they were good at artistic and creative activities, including cooking and baking.

Although music was important to children of all backgrounds, girls were far more likely to write about dancing and singing, and playing music. Boys were largely focused on playing a musical instrument and less likely to be involved in dancing and singing.

What 8 to 12-year-olds care about by gender

Thousands of postcards highlighted the important relationships in children's lives, with an equally high proportion of boys and girls writing about how much they care about family and friends. While pets were important to children of all genders, a higher proportion of girls mentioned caring about animals more generally.



Caring about the future, one's own health, and the health and wellbeing of others, was consistently raised by 8 to 12-year-olds, regardless of gender. A slightly higher proportion of girls reported caring about climate and the environment, with girls more likely to also mention school, teachers, and education.

Boys were more likely to write about playing and having the time, space and freedom to do the things they enjoy and are good at, particularly sport related activities and online gaming. It was also more common for boys to highlight the importance of their belongings and 'stuff', with items desired often related to gaming and physical activities.

What grownups should know by gender

Children wanted grownups to know more about them as individuals. This included knowing the kind of person they are and what they care about, as well as what it's like to be a kid in the twenty-first century. Boys wrote about this more often than girls. Boys sought more recognition and respect from adults in relation to the things they enjoy, are good at, or aspire to do for future learning or work.

Both boys and girls wanted grownups to know that what they say and do is powerful, with many children reflecting on the significant impact that pressure, expectations, and judgment from adults can have on a child's wellbeing and aspirations.

It was more common for girls to write about being 'under pressure' or to be 'compared to others' in relation to their bodies or academic performance, whereas boys focused more on wanting to challenge what they perceived as being low expectations adults have of them, with comments such as 'I'm not bad' or 'I'm not naughty'.

Regardless of gender, children wanted grownups to know that kids can be trusted, and that 'we are smarter and more responsible than you think'. Many 8 to 12-year-olds felt that kids shouldn't be underestimated or treated like babies, and wanted adults to know that they are 'there for them' and capable of 'doing more' and 'helping them out' when they need it.

Girls were more likely to emphasise that kids have ideas, and that grownups should listen to their voices and take children more seriously. Girls also described wanting grownups to be more aware of their friendships and bullying, including 'how badly boys can treat girls'. While boys wrote about their friends, they particularly wanted grownups to recognise how important it is for children to be able to see their friends and be allowed to have fun and freedom.

Both boys and girls wanted to remind grownups that they can and must do better when it comes to looking after the planet. They also wanted them to understand the importance of spending quality time with kids and to generally be more kind. While many children wanted adults to know they need more help, there were differences in the type of adult support boys and girls were seeking. Boys were more likely to call on grownups for support with learning

and schoolwork, whereas a higher proportion of girls wrote about getting help with navigating friendships and bullying.

Many children wanted grownups to know more about what happens to them at school. For girls, this was often described as making schools safer and having more chill out spots, canteen options, fidgets, and 'life skills' lessons. Boys wrote about having more sport, longer break times, financial literacy lessons. One child wrote that they wanted their parents to accept that Cs 'aren't bad grades' and another that teachers 'shouldn't embarrass me'.

Changes to make the world better by gender

Caring for the environment was the top response made by both boys and girls with littering and pollution raised as the biggest environmental issue being tackled at school. A higher proportion of girls wrote about littering and plastic, while boys were more likely to focus on energy and transport, particularly the need to make electric cars more available.

For non-binary and gender diverse children, making the world more equal and respectful was the most common response, including showing more respect within family relationships and in the broader community. Regardless of gender, kindness and peace were central to children's visions for a better world. Both boys and girls wrote about ending bullying and discrimination, racism, poverty and homelessness, as well as ensuring gender equality.



For boys, gender equality was often raised as part of a broader statement about a fairer world for everyone, no matter who you are. Girls were more likely to identify with specific changes that they believed would make the world fairer. These ranged from ensuring equal rights, rules, and pay conditions were available to giving girls more of a say, making clothing less gendered, supporting more females in sport, and stopping the sorting of everything 'into boy or girl'.

A similar proportion of boys and girls wrote about wanting changes to school and homework that they thought would make their world better. While a higher proportion of boys wanted to reduce or eliminate homework altogether, children across gender identities wrote about small changes to the structure of school that would improve their experiences overall. These ideas included having longer break times and even different start times to allow kids to have more sleep or more time to engage in physical exercise.

Making more time for sport and PE was popular amongst both boys and girls. Other changes to curriculum varied according to gender. Girls suggested cooking classes, while boys were more likely to write about having more opportunities for gaming and to learn coding.

When it came to changes to community infrastructure, girls wanted more clothing shops, food options, and services to be made available across the community. Overall a higher proportion of boys wanted changes to be made to community infrastructure aimed at children and young people. Their responses reflected a greater focus on play and physical activity, with common responses involving a desire for more fun and active spaces with things to do. These included more amusement parks, sporting facilities, bike tracks, and skate parks. Girls also wanted to have more fun things to do, but their responses more often highlighted a need for safety to be made paramount too.







Regional differences

The Commissioner received postcards from children in schools across South Australia, from metropolitan Adelaide to regional centres, and from rural and remote communities.

Regardless of where they live, 8 to 12-year-olds shared many of the same interests, passions, aspirations, and ideas for a better world. Consistent with the 2019 and 2020 postcards, there were differences between children living in various communities, reflecting the diversity in the social, cultural, and economic contexts in which they live, as well as across their ages.

Children across all regions wrote about the importance of being taken seriously by adults and of providing them with more opportunities to have a say at every level of decision making. They wanted to be included in decision making that was occurring within their homes, their schools, and across their local communities at all levels of government including having input into the service systems that deliver services to them. They were clear that adults needed to listen to their unique imaginations, creative perspectives and big ideas, not only to improve their own wellbeing, confidence and trust in

adults, but also for the benefits this offers their family, school and whole community.

From metropolitan Adelaide through to regional and remote communities, children wanted grownups to know more about them – both their day-to-day lives, and their interests. Those in metropolitan areas wanted grownups to know more about what they are good at and what their aspirations for the future are, while those in regional towns and communities focused more on the kind of person they are now, how they feel about things, and recognising when they need support.

The state of the environment was a key concern for children in every region, particularly the need to stop littering and reduce the use of plastic and fossil fuels. For children living in the regions, it was particularly important for people to show more respect for farmers with an emphasis on the need for leaders to do something about bushfires and drought.

Wherever they live and go to school, children's visions for a better world shared many common themes, particularly relating to making things cheaper, stopping bullying, and making school and homework more engaging, flexible, and fun.

As was the case in the 2020 postcard responses, children in regional South Australia were more likely than their metropolitan counterparts to write about the COVID-19 pandemic. They focused on the impact of restrictions on their relationships and on participation in the things they love most. COVID-related postcards from metropolitan areas were more likely to focus on masks and vaccinations.

Sport was very popular across all regions. Music, singing and dancing were more popular among children living in metropolitan Adelaide, whereas children living in regional towns wrote about building stuff, driving, farm work, horse riding, fishing and other outdoor activities. While children in every region of South Australia care deeply about animals, children in metropolitan Adelaide wrote more about pets. A higher proportion of children in regional areas wrote about a range of animals, from those living on local farms to animals 'in the wild'.

Having fun, affordable and safe 'places to go' and 'things to do' is key to children's wellbeing and sense of belonging, no matter where they live. Although most 8 to 12-year-olds are proud of the communities they call home, many of them also identified changes needed to infrastructure and transport in their school and community, that they believe will make their community a happier and more connected place to live.

Children in regional and remote communities wanted more 'fun activities' and 'things to do' in their communities, including swimming pools, clothes shops, fast food places, gardens and other 'nature spots'. In metropolitan areas, children wanted to make existing public places safer and build more sports and recreation facilities, particularly ovals, parks, bike tracks and skate parks.

Where children in metropolitan areas focused on making existing facilities cheaper and more accessible to everyone, 8 to 12-year-olds in regional areas wanted to have more shops, more entertainment, and more community attractions and events happening in their communities.



The following pages provide summaries of insights into the views, experiences, and key messages that were received from children aged 8 to 12 years from across regional South Australia.



Adelaide Hills

Children in the Adelaide Hills care deeply about the people, animals and nature that make up their communities. They think about the future, and many shared their concerns about the impact climate change, pollution, and plastics will have on the state of the world that they will inherit. As such, many of their ideas for making the world better revolved around better protecting animals and the environment.

Children in the Adelaide Hills want adults to know that kids are smarter and more independent and capable than they think. They want people to 'care more about everything' and for adults to ask children about the 'big problems' that affect them, both locally and globally. They want to work together with adults to help address them. They want grownups to support them to pursue their interests and to have more choices at school, both in relation to their school subjects and who teaches them.

They described their love of family, friends, and pets as being paramount, alongside being active and creative, particularly when they're outdoors. They care about having opportunities to learn new things, make new friends, care for others, and ensure that everyone 'has a chance', particularly those who they see doing it tough.

Like children across other regions, children in the Adelaide Hills wanted to see the end of COVID-19 and quickly, mainly so people could return home and there would be no more deaths. They also wanted to improve road safety around their schools, as well as ensure every town has access to a vet. Their ideas

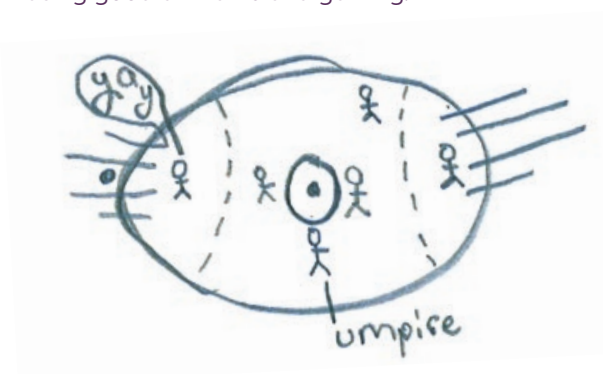
to progress gender equality ranged from having more 'respect for what girls wear' to providing 'greater support for women in sport'.

"we had more days where we clean up the rubbish, everyone got a free electrical car and kids could vote for priministers."
– 9 year old, female, Adelaide Hills

Barossa, Light and Lower North

Children in schools located in the Barossa, Light and Lower North region care deeply about the health of people and the environment, including how everyone feels. They care about the people they love most as well as the 'new student in class' and people who are 'homeless'. They focused on how well they're doing at school, their parents' jobs, wanting 'a better future', as well as all of 'the things' they're grateful for. These things included having fresh food and water, 'a roof over my head', a family pet or pets as well as toys and gadgets.

They are particularly interested in skating and roller blading, scootering, go karting, and mountain biking. As well as their interest in playing a range of sports and participating in other physical activities regularly, the 8 to 12-year-olds in this region also wrote about being good at maths and gaming.





They want adults to know that kids have feelings and the same rights as adults do and can make their own choices. They also wanted to stress that they're trying their best and that when they make mistakes they are 'only learning' – rather than be punished for their mistakes, they would prefer that adults to talk to them so they can understand what they've done wrong.

Children across the Barossa, Light and Lower North region value their friendships, family relationships and community connections. They wrote a lot about being good at 'helping', 'loving' and 'socialising'. They are worried that adults are 'not doing much to help the world' and that they need to do more to care for the environment, particularly using more 'sustainable energy sources' and planting more trees and plants.

Greater equality and respect for diversity was a key issue for children in this region, with many postcards describing a better world free of racism – one where no one is bullied for having a 'different colour skin'. Other ideas for a better world included making things cheaper, creating more jobs, and ensuring everyone has friends to 'hang with'.

“ that if I do something naughty/wrong not to yell at me but to have a grown-up conversation about it.” – 11 year old, female, Barossa, Light and Lower North



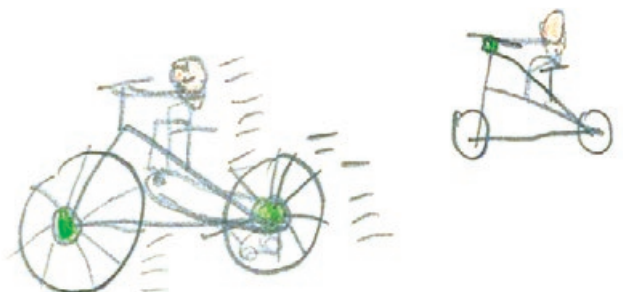
Eyre and Western

Like most children across South Australia, those in schools across Eyre and the Western region emphasised that kids are creative, have good ideas, and 'want and need a say'. They also wanted grownups to know that they can't be 'good at everything' and that sometimes they need more help, particularly with friendships, bullying, or learning.

Children wanted the adults in their lives to show greater interest in their achievements and activities, with swimming, fishing, kayaking, and bike riding among the most popular activities in this region. The 8 to 12-year-olds living in Eyre and Western also emphasised how much the world has changed since today's grownups were children. They wrote about the importance of gaming and technology in their lives, and that adults needed to understand that devices should not always be blamed for children's behaviour or health issues.

Preventing bushfires and making it rain more for the farmers were also important to children living in this region. They highlighted changes they felt could be made to their community and infrastructure so that their towns could attract 'new people' and have 'better things to do'. This included having free access to WiFi and electricity, safer roads, a cinema, a ten pin bowling alley, McDonalds, an 'ice rink in front of Kmart again' and a community fair on the weekends, to name a few.

“ the Australian leaders should start helping doing something about how Australia was on fire.” – 12 year old, female, Eyre and Western



Far North

Children across the Far North focused on their family, friends, school, and the health and wellbeing of their communities. They care about having opportunities to help other people and make them laugh. They're good at riding motorbikes, fixing and making things, working in a team, and playing a wide range of sports, particularly footy.

They want adults to know how important it is for children to have good role models, particularly given that growing up today is so different to how it used to be, and because it can be harder in many ways.

They had a vision for a better world where there was no racism or wars and more kindness, where everyone had food to eat, 'the same amount of money' and opportunities to play and have fun. They also wanted 'a bigger skate park', 'life skills' to be taught at school, and to be able to see a time when all kids going to school every day have a say because 'we are the future of the world'.

The 8 to 12-year-olds in the Far North gave more attention to COVID-19 than children in most other regions. Getting rid of COVID-19 came up almost as often as looking after the environment, with some children particularly concerned about the border closures and lockdown restrictions that had been separating them from other family members.

“ [The world would be better if...] Borders opened to see family in different states.”
– 12 year old, female, Far North



Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island



Children across the Fleurieu Peninsula and Kangaroo Island want grownups to know more about the things they love and are good at; from sports, art, reading and gaming, to looking after animals and 'driving cars (not on the road)'. They also called on grownups to find out more about their friends, to take better care of the earth, and to listen to kids more often, 'because kids can be just as capable and responsible as adults'.

Strengthening environmental protections was central to their ideas for a better world. They wanted to see an end to littering and plastics and greater protection of trees and oceans, which they raised as key actions to address in relation to climate change. Many 8 to 12-year-olds living in this region expressed a wish for people to care more about farmers, animals, and pollution, which they said is 'destroying the animals' habitat'.

Postcards from Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island also highlighted the importance of family, friends and community, as well as being active and getting a good education for the future. Children in this region also value equality, inclusion and health, with calls for 'more equipment for children with disability' and 'more support for teachers who teach dyslexic kids'. Alongside concerns specific to COVID-19, children wrote about health more broadly and shared their vision of a world where there was a 'cure for every illness' and where people 'never smoked, did drugs, or got sick'.

Other ideas for change included 'school libraries being bigger', 'toys at the shops being cheaper' and kids having more time to relax and play with family and friends. While gaming was popular among children in this region, some responses focused on what 8 to 12-year-olds saw as the negative impacts of too much technology in their lives. They were seeking more outdoor play time, both at school and outside of school.



“ [The world would be better if...] if people cared about farmers more and not get disrespect.” – 12 year old, male, Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island

Limestone Coast

Children attending schools in the Limestone Coast region care deeply about other people's wellbeing and about 'everyone's safety', particularly those who are 'hurt' or 'who can't afford things'. They wanted adults to know that they are grateful for everything adults do for them, and that they love and care about the grownups who support them, even when this love isn't openly expressed.

At the same time, many 8 to 12-year-olds felt that adults had a tendency to underestimate children, and sometimes decide to speak for kids when this wasn't always necessary. They emphasised that 'kids have their own voice' and that they wanted adults to know that kids 'deserve equal rights', that 'there's more to me than it looks like' and that 'we don't always have to be treated like children'.

While children wrote about their strong connection to their communities, 8 to 12-year-olds living along the Limestone Coast felt strongly about making positive changes to community spaces, transport, and infrastructure, to make 'the towns they call home even better'. This included building 'more hospitals', making it easier to get a driver's licence, building an indoor heated pool for all ages, setting up a community kitchen with a community garden, and creating 'other places so that we can live together like we should'.



Other wishes for a better world ranged from wanting 'more books in my house' to 'no bullying' and 'world peace'. Wanting things to 'go back to normal' after COVID-19 was another popular response from children living in this region, along with particular worries they had about isolation in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“ [The world would be better if...] Covid 19 wouldn't ruin our lives and make us self isolate.” – 10 year old, male, Limestone Coast

Murray and Mallee

Alongside family and friends, the environment, farming and animals were some of the most important things to children in schools located across the Murray and Mallee region. They care deeply about school and getting a good education, as well as what's going on in the world, what their future will look like, and the choices available to them.

Children in this region are good at horse riding, sports, art, gaming, and coding, and they shared diverse job aspirations, from managing a company to playing in the NBA or becoming an astronaut. They wanted adults to understand that their decisions affect other people, that kids can be trusted, and that it's critical that adults talk to kids more often, and keep their promises. In particular, they wanted kids to be able to have more of a say in family decisions.

Many 8 to 12-year-olds living in the Murray and Mallee region also wanted adults to know how children are feeling. Given that their lives aren't always as they seem on the outside, children felt that adults should listen to kids and regularly check in with them to understand when they need support and when they need space or privacy.





Children's visions for a better world included creating a cleaner environment and having safer energy sources, more healthy food options, and greater support for families and for those looking for jobs. They want more fun things to do on weekends, and they want to feel safe in communities free from criminals such as robbers, kidnappers, or vandalisers. They want to live in communities where there is no bullying or abuse, and instead where there is more fairness and equality.

Having a 'class pet' or 'guide dog at school', 'more monkey bars', and more 'brain breaks' were popular ideas on ways to improve school. Kids in this region are worried that when they go to high school there will not be as many opportunities to have fun or to be as creative, and that they won't be able to use coloured pens and pencils.

“ [I am good at...] Drawing Loxton (which is my town I live in) and farming and gaming which I am an expert at.” – 11 year old, male, Murray and Mallee

Yorke and Mid North

The 8 to 12-year-olds in schools across the Yorke and Mid North would like to see all animals treated well. They also want the environment to be kept safe and clean, and for the 'earth to be healthy and a great place' to live. They want grownups to know that it's 'not good to litter' or pollute, and that 'in years there will be no water', so we all need to do more and do better to protect the environment now.



my dad works on a farm and the farm makes me feel safe.



Children living in this region also want grownups to show more interest in their hobbies and the things they like, as well as learn more about the kind of person they are. Many describe themselves as being cool, powerful, helpful, trustworthy, loving and always trying their hardest.

Children across the Yorke and Mid North region are sick of the pandemic stopping them from 'doing the things we love'. They want everyone around them to be 'more thoughtful' and to 'do the right thing' to help stop the spread of COVID-19. Some children were particularly worried about the disposal of face masks and the potential for negative impact this could have on the environment.

It is important to children living in this region that kids 'got a say in parliament activities', and that governments listened to young people more before making decisions. Many 8 to 12-year-olds wrote about wanting 'more natichery (nature) spots in citys (cities) and towns', ensuring all schools have a 'sustainable school environment' and that small schools have 'more students' or 'better access to bigger education'. In addition to ensuring everyone has a home, money, and food, they would like to see opportunities for children to 'travel for free' and be able to play video games without paying 'real money'.

“ that greed is bad, that children need someone they trust and that they should do their part in makin the world a better place.” – 9 year old, female, Yorke and Mid North

Conclusion



It is so clear that a future in which children and young people can trust adults to deliver on the promises they make is key if we are to have any hope of solving some of the world's biggest issues. Fixing the environment is no longer a task on a list of things that could be done – children and young people have made it abundantly clear that it must be our top priority. They're not willing to compromise their futures by waiting for adults to act on the changes they know must be made now.

As the adults in their lives, it is our role to provide the support children need to ensure they are not made to feel like strangers in their own neighbourhoods. Not only do they need investment in local infrastructure that creates the spaces and places in which they like to go, they need adults to have a modern mindset that welcomes them into their own communities because it takes them seriously and has committed to setting up opportunities for them to have a say.

This generation of children is telling us that the connections they make with family, friends and their local community are just as critical to their health and wellbeing, as those they may make across the world with a global family. They want to be both seen and heard at home, at school and in the broader community with opportunities for genuine participation that enable them to contribute meaningfully to decision making.

Children across the 8 to 12-year-old age group said they want adults around them to take a greater interest in more aspects of their lives. They also want adults to know that they have 'our back' and that they want to be part

of the team that brings about real and lasting change. They're asking adults to listen to what they have to say and to give them credit for knowing more than adults think they do about many things.

They also want adults to acknowledge that their childhood is vastly different from that of previous generations and that because of this they think differently about a lot of things. They value diversity, equality, inclusiveness, and kindness, and they want to celebrate diverse abilities, learning styles, cultures, and gender identities.

If we can work with children to build a future where their parents, teachers, and leaders listen to what they have to say, it will be possible to address the social and environmental issues we face.

By considering their ideas, validating their contributions, and implementing strategies that reflect their input, we will be building relationships with children that are grounded in trust and hope for a future where children, animals, and the planet can thrive.

be kind

Michael Jordan



KEEP CALM & SHINE



I want a better govornment, education system, but im too young for adults to aknowledge me and understand.



Share Your Feeling



Never stop being a good person because of the bad people



Good work
nice keep going



I Want to be prime minister
... and i can be



No Covid!

