



Building youth-friendly local communities

A youth-friendly community provides:

- ✓ welcoming spaces across the community
- ✓ places and spaces specifically for young people
- ✓ environments that are safe
- ✓ opportunities to be involved
- ✓ opportunities to be creative

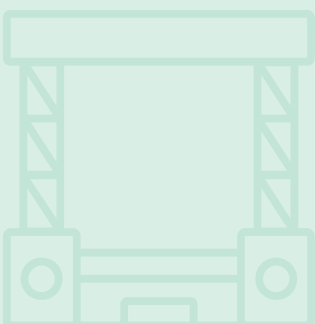
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There are approximately 369,900 children and young people 18 years and under living in South Australia. Approximately 35% are aged 12–18.¹

While the proportion of young people in each local community varies hugely across the State, the interests of young people have an impact on many members of the community, including business owners, parents, and grandparents.

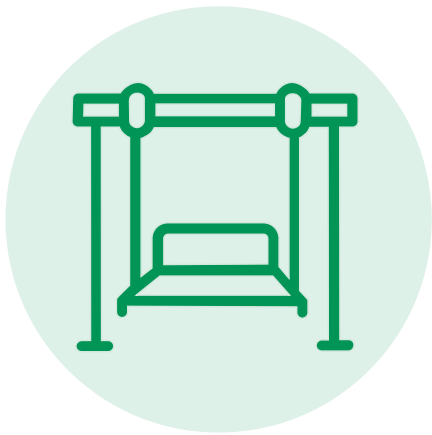
To build a strong state where young people can be confident, connected, and creative, the adults in their lives need to find ways to involve them more in their local communities. This includes engaging young people as capable citizens, facilitating their participation in decisions about things that impact on them directly, and supporting them to feel they belong and are valued members of society.

We need to listen with interest to what young people tell us about their lives and what they need to feel as though they belong. We need to do this with an open mind and be ready to be creative in how we solve problems they pose or suggestions they make. They are the experts in their own lives and know what they need. If we can find ways to support them to find or create what they need, we will be helping to build trust with younger generations, while simultaneously sending them the message that they are valued and important members of their local communities. This guide has been developed to assist in the building of youth-friendly communities.



How youth-friendly is your local community?

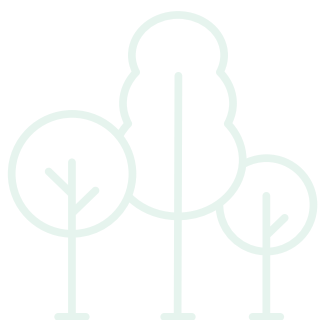
A youth-friendly community provides young people with...



Welcoming spaces across the community

Local area facilities and activities are extremely important to young people. The more opportunities they have to get to places quickly and safely and to participate in local events and activities the more likely they are to be able to engage with others of all ages and feel they are valued members of their own community. Importantly, it also enables them to catch up with friends their own age, be seen out in the community, and be physically active.

- We provide young people with comfortable, welcoming, and well-signed environments.
- Our community has outdoor spaces where young people feel welcome and where they can 'be young and hang out' without fear of being hassled, judged, or moved on by adults.
- We provide ideal spaces that include shared areas where young people can sit on the ground or on seating, preferably with all-weather options, and be seen and respected by others in the community.
- We provide accessible, clearly sign-posted, free period products, along with clean and safe places to go to the toilet, dispose of products and wash hands hygienically.





Places that are specifically for young people

Engagement with young people must go beyond meeting their physical needs to also include support for opportunities to access meaningful social connections. They also need to be able to find information that they can understand about matters that are important to them and be made to feel safe and respected in all situations and settings. In other words, they need to feel welcome and that they belong.

- We work closely with local young people to identify appropriate local places that appeal to them. We then work closely with them to ensure these chosen spaces are designed appropriately for their safety, convenience, and comfort, including ensuring they are also welcoming spaces for young people living with disability.
- We ensure our libraries combine youth-friendly features with opportunities for learning. We offer comfortable and inclusive spaces to hang out. These spaces have free Wi-Fi, charging points, IT facilities, and activities that attract young people into libraries, with or without their parents accompanying them.
- We provide free accessible Wi-Fi and phone charging stations to ensure young people feel safe, able to connect with their friends and family, find information that is relevant to them, and can access entertainment suited to their interests and age-group.



Environments that are safe

Few young people have access to independent transport beyond walking or cycling for most of their childhood. Even for the over sixteens, rarely do they have access to their own vehicle, or are completely free from parental limits on their mobility. This is a critical issue for regional and remote young people who have fewer transport options than their city counterparts. Lack of access to transport impacts significantly on young people's lives. It limits their ability to get and maintain a job, attend extra-curricular activities, or meet recreational or social commitments on a regular basis.

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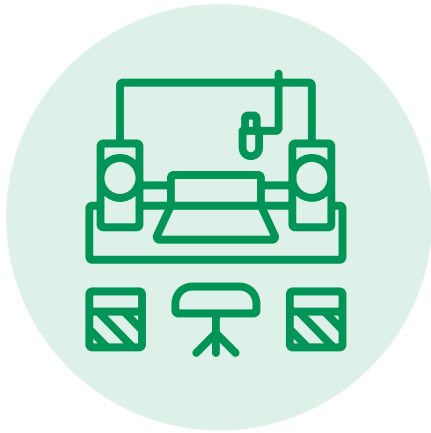
- We employ friendly staff who like young people and who are relatable and approachable.
- We provide well-lit and well-maintained footpaths and bike tracks around schools, parks, sporting facilities, shopping centres, bus stops and libraries.
- We ensure reduced speed limits are in place around schools, shops, sporting facilities and parks to make roads much safer for walking and cycling by young people.
- Our public transport infrastructure and facilities, which include our bus stops, provide shelter and safety for young people.
- We make it easy for young people to provide feedback or to make a complaint to the local council when things are not to their liking.
- We are a regional community that is considering ways in which we can provide opportunities for young people who can't afford driving lessons to get access to lessons and driving practice via a bespoke community youth driving program.



Opportunities to be involved

Loneliness and isolation are becoming increasingly common amongst young people, particularly those living with disability and chronic illness. Young people need programs and opportunities that enable them to build friendships, get active and enjoy social activities with their peers. It also means scaffolding young people to connect, build relationships and have positive experiences within their local neighbourhoods, while providing opportunities for them to speak their mind and stand up for what they believe in to be agents of change.

- We take active efforts to find ways for young people to be kept informed, involved and to have a say on what's happening in their community, including opportunities for co-designing youth activities and events.
- We encourage and support local businesses to provide a structured work experience program that can showcase to young people what is available locally.
- We promote and provide volunteering opportunities for young people and are welcoming and accommodating of our younger volunteers.
- We find ways to encourage and seek feedback and views directly from young people, including young people living with disability. We do this through formal and informal arrangements such as the Youth Advisory Groups and via events and activities that are specifically convened to enable young people to discuss specific topics of interest to them.



Opportunities to be creative

While local communities often provide playgrounds for younger children, they forget that teenagers also need spaces within which to be active – and not just skate parks! The lack of dedicated inside and outside spaces for young people means they are seen less and less. Being seen less means that when they do venture out, they feel increasingly uncomfortable and sometimes unsafe in their own communities. Young people need to have safe places to “hang”.

- We support the development and maintenance of a vibrant creative youth creative arts scene that includes music, fine art, performance, festivals and events.
- We ensure that young people can access and afford to participate in or attend any arts and cultural activities supported by our local council.
- We encourage and facilitate unlicensed venues across our local community to promote young local music talent through concerts and performances within small scale venues and via competitions designed to encourage participation and attendance.

Endnotes

- 1 Child Development Council, 'Data Snapshot: Children and young people as a proportion of the total population, South Australia,' 2021. Available at <https://childrensa.sa.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Data-snapshot-CYP-Proportion-of-SA-Popn-2020-2021-09-22.pdf>

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.