THIS PLACE I CALL HOME

The views of children and young people on
growing up in Queensland

Queensland
Family & Child
Commission

Queensland
Government

COVER DESIGN

This work is based on the theme of 'safety.' To me, safety means home, but just recently, my home shifted. My family and I moved from a major city to a coastal suburb; I went from a place where everything was straight roads and large landmarks to an area where every winding bush road and big freeway roundabout looks the exact same as the last. At first, I found myself constantly lost. Even venturing out to get some groceries on my own was a terrifying quest to be taken on with great care. That's part of what I tried to express in this piece, how utterly bewildering and labyrinthine this new place was to me. The most important part of my work however, is the big, homely-looking tree. Within a few weeks of moving, I came to know the park across the street from my house pretty well. I slowly came to realise that it had paths leading to every part of the suburb and could navigate almost anywhere from there. Even better is that it sits on top of a big hill, so you can see the tops of the trees from quite far, which is what the tree in my work represents. This is how I became comfortable with exploring more, as long as I could see the tall trees, I knew I was safe and close enough to home. I explored through this work how strange, specific things put us at ease; holding a familiar object, seeing a name on a street sign or spotting a familiar landmark.

Clare, 15 years, South East Queensland

Submitted as part of the Queensland Family and Child Commission's Hear Me See Me Art Exhibition (2017)

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) thanks the children and young people who participated in the Growing up in Queensland project by generously sharing their opinions and insights through the survey, focus groups, workshops, postcards and art activities. Thank you for helping us make Queensland an even better place for children and young people to grow up.

QFCC youth champion, Annika at Far North Queensland focus group

We recognise our partnership with the State Library of Queensland and give credit to the regional libraries across the state. They provided opportunities for children and young people to complete postcards and distributed information about the ways children and young people could participate.

The QFCC's Youth Champions[1] provided valuable input into the design of the project and the individual data collection methods. They promoted the project on social media, participated in media activities and assisted with the delivery of focus groups across the state.

The QFCC thanks the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities for supporting us talking with their children and young people and hearing their unique perspectives. In particular, we wish to acknowledge the communities of Cherbourg, Woorabinda, Hope Vale and the Torres Strait for welcoming the project team onto country.

The QFCC would also like to thank the youth services who facilitated contact with young people.

These include the Multicultural Development Association (MDA), Youth Empowered Towards Independence (YETI), Nintiringanyi Cultural Training Centre, Open Doors, Mossman Youth Centre, YIRS One Stop Youth Shop Inc., Emergency & Long Term Accommodation Moranbah (ELAM Inc), Young People Ahead, Project Booyah, Cowboys House, Headspace and the Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma (QPASTT).

> And finally, we would like to extend our appreciation to all the organisations and individuals who promoted the Growing up in Queensland project in the community and helped Queensland children and young people stand up and speak about their lives, their dreams and their hopes for the future.

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1   The Youth Champions form the QFCC's Youth Advisory Council and meet regularly to talk about issues affecting young people. They champion the voices of children and young people to provide youth perspectives and leadership to the QFCC.

PRINCIPAL COMMISSIONER'S FOREWORD

All children and young people have a right to be listened to on the issues affecting their lives. Too often, adults don't pay enough attention to the voices of children. They are often referred to as *future* citizens as if their role in the community only becomes relevant when they can vote.

Children and young people are already citizens. Their active participation is important in building their capacity to become agents of positive change now and in the future.

As the Principal Commissioner of the Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC), I am committed to actively listening to children and young people. At the end of 2017, I tasked the Commission with implementing a project to provide Queenslanders aged 4 to 18, with the opportunity to contribute their thoughts, opinions and ideas on the things that matter to them. This project was called Growing up in Queensland.

In mid-2018, the project team visited more than 40 different communities—from South East Queensland, to as far north as the Torres Strait and west to Mt Isa and Longreach. More than 7000 young people participated, making it one of the largest projects of its type ever conducted in Queensland. This report captures and shares their voices.

Overall, they are optimistic about their future and have great ideas for making our communities stronger for the next generation. The information they shared is valuable, not just for the work of the QFCC but also for policy makers, business leaders and communities. It will help us develop new initiatives and review current practices to support this generation and the next. As adults, it is

our responsibility to dig deeper than just their words to understand the meaning of what they have told us and work out how we can respond.

We heard loud and clear what is important to children and young people. They value the support they receive and the time they spend with their families. They want more green spaces, more diverse sports and more support for creative activities like music and art. They care about their safety and would like more safe spaces to spend time with their friends. They are passionate about the environment and issues such as the drought.

As they get older, they start thinking about finances and job prospects. Like adults, children and young people are concerned about the impacts of bullying and mental health issues, how to manage workloads, stress and decisions about the future. They also worry about big world issues like pollution and global warming.

The views and opinions they shared were often deeply insightful, particularly about what they need from the adults in their lives. Children and young people want the opportunity to be heard, whether through targeted engagement or by having a seat at the table. They want the opportunity to discuss issues, form opinions and find solutions. They strongly value face-to-face interaction—and this is coming from a generation often characterised as living only on social media.

The themes children and young people have raised are a call to action. They have sent a challenge to those who work in government, industry and support services as well as their families and the wider community. They are seeking our help and guidance in managing workloads and stress. They would like access to clear information and strategies for supporting friends and family who might be struggling in difficult circumstances. They want information about assuming the responsibilities of adulthood—paying bills and taxes, working, and taking care of their own health. Their desire to learn these life skills was a persistent theme.

The Queensland Family and Child Commission is issuing a call to action to decision makers and leaders across government, industry, support services, as well as families and the wider community.

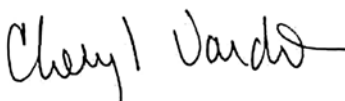Queensland's children and young people want:

- your help and guidance to manage workloads and stress strategies so they can support friends and family who are struggling

- to learn life skills as they transition to adulthood.

They told us who they turn to for advice and how adults currently help and hinder them in resolving problems. This provides great insight into how we can tackle issues like cyberbullying and skilling the future workforce.

The ideas and views shared by children and young people provide evidence to inform public policy, service design and economic investment. If we ignore what they have told us, we run the risk of children and young people going missing. Not missing in the physical sense but metaphorically, as they become disenchanted with a society that does not seem to respect their perspectives or listen to their points of view.

The information collected as part of the Growing up in Queensland project in not just anecdotal, and it goes far beyond community consultation. It is a challenge sent from our youngest citizens to decision makers. If our children and young people are to remain optimistic about their future—which is also our future—we must listen carefully to what they have told us.

If we take up the challenge, we can make sound economic and social choices. By listening to the voices of children and young people, we can advance Queensland's future together.

Cheryl Vardon
Principal Commissioner
Queensland Family and Child Commission

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is the right of all children and young people to have their voices heard in all matters that affect them.[2]

In 2018, the Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) provided an opportunity for Queensland's children and young people to speak up and have a say about their everyday lives, priorities, concerns and visions for their communities and futures. The Growing up in Queensland project engaged young people in meaningful conversations and gathered their views and experiences. This report *This place I call home: the views of children and young people on growing up in Queensland* amplifies their voices.

More than 7000 people between the ages of 4 and 18 participated in the Growing up in Queensland project. They responded to the survey and took part in workshops, focus groups and other activities. The information they provided has been aggregated throughout the report to present the key themes and ideas for making Queensland an even better place in which to grow up. The children's and young people's views demonstrate they have a keen understanding of life in their community.

They also have insightful, sophisticated and innovative ideas about how community leaders and decision makers can strengthen Queensland for the current and future generations.

Main findings

Queensland's children and young people hold strong opinions on a diverse range of community issues and want their opinions considered and heard in the community. More than a quarter highlighted the need for leaders and decision-makers to listen to their views.

The findings highlight the practical ideas children and young people have about current community issues. They value the support they receive and the time they spend with their families. They have a lot to contribute to discussions and solutions. Listening to their voices gives governments, community service providers and business leaders the opportunity to understand what children and young people need, to make better decisions and impact on their lives in positive ways. It also gives leaders a valuable insight into the future.

Much more can be done to help children and young people forge stronger connections with the people in their lives. Their generation is often characterised and portrayed by adults as being focused only on 'social media and selfies'. The Growing up in Queensland project has shown they are much more than what they do online.

Children and young people crave direct human connections. The vast majority of what they have told us can be summarised as wanting adults to pay attention, have respectful conversations and listen to what they have to say about the things that matter to them.

The Growing up in Queensland project explored three lines of inquiry. These were community, hopes and dreams, and the big picture.

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2   United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Retrieved November 1, 2017, from www.unicef.org.au/Upload/UNICEF/Media/Our%20work/childfriendlycrc.pdf

My community

Well-being is supported by a strong sense of community. During the project, children and young people identified 'community' as the place, town or neighbourhood they live in, the places they spend their time, and the people they spend their time with. They had many positive things to say about their communities and their experiences of growing up in Queensland. They saw community as a place of connection, relationships, social engagement, social participation, health and well-being, as well as support in tough times. They said it is important to feel safe, valued, respected and included in their communities.

Children and young people spoke about their community being a place where people support each other and are connected. They wanted everyone to feel welcome and be treated equally to improve community cohesion and reduce the feeling of isolation. They saw community as a place where people from different backgrounds can come together to share culture and language and develop relationships of trust.

These positive elements were balanced with suggested improvements, which children and young people felt would make their communities a better place to live for people their age.

What did children and young people say would improve their communities?

They value a clean environment and asked for more green spaces and playgrounds catering for all ages and abilities. They want all children to be able to participate in community life.

They would like better public transport options for accessing community facilities and affordable recreational activities and events, including creative arts.

They want opportunities for meaningful participation and more youth-friendly places where they can safely 'hang out' together. They would like more retail and entertainment options so they can spend quality time with the people who are important to them. They value businesses that support the local economy.

They want safe communities with adequate services to support people who are less fortunate, are experiencing homelessness, or are struggling with drug or alcohol dependency.

They value their multicultural communities and want to be able to celebrate these cultures more. They want everyone to feel included and treated equally by the whole community. They want more opportunities for people to come together and learn from one another - to reduce isolation and build community cohesion.

Hopes and dreams

Queensland children and young people are generally optimistic about their future. They consider education, employment opportunities and being prepared for life after school as critical to their future success. They told us they valued talking to others about their plans for the future and identified parents, carers and friends as the people they turn to for advice.

What did children and young people say would help them achieve their hopes and dreams?

Plans to access higher education or training opportunities after school were high on the agenda for children and young people. They felt addressing issues related to geographical isolation, financial constraints, and lack of access to opportunities such as volunteering and entry level work would help them reach their goals.

They would like a better balance between education, extracurricular activities, family time and time for themselves. They would like more support to manage school stress.

They would like to have more knowledge about the life skills they will need to make the transition from childhood into independent adulthood. They said they needed more information and skills to manage finances and to have a good physical, mental and sexual health.

Some children and young people worry they may be prevented from achieving their dreams because of their disability, race, religion, gender, or caring responsibilities.

The big picture

The results of the Growing up in Queensland project demonstrate children and young people are strongly invested in good outcomes for their communities. Their worries and concerns reflect awareness of contemporary, local and broader issues and how these potentially impact their lives and the lives of people around them.

The top issues children and young people are worried about are bullying and cyberbullying, mental health, education, drugs and alcohol, the environment and climate change, and employment. In raising these issues, they also shared their ideas for how they can be addressed by everyone in the community.

We know governments and communities are already responding to these issues. However, the way we respond should also be guided by the views of children and young people.

What did children and young people say would help them with the important issues?

Young Queenslanders said they want adults to actively listen to them without judgement. They value having open conversations about their lives and the support they need. They want to be able to access clear information about the issues important to them and to know where to go for further help.

They asked for more peer support training and information so they could provide more effective support to their friends.

They would like more education and services for adults who may be struggling with their own issues. They would also like to know how they can support them in these circumstances.

They endorse the important role of governments in making decisions to protect the safety of communities and preserve the environment.

The children and young people of Queensland have entrusted the QFCC with their thoughts, feelings and experiences in the hope they will be heard by adults who will value their ideas and use them to make a difference.

We now encourage everyone in Queensland - especially community, government and business leaders - to pick up the baton and include the voices of children and young people in planning, decision making and the way they work.

It is a powerful way to improve outcomes for all children and young people and to deliver a better future for all of us.

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List of acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
DSS	Department of Social Services
KICS	Kids in Community Study
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Questioning, Gender diverse
LSAC	Longitudinal Study of Australian Children
PCYC	Police Citizens Youth Club
QFCC	Queensland Family and Child Commission
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Notes to the reader

The Growing up in Queensland survey results have been reported as whole numbers. Figures with decimal points of 0.5 and above have been rounded up to the next whole number, and figures with decimal points below 0.5 have been rounded down.

The Growing up in Queensland results have been analysed for five regional areas – South East Queensland, Central Queensland, South West Queensland, North Queensland and Far North Queensland. While there were some differences on certain topics, findings were generally consistent across regions.

The QFCC commissioned the Australian Institute of Family Studies to provide a technical paper identifying areas of overlap between the lines of inquiry in the Growing up in Queensland project and information available in the Growing up in Australia: Longitudinal Study of Australian Children. This technical paper used findings from the pre-released Wave 7 data. Results are reported throughout in purple boxes.

Findings from focus groups are reported throughout this document. These findings include the contributions of both school based focus groups and young group workshops.

INTRODUCTION

The true measure of a nation's standing is how well it attends to its children — their health and safety, their material security, their education and socialisation, and their sense of being loved, valued and included in the families and societies into which they are born.[3]

This report documents the aspirations, ideas and concerns of children and young people living in Queensland in 2018. Through the Growing up in Queensland project the Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) gathered insights from children and young people ranging from 4 to 18 years old, to give them a voice about their everyday lives and visions for their future.

Our aim was to hear from participants of all abilities, from many cultures, in many locations and in a variety of familial circumstances. The findings reveal what children and young people think government, industry, community leaders and decision-makers should do to build a strong society for today and the future.

> Participants were of all abilities, were from many cultures and lived in many locations.

A broad group of Queensland youth participated in constructive and meaningful ways. Our intent is to use (and encourage others to use) what they have said to influence policy, programs and initiatives across sectors. We want to change the way leaders think about, include and take into account the perspectives of children and young people. This will help us to understand their priorities and to build stronger communities where social policies contribute to economic prosperity.

> *Putting children in the centre of our society acknowledges that all aspects of our future capacity depends upon us having the majority of our children and youth able to participate to their full potential.[4]*

It is estimated that in the next 25 years the number of people living in Queensland who are younger than 19 years will increase at a faster rate than it has in the previous 25 years.[5] While adults find many reasons to dismiss the questions and opinions of children and young people, they are unwise to do so. They need to understand what is important to children and young people today, so they can meet the needs of this growing demographic and prepare for the future. In the Growing up in Queensland project, we focused on gaining a broad understanding of children's and young people's opinions on three main lines of inquiry:

- how they experience life in their community. This includes their relationships with friends and family, safety, support and the places they spend time

- their career aspirations and the supports and barriers that might affect them

- the big issues that worry them and their ideas for solutions.

We used a combination of methodologies, with qualitative and quantitative techniques, adapted for the target cohorts of 4 to 6 year olds, 7 to 12 year olds and 13 to 18 year olds. We used five research methods:

1. an online survey (13 - 18 year olds)
2. a teacher and librarian led artwork activity (4 - 6 year olds)
3. written responses to individual questions (7 - 18 year olds)
4. school-based focus groups (7 - 18 year olds)
5. youth group workshops (13 - 18 year olds)[6]

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3   UNICEF. (2007). *Child poverty in perspective: An overview of child well-being in rich countries*. Retrieved October 5, 2018, from www.unicef.org/media/files/ChildPovertyReport.pdf. p. 1.

4   Stanley, F. (2008). Australia's Children and Youth. In H. Sykes (Ed.), *Issues of Our Time*. Albert Park, Vic. Retrieved October 5, 2018, from www.futureleaders.com.au/book_chapters/pdf/Issues_Time/Fiona_Stanley.pdf. p. 75

5   Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2018). *Labour Force Australia*. Catalogue No. 6202.0. Retrieved September 25, 2018, from www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6202.0

6   See Appendix for a more detailed discussion of the methodology and project design

The Growing up in Queensland project differs from many other child-focused research projects in that it covers a broad age group and range of topics. Also, young people were actively involved in the design and delivery.

> The scope of the Growing up in Queensland project aimed to gain a holistic understanding of what life is like for the state's youth population without focusing on a particular agenda.

As mentioned earlier, many adults are sceptical about the value of engaging children and young people in discussions. They also question children's capacity to identify and raise concerns about issues that affect them.

However, recent studies of the sociology of childhood have determined children exercise more agency than they have previously been credited with. This area of study positions children as actively engaged with and able to interpret and influence their social contexts. Children are 'sources of authoritative knowledge about their own world and are active agents in shaping and interpreting the world and constructing meaning and purpose'.[7]

It is critical children and young people are recognised as citizens in the here and now rather than characterising them as 'future citizens' until they reach voting age.

Our project design centred on a fundamental participatory principle[8] – that we would consult children and young people and take their opinions seriously. Growing up in Queensland gave children and young people the opportunity to participate in meaningful conversations. We have found children and young people have an intense desire to be included in decisions impacting on their lives and have provided insightful commentary and solutions on a wide array of issues which concern them. The evidence of this desire to be heard is perhaps best reflected in the number of children and young people who chose to participate and share their perspectives.

As part of the project, we heard from more than 7000 children and young people from across the state making this one of the largest projects of its type conducted in Queensland.

Focus group locations

The results of the project presented in this report provide valuable insights into how Queensland's children and youth experience their communities and what they want and need to help them realise their hopes and dreams.

This information has relevance to everyone who is truly committed to promoting the health and well-being of children and young people, now and in the future.

There were more than:

4900
survey responses

1300
written responses to 5 different postcards

200
artwork submissions

1500
children and young people who participated in

102
focus groups

7   Fattore, T., Mason, J., & Watson, E. (2009). When children are asked about their well-being: Towards a framework for guiding policy. *Child Indicators Research*, 2(1), 57-77. p. 62
8   Shier, H. (2001). Pathways to participation: Openings, opportunities and obligations. *Children & Society*, 15(2), 107-117.

Far North Queensland

Number of focus groups	**15**
Number of participants	**225**

North Queensland

Number of focus groups	**17**
Number of participants	**274**

Central Queensland

Number of focus groups	**16**
Number of participants	**203**

South West Queensland

Number of focus groups	**11**
Number of participants	**154**

South East Queensland

Number of focus groups	**43**
Number of participants	**685**
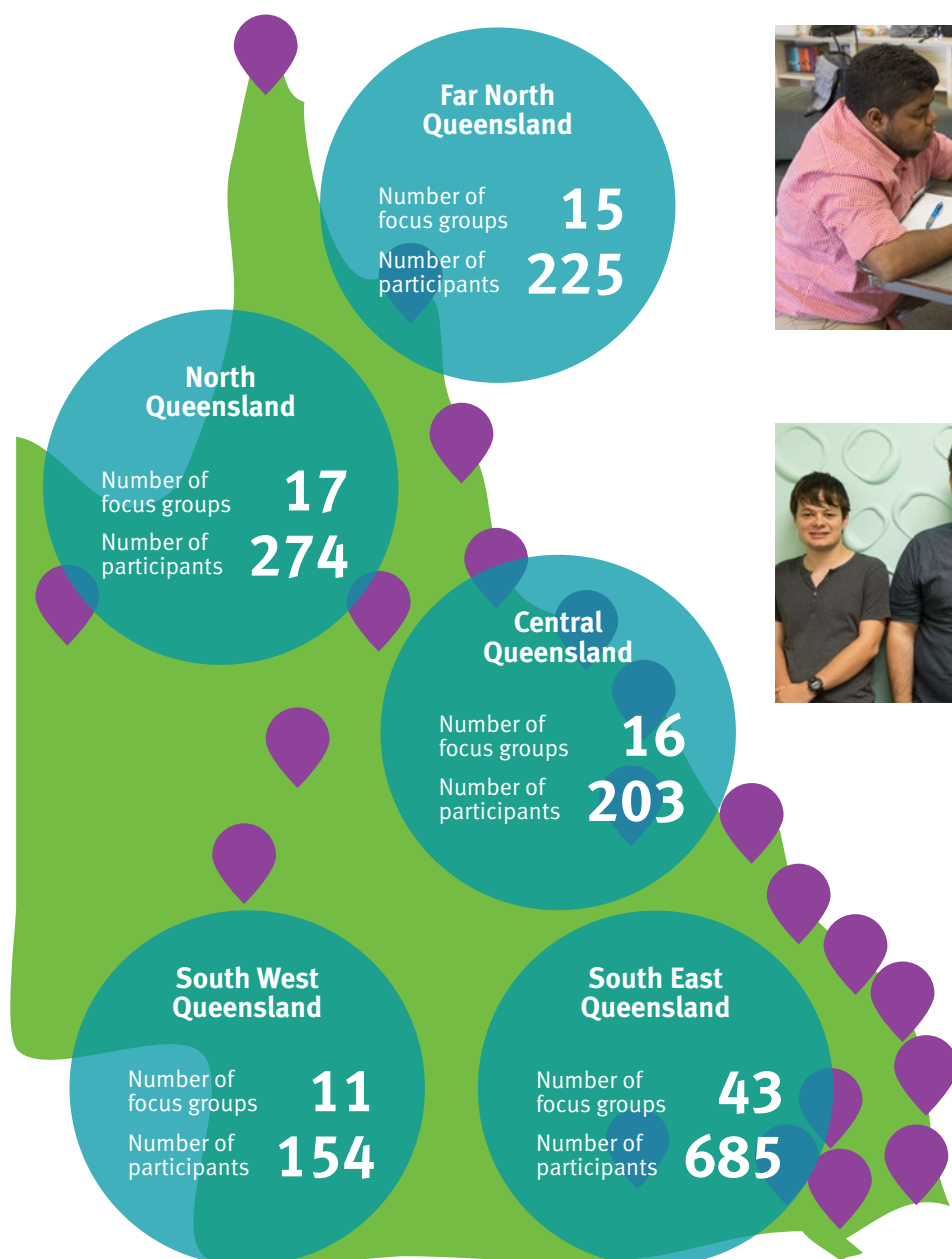
QFCC youth champion Taz

Focus group participants in Far North Queensland

Profile of Queensland's youth population

A snapshot of the general Queensland youth population based on data from the *2016 Census of Population and Housing*[9]

There are

1,149,645

people aged between 0 and 18 years living in QLD.

Gender

% of youth population in QLD

49%
Females

51%
Males
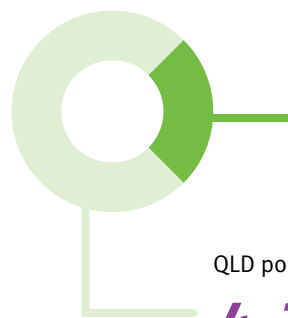
24%

This is nearly a quarter of the state's total population.

QLD population (2016)

4,703,192

Age

as % of total QLD population

0-3 Years	4-6 Years	7-12 Years	13-18 Years
5%	4%	8%	8%

as % of total QLD youth population

20%	26%	33%	31%

Education[10]

806,555

children and young people were enrolled in school in 2017

58%
were in primary school

>

42%
were attending secondary school

Employment[11]

400,300

of 15-24 year olds in QLD were employed as of August 2018

70%
of the 15-24 year old population works part time

Unemployment rate for 15-24 year olds in QLD

13%

9   Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2016). *Census of Population and Housing*. TableBuilder. Findings based on use of ABS TableBuilder data.
10 Queensland Government Statistician. (2018). *Full-time students by government and non-government sector, by school level* (a), Queensland, 1993 to 2017. Retrieved June 18, 2018, from www.qgso.qld.gov.au/products/tables/student-numbers-govt-non-govt-qld/index.php
11 Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2018). *Labour Force Australia*. Catalogue No. 6202.0. Retrieved September 25, 2018, from www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6202.0
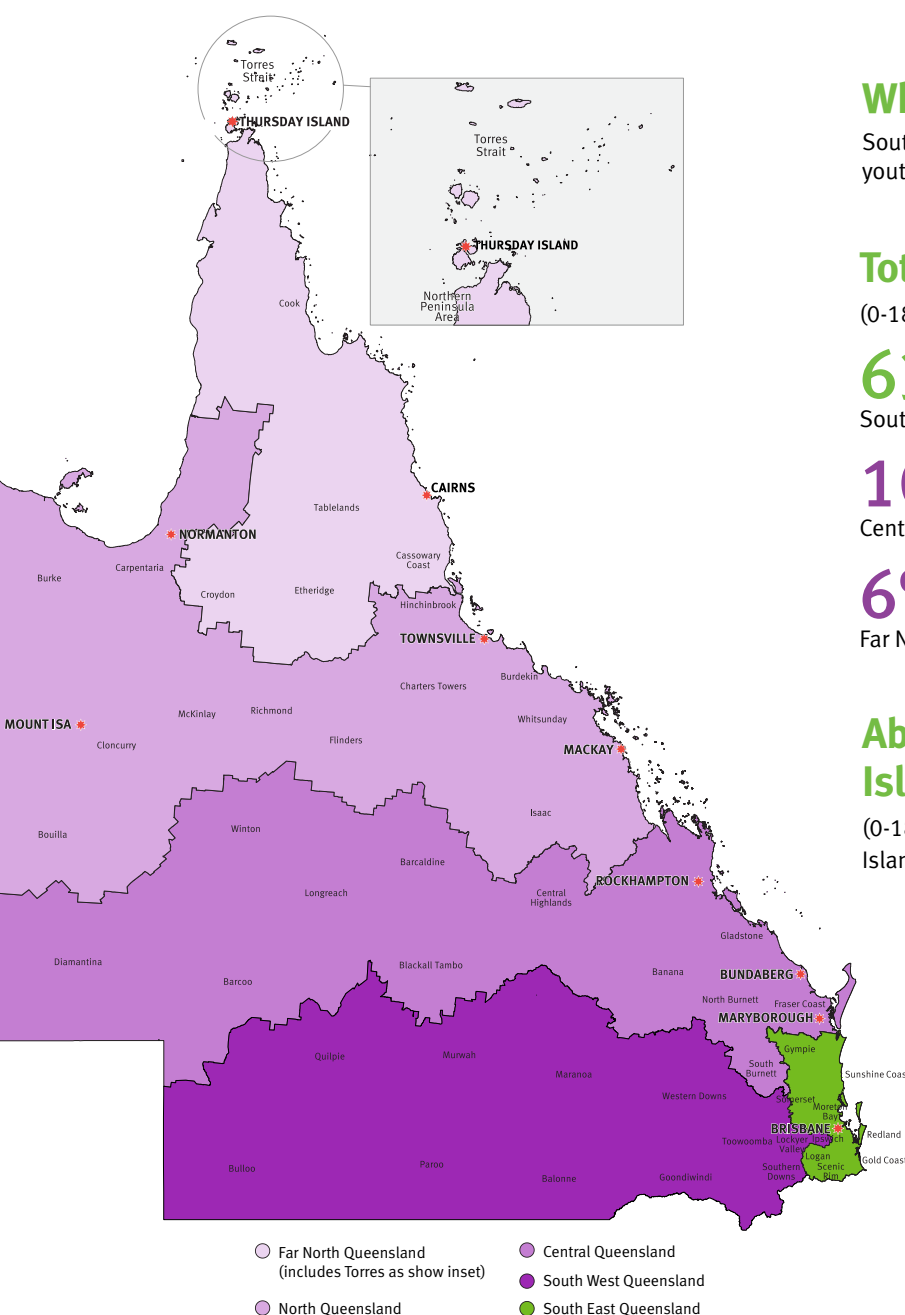
Where do they live?

South East QLD is home to over half of the total youth population of QLD.

Total regional youth population

(0-18 years) as % of total QLD youth population

63%
South East QLD

12%
South West QLD

10%
Central QLD

10%
North QLD

6%
Far North QLD
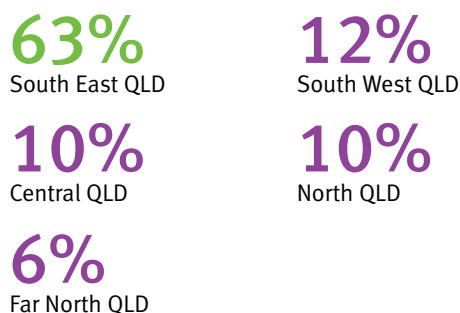
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth population

(0-18 years) as % of QLD Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population

32%
South East QLD

14%
South West QLD

14%
Central QLD

18%
North QLD

21%
Far North QLD

Far North Queensland
(includes Torres as show inset)

North Queensland

Central Queensland

South West Queensland

South East Queensland
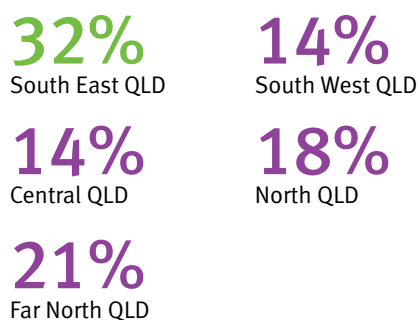
Refugee and asylum seekers

From 1 July 2017 – 30 June 2018, 2081 people who entered Australia under the Humanitarian Migrant Scheme settled in Queensland. Fifty nine per cent (1225) were children and young people, aged 0-24 years[12].

Settlement areas

47%
South East QLD

35%
South West QLD

11%
North QLD

7%
Far North QLD

12 Australian Government. (2018). *Settlement Data Report 2017-2018*. Retrieved July 10, 2018, from www.data.gov.au/dataset/settlement-reports

MY COMMUNITY

Children and young people told us what it is like growing up in their communities.

The best things about our community are:

- people who are nice and friendly
- fun things to do in your free time
- community events and activities
- sporting activities
- good parks and recreation spaces
- spending time with family.

Community is:

- the people who support us
- coming together to celebrate and spend time at community events
- helping one another in tough times
- people from different cultures and religions
- having common goals and interests
- places to come together to share experiences and build trust.

We would like our community to have:

- more affordable activities and creative arts activities
- park equipment for older kids
- natural play spaces
- better public transport
- more safe places for us to spend time with our friends
- youth-friendly facilities.

We want adults to:

- respect us more
- listen to our ideas
- involve us in decision making and finding solutions
- make sure everyone is treated fairly.

MY COMMUNITY

The healthy development of children and their ability to reach their full potential depends upon a range of factors, including the characteristics of the child, their family and the economic and social environment in which they live.[13]

Current child-friendly initiatives seek to promote child well-being through healthy communities. They recognise positively influencing the development of children is a powerful contributor to the productivity of society as a whole and provides a solid basis for community and economic development.[14]

Understanding how children and young people experience their communities at a local level can:

> *…help contribute to decision making and interventions that move beyond the individual level, which has shown limited sustained success, to the broader community level (e.g. place based initiatives). This has the potential to benefit many children and families in the long term.[15]*

A growing body of research highlights the importance of community in the lives of children. The characteristics of the neighbourhood in which children live have been related to children's cognitive development and educational achievement,[16] propensity for risk-taking behaviours,[17] teenage child-bearing,[18] emotional and psychological well-being,[19] physical health,[20] and social-emotional and learning outcomes.[21]

Identifying areas of community concerns, strengths and weaknesses assists community groups, businesses and governments to better understand priority areas for attention. This understanding can then help direct investment and effort to those areas.

The 2017 Kids in Communities Study (KICS), sought to understand the community factors which are consistently related to better outcomes for children.[22] The study identified a number of ways in which local communities impact on a child's well-being. These community factors can be summarised as:

- availability, diversity, quality, coordination and access to services and facilities
- perceived safety
- public transport availability
- public open spaces and the natural environment
- a strong sense of community attachment, belonging and pride.

What children and young people told us through the Growing up in Queensland project supported these findings.

13 Edwards, B. (2005). Does it take a village? An investigation of neighbourhood effects on Australian children's development. *Family Matters*, 72, 36-43.

14 Goldfield, S., Villanueva, K., Lee, J. L., Robinson, R., Moriarty, A., Peel, D., . . . Katz, I. (2017). *Foundational Community Factors (FCFs) for Early Childhood Development: A Report on the Kids in Communities Study*. Retrieved September 24, 2018, from www.rch.org.au/ccch/research-projects/Kids_in_Communities_Study

15 ibid. p. 3.

16 Crane, J. (1991). The epidemic theory of ghettos and neighborhood effects on dropping out and teenage childbearing. *American Journal of Sociology, 96*(5), 1226-1259.

17 Brooks-Gunn, J., Duncan, G. J., & Aber, J. L. (1997). *Neighborhood poverty: context and consequences for children* (Vol. 1). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

18 Harding, D. J. (2004). Counterfactual models of neighborhood effects: the effect of neighborhood poverty on dropping out and teenage pregnancy. *American Journal of Sociology, 109*(3), 676–719.

19 Aneshensel, C. S., & Sucoff, C. A. (1996). The neighbourhood context of adolescent mental health. *Journal of Health and Socal Behaviour, 37*, 293-310.

20 Morland, K., Wing, S., & Poole, C. (2002). Neighborhood characteristics associated with the location of food stores and food service places. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 22*(1), 23-29.

21 Edwards, B. (2005). Does it take a village? An investigation of neighbourhood effects on Australian children's development. *Family Matters, 72*, 36-43.

22 Goldfield, S., Villanueva, K., Lee, J. L., Robinson, R., Moriarty, A., Peel, D., . . . Katz, I. (2017). *Foundational Community Factors (FCFs) for Early Childhood Development: A Report on the Kids in Communities Study*. Retrieved September 24, 2018, from www.rch.org.au/ccch/research-projects/Kids_in_Communities_Study

'This is my mum and me next to a tree with my dog. My tree house has a real bath-tub inside. I drew my treehouse because it makes me happy. Because I can see my friends from there, and my lovely park and people wave to me.'

Artwork submission, South East Queensland

Community is a social space within which people are personally connected and known to one another. Within this social space, people provide friendship and support to one another and work towards common goals. Respect and kindness are very important. The people who make up a community can be diverse.[23]

Community means many things to different people. As part of the Growing up in Queensland project, children and young people in Queensland were asked about what the word community means to them.

They identified communities as being made up of the physical place, town or neighbourhood they live in, the places they spend their time and the people they spend time with. They spoke about the connection between community members and the support they have for each other as being an important and positive part of their communities. They also described communities as places where people from different backgrounds come together to share culture, language and develop relationships of trust.

Many young people said they belong to more than one community. They distinguished sporting communities, schools and neighbourhoods as different communities, with unique characteristics of value.

Children and young people in Queensland had many positive things to say about their communities and their experiences growing up in Queensland. They see communities as important places of connection, relationships, social engagement, social participation, health and well-being, as well as support in tough times. Most importantly children and young people want to feel safe, valued, respected and included when they are spending time in their many communities.

They expressed insightful ideas about what they want for their communities. They discussed the positive aspects of communities and what they would like to see change. They consistently offered considered, practical ideas for what would make their community a better place for people their age.

23 Bessell, S., & Mason, J. (2014). Putting the Pieces *Together: Children, Communities and Social Capital in Australia*. Australian National University. Retrieved November 1, 2018, from cpc.crawford.anu.edu.au/pdf/2014/publications/Children-Communities-and-Social-Capital-Report-FINAL-Colour-March-2014.pdf. p. 13.

'A community is a place where everyone belongs because of a specific reason. I think I belong to a number of communities. There is my home community which I really like. There is my neighbourhood community where we all grew up close together and then there is my school community which I feel really close to. Then there is my suburb community and sport and all my extra-curricular activities which are a massive community which is sometimes interlinked. If I didn't belong to a community I would feel really alone.'

Secondary student, South East Queensland

'Community is a place where you live. Where you learn from your family and the people around you. It is a place we can be safe and happy and have fun. It is a place where you build your home and where you can have a good life.'

Primary student, Far North Queensland

'Community is important. It is the people around you who you can rely on and who helpand support you.'

Secondary student, Central Queensland

Relationships and connection

A sense of community can be referred to under the umbrella term 'social capital'. Strong social capital within a community fosters trust and increased social interaction among neighbours, which can lead to positive support for children. Positive social capital is associated with higher behavioural scores, reduced school dropout rates, improved mental health outcomes and improved overall well-being in children.[24]

Children and young people in Queensland place special emphasis on the relationships and connections they have with people in their communities. Having these relationships and connections offers reassurance, comfort and a sense of looking out for one another. Children and young people report that it keeps them accountable, too.

'What's good is the community connection where you can walk up and down the street and say 'hi' to everyone. But you can't get away with anything in a small town. If someone sees you do anything, they go and tell your parents.'

Secondary student, Central Queensland

'I like to be busy and play. The wind is blowing my toys and I am trying to get them back because it's fun. I love lots of people everywhere. I love my family and my house and going to the park.'

Artwork submission, South East Queensland

24 Goldfield, S., Villanueva, K., Lee, J. L., Robinson, R., Moriarty, A., Peel, D., . . . Katz, I. (2017). *Foundational Community Factors (FCFs) for Early Childhood Development: A Report on the Kids in Communities Study*. Retrieved September 24, 2018, from www.rch.org.au/ccch/research-projects/Kids_in_Communities_Study

The most important things for children and young people in Queensland today

FRIENDS
Health
A VOICE
Money
Pets
Teachers
Video games
Safety
EDUCATION
Books
Online Connections
HOME
HEALTHCARE
Religion
Further study
Public transport
SOCIAL LIFE
Holidays
Family
Support advice
CARING
Healthy food
INTERNET
Jobs
Leisure & hobbies

Older citizens

Connecting with older citizens in their community is also important for many children and young people - both for the relationship, but also for the life skills they can learn from a different generation.

'I really enjoy being friends with older people. They teach you life skills. Give cooking lessons. They welcome teaching younger people.'

Secondary student, Central Queensland

Pets

Pets play an important role in providing support and comfort for children and young people. Focus group participants spoke about being able to tell their pets anything and receiving unconditional comfort from them when they were feeling sad or upset. Children and young people often spoke about pets being something you need to be happy.

'If I'm agro I tell my dog and she makes me laugh and I'll give her a treat. Pets sometimes know when you are upset.'

Youth group participant, South East Queensland

'I need my dogs. I like them because they don't judge me.'

Secondary student, South West Queensland

Coming together as a community

Children and young people discussed the importance of having connection to others in their community through common goals and interests. Many reported positive experiences in their community, for example when people come together to help others who are 'doing it tough' or in times of crisis, such as natural disasters. They spoke about these experiences giving them a sense of security because people look out for one another.

'A few people have had their houses go up in flames. As soon as that happened we were there fundraising and seeing what we could do for them to get the right compensation and everything. But it's the smaller things too, like when someone gets sick, everyone pitches in and helps them.'

Secondary student, South West Queensland

'There are lots of different kinds of people in my neighbourhood and every once in a while there is an invitation in our mail box to a barbeque to try and bring people together. This happens only every couple of years. If more people could get involved more often it would help... The best way to get close to people is to just sit down and have a bit of a chat and ask them how they are going. Those conversations can then turn into a support line if you are going through some difficult stuff.'

Secondary student, South East Queensland

We love animals

Primary student, Far North Queensland
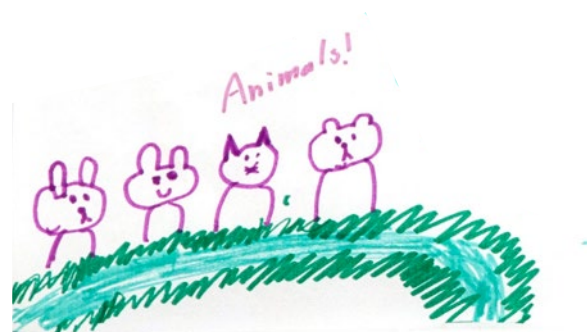
> 'Life would be better for youth in Queensland if we had more multicultural weeks, days and activities ... It would also be better if we built more cultural and religious buildings and ... places for youth to socialise and work together in unity.'
>
> Postcard response, South East Queensland

Celebrating culture

Children and young people value the diversity of their communities. They said they enjoy the times when the community comes together to learn about different cultures and traditions. These celebrations were often connected with their discussion of community celebrations more generally. They recognised the importance of understanding different cultures as part of communities being welcoming and inclusive.

Trust and respect

More than half (55 per cent) of 13-18 year olds surveyed said they can trust most people in their community.

While many (58 per cent) of children and young people surveyed said people in their community are 'nice/friendly to people my age', fewer than half (44 per cent) said adults 'in my community respect people my age'. This was reflected in focus groups, where children and young people said they value relationships with adults who listen to them and take their opinions seriously. Children and young people said they often feel devalued by adults.

When asked what they wanted from community decision makers, 25 per cent of children highlighted the need for decision makers to listen to young people's views. Examples of issues flagged by children as needing 'better solutions' and more consultation from decision makers included topics such as education (9 per cent), equality and fairness in the community (e.g. relating to issues such as gender, LGBTIQ, and race) (8 per cent) and mental health support and services (6 per cent).

'Sometimes they stereotype us and say that we spend all day inside on technology or playing games. They think we never go outside or that we are stealing things and being nuisances.'

Secondary student, South West Queensland

They said having two-way conversations would allow them to participate in their communities in a more meaningful way. Children and young people who participated in the focus groups expressed appreciation for having the opportunity to be engaged in this way and said they felt valued by the idea of influencing decision makers.

'I decided to take part in this focus group because it was a chance to have my say and not have my views dismissed just because people think I'm too young to have an opinion.'

Secondary student, Central Queensland

'We value just being heard. It has impact.'

Youth group participant, Far North Queensland

'I like my culture on the weekends.'

*Artwork submission,
Far North Queensland*

How they spend their time

As part of the survey, respondents were asked to indicate how much time they spent on a range of different activities. Results indicated the activities that most children and young people spend time on 'every day' are being online (67 per cent), watching/streaming TV and movies (35 per cent), doing homework and assignments (25 per cent) and doing sport/fitness activities (24 per cent). Twelve per cent of children and young people reported 'never' doing sport/fitness activities and 7 per cent 'never' hung out with friends.

While most responses across Queensland showed similar results, a lower percentage of children and young people in South West Queensland (60 per cent) and Far North Queensland (63 per cent) reported daily online activity. However, children and young people in these two regions indicated spending more time daily on sport or fitness activities (29 per cent in South West Queensland and 31 per cent in Far North Queensland).

Spending time with family

Family is important to Queensland's children and young people. When asked if they 'get to spend enough time with parents, carers or family, 68 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed. Most survey respondents (81 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'I enjoy spending time with my parents or carers.'

Focus group participants spoke about the opportunities children and young people need in order to have successful outcomes. Often, spending quality time with parents or carers and family was singled out as being of particular importance to them.

More broadly, participants described having time to do things they enjoyed with their parents or carers or families as providing a good balance between school and life outside of school.

The Growing up in Queensland results align with the findings from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC). The majority of Queensland children (71 per cent), participating in the LSAC reported the amount of time they spent with their parents was 'about right'. LSAC provides us with a deeper understanding of the different experiences between genders, where around 40 per cent of 14 - 15 year old girls reported the amount of time spent with their father was not enough compared to boys of the same age (25 per cent).[25]

'I love playing soccer with my sister and my dad. I love my dad.'

Artwork submission, South East Queensland

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25 Australian Institute of Family Studies. (2018). *Children Living in Queensland: Learnings from Growing up in Australia Technical Paper*. Unpublished.

Having places to go and things to do

Designing neighbourhoods to encourage children's health and well-being means including access to places like green spaces and nature, local infrastructure and services. Evidence shows destinations such as schools, recreation venues, and child and health care services all have inherent functional roles but can also serve as physical places for interacting socially and developing networks of support. These places may influence children's development by providing opportunities to learn, explore, recreate, socialise, and interact.[26]

Sport and culture

Children and young people place special emphasis on playing sport and having access to a range of extracurricular activities within their communities. They talked about engaging in these types of activities for health and wellness purposes, as well as for social reasons to meet and spend time with people their age in a safe environment.

However, participants noted the same opportunities were not necessarily available for children and young people interested in music and the arts, particularly in regional Queensland where they said access to creative activities is limited.

'I'd like to see more programs that involve parents and their kids.'
Postcard response, Far North Queensland

'To feel happy you need to prioritise spending time with your family as well as your friends'.
Youth group participant, Central Queensland

'Music is really important to me but you have to tra... long way to participate in group activities, like Bat... the Bands. I can't do music as a class in school eith... It has to be done as an extracurricular activity and ... out of your own time and pocket. If I need equipme... have to order it online and sometimes it will be bro... when it arrives.'

Secondary student, South West Queensland

'For little kids and for older people this place is rea... good but for teenagers who don't like sport, like m... for instance, who doesn't even like watching it, the... is almost nothing to do except just sit in a room an... forget everything of existence. I didn't even have W... until recently.'

Secondary student, Central Queensland

'More riding bikes to help our environment and more safe places to ride.'

Artwork submission, South East Queensland

26 Goldfield, S., Villanueva, K., Lee, J. L., Robinson, R., Moriarty, A., Peel, D., . . . Katz, I. (2017). *Foundational Community Factors (FCFs) for Early Childhood Development: A Report on the Kids in Communities Study*. Retrieved September 24, 2018, from www.rch.org.au/ccch/research-projects/Kids_in_Communities_Study

Parks and green spaces

Quality public open spaces, such as parks, can strengthen family relationships and provide safe green environments for children and young people to play. Access to outdoor spaces increases participation in different types of physical activity, improving motor skills, and social development. Exposure to green space and physical activities has also been associated with enhanced emotional well-being. In addition, perceived high quality public open space may facilitate social interaction and create a sense of community.[27]

During focus groups, children and young people highlighted the importance of having safe and usable public spaces and a means of accessing them. In particular, they saw having parks with equipment that is fun and challenging for all age groups as an asset in the community.

Older children and teenagers were vocal about wanting age-appropriate equipment. They noted most parks were 'great' for younger children but teenagers outgrow the commonly available equipment in playgrounds. Some ideas they had for age-appropriate equipment for teenagers included climbing walls, mazes and flying foxes. They also suggested providing equipment for children with disabilities.

> 'I'd like to see more equipment in parks for kids with disabilities because everyone should be able to enjoy playgrounds.'
> Primary student, Central Queensland

> 'Parks and playgrounds are good, but I'd like to see bigger and more challenging playground equipment, like a climbing wall, for kids our age.'
> Secondary student, South West Queensland

> 'I love the big round swings in parks, but they need to be 'proper human sized'. Parks need to be designed for everyone to have fun, not just little kids.'
> Secondary student, South East Queensland

'Nature and playgrounds because that is what is important to me.'

Artwork submission, South East Queensland

27 Goldfield, S., Villanueva, K., Lee, J. L., Robinson, R., Moriarty, A., Peel, D., . . . Katz, I. (2017). *Foundational Community Factors (FCFs) for Early Childhood Development: A Report on the Kids in Communities Study*. Retrieved September 24, 2018, from www.rch.org.au/ccch/research-projects/Kids_in_Communities_Study

Natural play environments (with elements such as trees, wood and flowers) also play a part, supporting children's cognitive and physical development. Children who play in natural areas engage in more physically demanding play, demonstrate better gross motor skills (for example, climbing, balance and coordination), have increased attention spans, and fewer sick days compared with children who play in purpose-built playgrounds.[28]

In the Growing up in Queensland project, children and young people expressed a strong appreciation of the natural environment. They valued having access to green spaces and living near or among wildlife. All age groups in all regions wanted these spaces not to be controlled or uniform. Rather, they wanted winding paths and places to explore, engaging with the natural environment.

'We don't just want straight paths to ride our bikes on.'

Kindergarten student, South West Queensland

'Why can't there be places in parks where there are sticks and branches so kids can build forts for example and each day they are broken down and you can build something new the next day?'

Secondary student, North Queensland

Some children and young people noted the lack of these types of areas or a lack of facilities in parks in their communities as reasons for not spending time in the places they like and doing the things they enjoy.

'Kids in apartments need to have safe places to play and things they can do so they don't just stay home.'

Primary student, South East Queensland

'We need public toilets in our park. You don't get to spend as much time there as you want because you need to go home to go to the bathroom.'

Kindergarten student, South West Queensland

Recreation and retail choices

When asked specifically about the types of facilities they would like to see available in their local community, 15 per cent of survey respondents wanted age-appropriate retail facilities, such as restaurants, shops and cinemas, and 14 per cent wanted to see leisure and related facilities such as trampoline parks, theme parks, skating rinks and bowling alleys. These views were echoed in every focus group making it apparent that spending time with friends at safe, fun, youth friendly places is a vital part of growing up.

Infrastructure such as bike paths and footpaths all contribute to the 'walkability' of a community and build the opportunity for social interaction. Health research suggests a connection between the built environment and social interactions. For instance, more walkable neighbourhoods, characterised by more connected streets, a higher number of residential dwellings and a greater mix of local destinations, have been found to increase social interactions. This is because people are more likely to walk, cycle, and linger locally.[29]

'People playing with friends in this picture, it is me and my best friend, so people don't become alone'

Artwork submission, South East Queensland

28 Goldfield, S., Villanueva, K., Lee, J. L., Robinson, R., Moriarty, A., Peel, D., . . . Katz, I. (2017). *Foundational Community Factors (FCFs) for Early Childhood Development: A Report on the Kids in Communities Study*. Retrieved September 24, 2018, from www.rch.org.au/ccch/research-projects/Kids_in_Communities_Study
29 ibid.

Children and young people in Queensland commonly expressed that having fun and engaging things to do in their communities was especially important to them. They provided examples such as skate parks, bikeways and access to recreational activities such as ice-skating and pool facilities as making their communities a good place for people their age.

Universally, children and young people wanted more retail choices. When asked about online shopping, the vast majority said this was good for everyday items like games and stationery but not for clothes. Teenagers in particular emphasised the experience of shopping, including spending time with friends and trying on clothes, was as important and enjoyable as buying a new outfit. In regional areas, they looked forward to travelling to major centres every few months to shop.

Similarly when they talked about streaming entertainment they said they enjoyed the access to a wider range of shows and movies than they could get on free-to-air TV; however, the loss of local cinemas in regional areas restricted their access to new release movies which put them out of step with other people their age.

'One of the problems with the cinema was that it had to compete with a lot of free activities and movie screenings that the Council was offering. Because we are a small town we don't really have the capacity to support things like a cinema unless everyone went along to support it. Unfortunately there are people who do not do that and the rise of on-line movies and Netflix doesn't help.'

Secondary student, Central Queensland

They acknowledged that while they enjoyed the free activities offered by local councils they could see the impact this has on some businesses providing similar activities.

'...It would be good if the Council spread out activities more so it's not just in the holidays too'

Secondary student, Central Queensland

Children and young people valued going to restaurants that are welcoming towards them. They see it as an important part of their social lives. This was particularly apparent among regional focus group participants, who would like the option of going to a café that stays open into the evening. While they acknowledged fast food restaurants are open at night, they wanted an experience with their friends as much as late-night access to food.

'The town needs more night time stuff. After about 6pm it sort of just dies. We've only got the cinemas. It's pretty bad and there nothing other than Maccas open after hours where we could sit down as a group and have dinner together. Sometimes you want something a bit nicer than fast food.'

Secondary student, South West Queensland

Children and young people appreciated things like 'pop up shops' in their town but were conflicted about taking advantage of this opportunity and recognised how it impacts on existing local stores. They spoke insightfully about some decisions they saw negatively impacting on local small businesses. For example, they questioned high rents charged by property owners, which made it difficult for small businesses to survive. They also wondered why owners would prefer to have an empty shop rather than reducing rents and having a new retail outlet.

'There are very limited choices for clothes here. I tend to save up so when we go into the city on the holidays I can shop then. It's ok to buy standard stuff online but I want to try on clothes before I buy them.'
Secondary student, Central Queensland

'Pop up shops are good to increase choices but it means people don't support local businesses.'
Secondary student, Central Queensland

'Why do people make the rents so expensive? Businesses can't make money so they close and we just have empty shops. We need competition to make things cheaper. Doesn't make sense wouldn't it be better to charge less and have rent money coming in?'

Secondary student, North Queensland

'We need better support of small businesses so that more creative, funkier stores can thrive instead of being instantly squashed by bigger businesses.'

Postcard response, location not provided

Youth friendly spaces

For most children and young people, a significant amount of each weekday is spent at school. Outside school hours, much of their time is spent with their peers in the community. This includes being at home or at a friend's house (72 per cent), at shopping centres (59 per cent), the movies (53 per cent) or online (48 per cent). Focus group participants said they had experienced issues when spending time as a group in public places, such as being asked to 'move on' in shopping centres.

Survey respondents were less likely to report spending time with friends at outdoor areas like the beach (25 per cent) or a park (23 per cent). However, children and young people talked about spending more of their time together indoors at people's houses and online due to limited access to appealing public areas. As discussed earlier, they expressed a desire to see more natural places such as parks and playgrounds in their communities. This suggests children and young people would spend more time with friends in outdoor areas if more of these spaces were available.

'I would add some public clubs where children and young people could share their own interests with people without being embarrassed and they may meet people with the same interests as them. It's going to be a positive place to make friends.'

Postcard response, South East Queensland

WHAT MAKES A SPACE YOUTH FRIENDLY?
Children and young people describe youth friendly places as 'safe places to hang out with my friends'. They may include things like:

- couches
- Wi-Fi
- TVs
- movies
- computer games
- activities like fußball or pool
- a place to store equipment like bikes
- offering optional activities like excursions.

'If I were mayor I would ... have more places for children and young people to hang out with their friends without any serious adults hanging around for example an arcade or a leisure complex.'
Postcard response, North Queensland

'Where I live kids wander around and do nothing really so ... I would make a kids centre so they could have fun.'
Postcard response, Far North Queensland

Focus group participants spoke about wanting safe gathering spaces that did not necessarily have an 'agenda' (such as sport or an organised activity). They suggested communities should have more places where they can relax with their friends. They also discussed the importance of having a choice to opt in or out of activities while still having access to a safe space to spend time with their friends.

Many children and young people commented on the facilities offered by Police Citizens Youth Clubs (PCYCs) and local libraries as possible places to spend more time with friends. However, they said access to these services in some smaller communities is restricted if they are not open after school and into the evening or on the weekend.

Activities in these facilities is often seen as being geared more towards younger children or adults. Older children and teenagers said they were not accommodated to the same degree. Children and young people said they felt disappointed when popular programs ceased due to lack of funding or because of staff changes. There was also recognition that local recreation facilities could only support them to a certain skill level. This was more commonly heard in focus groups held in rural and remote areas.

'It would be good if the PCYC was open when we got home from school and on the weekend. There's not much to do here otherwise.'

Primary student, Far North Queensland

'I'm a gymnastics coach and we have a lot of kids coming but they tend to drop out when they get to a certain skill level because we don't have the money needed for better equipment to keep them interested.'

Secondary student, Far North Queensland

Public transport

Lack of reliable or regular public transport was seen by some children and young people as a significant barrier to participating in their preferred recreational and extracurricular activities. For example, in some regional areas, children and young people noted they are limited to school buses, which only run immediately after school. For those who live out of town, the burden is on

their parents to pick them up, so they reported feeling unable to take part without placing additional stress on their family.

'You really need to have your licence out here to do any after school activities. My parents both work full time and if I miss the school bus that's it.'

Secondary student, Central Queensland

'(We need) more options for cheaper public transport. Some people have to pay an insane amount in bus fares just to go to a decent school or get home in the afternoon or to do extracurricular/sports activities. Especially in rural areas.'

Postcard response, Far North Queensland

Cost and scheduling of events

The high costs of local recreational activities and some community events were seen as barriers for young people of all ages. They valued the free activities put on by local councils and businesses but, as stated previously, suggested these be made available more regularly throughout the year rather than clustered during school holiday periods. During focus groups, children and young people spoke about the high cost of entrance fees for events like fairs and music festivals. They also spoke of the price of movie tickets, as well as other costs like purchasing food while at a venue.

'Things are pretty expensive. They need to be more affordable.'

Primary student, South West Queensland

'There's not much to bring youth together. We need activities or events which are free or low cost. If you're not working or are on benefits you can't afford it.'

Youth group participant, Far North Queensland

'Life would be better...if there were more free opportunities and activities...something broad that a wide range of people can do to connect, talk and have enjoyable learning/or not learning experiences.'

*Postcard response, South East Queensland*

Feeling safe

Feelings of safety impact on how children and young people engage with their communities.

Environmental safety

Exposure to traffic influences perceptions of safe communities for children and young people. KICS found parents view increased traffic, speed, and poor availability and design of crossings as high risks to children. This influences their decisions to allow their children to use parks and play in their surrounding environments.[30]

There is evidence of increased injury in children when they are exposed to traffic with limited traffic calming measures such as footpaths, street crossings, side street parking and, traffic lights.[31]
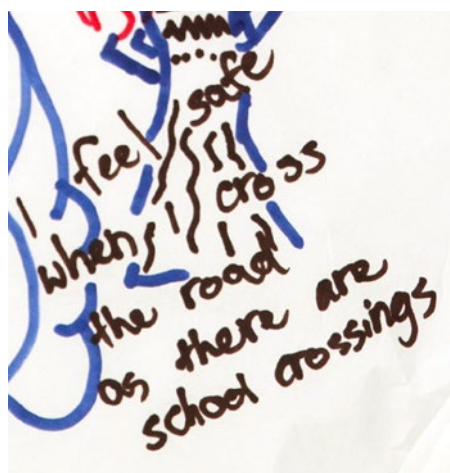
'I feel safe when I cross the road as there are school crossings.'

Primary student, South East Queensland

'We need footpaths so we don't have to walk on the road on the way to school or when we are going home. The road is really narrow and it is a steep corner. I worry someone is going to get hit by a car especially when it is busy in the mornings and afternoons.'
Secondary student, South West Queensland

'There should be a crossing up at the secondary (so) they are able to cross the road safely and in the right [way].'
Postcard response, South East Queensland

'I would get some proper footpaths because I've nearly been run over too many times.'
Postcard response, Central Queensland

Some focus group participants spoke about a lack of footpaths and the risks they felt this posed when they had to walk to school. The need for more bike paths was also highlighted as something children and young people thought would make travel safer for them.

Personal safety

A community's perceived level of crime impacts on feelings of safety, neighbourhood attachment and sense of belonging. These perceptions may limit children's and young people's interactions and use of public spaces. For example, 'stranger danger' is one of the most commonly cited barriers to children's access to the neighbourhood and outdoor environment. This limits play opportunities and affects trust in neighbours.[32]

30 Goldfield, S., Villanueva, K., Lee, J. L., Robinson, R., Moriarty, A., Peel, D., . . . Katz, I. (2017). *Foundational Community Factors (FCFs) for Early Childhood Development: A Report on the Kids in Communities Study*. Retrieved September 24, 2018, from HYPERLINK "http://www.rch.org.au/ccch/research-projects/Kids_in_Communities_Study" www.rch.org.au/ccch/research-projects/Kids_in_Communities_Study
31 ibid.
32 ibid.

The LSAC data allows for a more nuanced understanding of when girls and boys feel unsafe in their community. It shows that as boys and girls get older, differences emerge in how safe they feel in their neighbourhoods. Only 20 per cent of 16 - 17 year old girls felt safe walking alone near home at night time compared to 51 per cent of boys. Girls in this age group are also less likely to feel safe walking alone near home during daylight hours (73 per cent) compared to boys (87 per cent).[33]

'A place where teenagers can hang out at night without being scared or feeling like they are in a dangerous situation. Somewhere that's safe but fun.'
Secondary student, South East Queensland

'Feeling safe is a big part of what it means to be a community.'
Secondary student, South East Queensland

Feelings of safety in their community affect where and how young people spend time with friends. Although most (78 per cent) survey respondents reported 'I feel safe in my neighbourhood or town', more than half (58 per cent) reported 'there could be more safe places for children', 'there were not enough safe places for children' or there are 'no safe places for children in my town'.

Youth groups for teenagers to go to when adults don't get what they are going through and you just want to talk to someone that is going through the same thing or has just gone through it.'

Secondary student, South East Queensland

Focus groups explored reasons children and young people feel unsafe in their community. Certain behaviours contribute to this feeling. These include witnessing adults and older teenagers engaging in activities such as drinking alcohol, fighting and drug taking. Survey results showed respondents were concerned or very concerned about family conflict (34 per cent) and domestic violence (20 per cent).

Wariness of people they do not know, getting lost, being kidnapped or assaulted were recurring concerns for focus group participants.

'I would tell all the people to not bully or drink, do drugs or smoke. It would be a much safer place for people to stay. They will have a happy time with no cigarettes or alcohol, beer, wine etc. It will be a safe environment.'

Postcard response, South East Queensland

'I would make it necessary for one cop to be supervising places like the skate park ... I go there sometimes but 50% of the time I have to return home because of teenagers smoking and drinking ... I would love for our local leisure areas to be safe for children of all ages.'

Postcard response, North Queensland

'For young people I would create a new app for public safety so that if any incident happens they could record it on their phones and send it to the city for action.'

Postcard response, South East Queensland

'My parents always tell us about them growing up and always being outside playing with their friends. Times have changed a lot and as much as we want to be out in parks and being independent it's not that easy any more. We shouldn't have to worry about risks but that is the reality at the moment. The media makes it worse by victimizing women. Every year we get police officers visiting the school to teach us about physical danger and protecting ourselves but I wonder how much is being taught to boys' that 'no' means 'no'.'

Secondary student, South East Queensland

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33 Australian Institute of Family Studies. (2018). *Children Living in Queensland: Learnings from Growing up in Australia Technical Paper*. Unpublished.

Children and young people in focus groups developed an action plan relating to crime and safety in their community. This is what they told us.

What do kids need?

- the right to feel safe
- the support of trustworthy people
- support buddy, supportive friends
- safe and secure spaces to talk about feelings
- adults to support, care for and help kids feel safe
- adults who can care for kids when parents fight awareness and knowledge on what safety is and what it looks like

- professional support
- courage
- health and education
- protection
- comfort.

What do adults currently do that is helpful?

- provide safe places
- provide kids with the right to feel safe
- supportive adults (parents, teachers, friends, family and police) help kids feel safe
- care for kids and protect them
- make laws so kids are safe and protected
- give kids knowledge about how to recognise unsafe situations and know what to do
- help and support kids.

What do adults currently do that is unhelpful?

- abuse kids (mental, sexual or physical abuse and/ or neglect)
- start or escalate fights around kids
- don't listen to kids
- behave violently or aggressively
- be mean
- swear or yell.

What keeps adults from responding well?

- alcohol/drug abuse or addiction
- depression
- work pressures
- lack of understanding of kids problems
- not believing what kids say
- not addressing the issue
- involvement in criminal activity
- domestic and family violence
- not caring about what kids need.

What advice would you give to adults?

- don't do drugs because it could prevent you from keeping your kids safe
- don't commit crimes because it will influence your kids to do it as well
- stop yelling and being angry
- listen to kids more and take them seriously
- use alcohol responsibly
- be more aware and responsible for your kids
- stop fighting
- do what you love to do and be happy
- call a support person for help when you need it
- don't say stuff you don't mean when you are angry
- keep being you
- always be comforting
- let kids experience some unsafe things but not too unsafe
- be a good person, set a good example
- understand that every issue matters
- always report, even if it is not your responsibility
- understand violence is not the answer
- be a voice for younger children
- help and support kids
- be kind and fair
- keep on looking after your child.

Perceptions of safety - impact of the media

Children and young people rely heavily on their parents' and carers' knowledge or perception of safety in their community to build their own understanding of safety. They also discussed the role the news and media play in influencing perceptions of safety in their community.

This discussion extended to topical global issues such as terrorism, nuclear war, gun violence in the United States, domestic violence and crimes against children. Talking about these issues with other children and young people often raises their level of fear that these types of events will happen in their community. They said this causes them to feel anxious about their safety and the safety of their family and friends.

Children and young people spoke about often needing more context about issues, such as the difference between Australian gun laws and those of other countries, to gain an understanding of the real level of risk in their neighbourhood. Teaching children to critically analyse media reporting would help them to gain a balanced understanding of current events.

In their artwork, young children also highlighted concerns about safety and clearly demonstrated the influence media has on them.

'Having less robbery in Queensland. Because there is too much robbery. I've seen it on the news and in some places around the world. Because people are losing stuff that is precious and their money so it's making them poor. There is a bag on her back with all the money. Most thieves steal at night time.'

Artwork submission, South East Queensland

'The news ruins people's days because they report bad stuff which scares little kids.'
Primary student, South East Queensland

Kids need news to deliver facts and not opinions. The news should not take sides, instead it should present both sides.

Secondary students, Central Queensland

'Less murdering. There is lots of murdering now. I hear it on the news. It makes me feel bad we should take away guns and everything that kills.'

Artwork submission, South East Queensland

Unfair treatment

Children and young people also provided information about their concerns and experiences of unfair treatment in their lives. Focus group participants spoke passionately about the need for everyone to be treated equally.

Survey respondents listed the following as being important issues for all children and young people in Queensland, regardless of their cultural or racial background:

- equity and discrimination (40 per cent)
- LGBTIQ+ issues (38 per cent)
- racism (33 per cent)

Around 8 per cent of survey respondents highlighted the need for decision makers to improve equality and fairness in relation to gender, LGBTIQ+ and race. Focus group participants spoke thoughtfully about the need for more education and services to make communities more inclusive and supportive for all people.

Body size and shape, physical appearance and online activities are also listed as common reasons for unfair treatment. These have been reported in the Big Picture section of this report.

In the past 12 months, children and young people said they have witnessed unfair treatment based on:
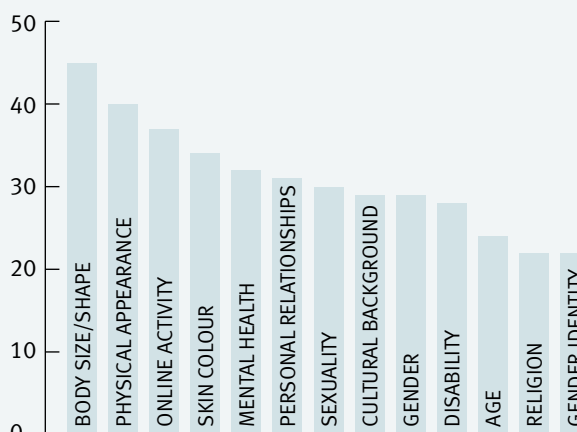
In the past 12 months, children and young people said they have personally experienced unfair treatment because of their:
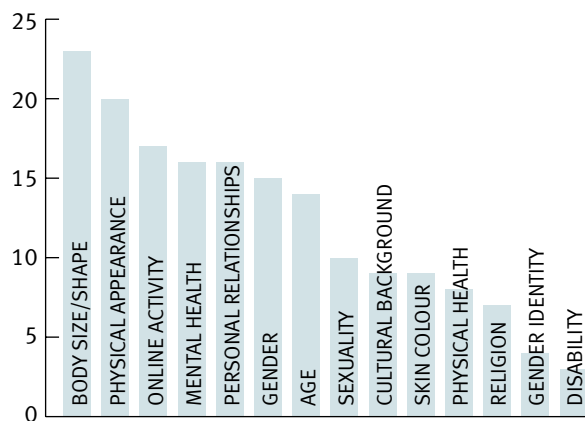
Race

In focus groups, some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people discussed their experiences of negative racial profiling by shops, businesses, police and schools in some areas. Participants from non-English speaking backgrounds spoke about people making racist comments as well as a general attitude in the community and the media of being made to feel unwelcome.

'I asked for something in a shop and the lady serving me assumed I had no money because I am Aboriginal.'

Secondary student, North Queensland

'It makes me feel disgusted. I'm no different to you just because I'm a different skin colour to you.'

Secondary student, South East Queensland

'As a young female Muslim, I have encountered many unfair situations. After school at a bus stop, male students from local senior schools block the stairway. As I was walking towards the stairs, these male students shouted sexual obscenities to me and made me feel unsafe and uncomfortable. Moreover, as a Muslim, I feel there is a high level of discrimination in my community which makes me feel unsafe.'

Secondary student, South East Queensland

'My dad was a refugee and it was instilled in us as we were growing up that not everyone has the life that you do or the opportunities that you do and you need to welcome everyone into your community because it's not about where they have come from but it's about what they can do. The house next door to our house was a rental with people coming and going every six months or so. I got to meet a lot of cool people. People who had just migrated into the country. We should all meet and share experiences and cultures.'

Secondary student, South East Queensland

Queensland participants in the LSAC - reported experiencing more discrimination as they get older, with girls reporting higher levels of discrimination at each age level compared to boys. By age 16 -17, girls reported being unfairly treated because of cultural background (8 per cent) and sexual identity (7 per cent).[34] These results are similar to the Growing up in Queensland survey findings.

44% of children and young people said they had not personally experienced any unfair treatment in the past 12 months.

34 Australian Institute of Family Studies. (2018). *Children Living in Queensland: Learnings from Growing up in Australia Technical Paper*. Unpublished.

'Bridging gaps is difficult in some situations. My dad and my grandparents for instance are not open to the new ways the world is going to evolve into and they are extremely racist and they think it's okay. They need to be taught that it's not okay to criticise someone because of how they look.'
Secondary student, South East Queensland

'We need to support LGBTIQ people.'
Postcard response, South East Queensland

'You need to create your own family. They won't necessarily be blood. They'll be the people who love and support you no matter what.'
Youth group participant, South East Queensland

Artwork submission, South East Queensland

'The drought is an ongoing issue. I don't remember the last time we had a good year. It has a massive impact on our parents but also affects us too. We need more assistance for mental health. We need to create more awareness of the effects of drought on the people as well as the animals. We need people in cities to understand where produce comes from, the steps involved in producing food and the economics of rural life – how far does a shearer travel to work, how much he gets paid, where his money goes'
Secondary student, Central Queensland

Sexuality

Workshop participants, who identify as LGBTIQ+, spoke about feeling isolated and alone. They also highlighted that community education materials designed to provide information regarding sexual and gender identity had the potential to unintentionally 'out' young people before they were ready. For example, brochures with rainbow colours which are designed to be LGBTIQ+ friendly had the potential to expose young people to questions about why they had this material before they were ready to discuss their sexual orientation or gender identity. They reported these situations could make them feel more isolated and increase the potential for bullying.

Some suggested LGBTIQ+ safe zones to assist children and young people to become more at ease with their sexuality and/or gender identification.

Passion for local issues

Children's and young people's acute awareness of current affairs creates passion for their community and feelings of being involved in protecting what is important to their locality and local industries. For example, children and young people living in central and western parts of the state have concerns about the

drought and the effects on farming families and their mental health, the need for support in their local area, and the impact on businesses. Children and young people living in northern coastal areas worry about the health and vitality of the Great Barrier Reef.

Children and young people are genuinely engaged in their local community, have a deep understanding of the issues being faced, and want to participate in finding solutions.

'We need to stop pollution so the Great Barrier Reef is healthier and the animals can live'

Primary student, North Queensland

Responding to what we have heard

Communities provide structures, conditions and resources, which can either help children, young people and their families thrive or limit them by the way they:

- control the use of, and access to, local resources
- influence parent and service provider perceptions of different community groups, and of themselves as a community
- influence how communities work together towards better collective outcomes.

The information provided by children and young people on how they perceive and experience these community factors can help communities strengthen their stakeholder engagement. It can also inform policy recommendations, and program and service development. It can do this by identifying key issues and priorities and providing ideas for future directions to build social and human capital.

Children and young people care about the communities they live in. They described the things they like and do not like and the things that strengthen connections between community members. They want opportunities to spend time safely with their friends and family and to feel included.

From a young age, Queensland children and young people demonstrate a clear and multi-layered understanding of their communities. They have much to contribute to the future planning for towns and neighbourhoods and Queensland as a whole. Through their responses in the survey and engagement in focus groups, they expressed ideas about the ways in which communities could be better for people their age.

These ideas included a range of considered responses, such as better support services for people who are 'doing it tough', support for small business and improvements to online services (which are often seen as a panacea for reduced choices in regional areas). Other ideas include having more accessible and affordable transport systems.

Responses reflect the aspects of their communities they appreciated and enjoyed, such as the natural environment and connections to others, which could be further enhanced in specific ways. For example, when asked about facilities and places, they indicated they would like various recreational facilities and places or services suitable for people their age.

The following tables list suggestions from children and young people. These have been translated into issues adults could consider. We acknowledge the practicalities associated with many of these ideas, such as insurance, safety and cost. However, if communities were to focus attention on even a few of these, they would be able to make a difference for children and young people.

YOUTH FRIENDLY SPACES

What did children and young people say they would like youth friendly spaces to include?

Youth friendly spaces need to be:

- welcoming for youth from all backgrounds, abilities, cultures and orientations
- safe places to spend time with friends
- open when children and young people can attend
- low cost or free
- accessible by public transport.

Adults could consider:

- does your space welcome children and young people?
- does it have activities, resources or spaces that are appealing to children and young people?
- do you ask children and young people from your community what they want when you are planning programs, events and designing spaces?
- have you investigated the availability of safe, inclusive spaces to welcome children and young people of different backgrounds, cultures, abilities and identities?
- can children and young people spend time in these spaces with the ability to opt in or out of activities?
- are there opportunities for children and young people to have conversations with supportive adults if they want to?

GREEN SPACES

What did children and young people say they want in the community's public spaces and playgrounds?

We want our community to:

- preserve bushland and the environment
- make green spaces more organic and incorporate the natural landscape
- provide equipment in playgrounds that can be used by children of all ages and abilities.

Adults could consider:

- does the design of parks and playgrounds in your community preserve the natural landscape and provide interesting places to explore?
- do you involve children and young people in designing playgrounds and green spaces?

SAFETY AND FAIRNESS

What did children and young people say would help them feel safe in their community?

We want adults to:

- understand how exposure to anti-social behaviour impacts on our sense of safety
- seek support and get help if they are struggling with drugs, alcohol and anger issues
- treat all people equally regardless of their race, religion, ability, orientation and culture.

Adults could consider:

- do you have conversations with children and young people about:
  - how to recognise when they feel unsafe?
  - what they can do, who they can call or where they can go if they feel unsafe?
- do you have open conversations about what is in the news and media and ask children and young people what they think about it?
- does your community welcome and include all people?
- does your community have events and activities that build connections and understanding among community members?

HOPES AND DREAMS

Children and young people told us about their plans for the future and the things helping or stopping them from achieving their goals.

To achieve our hopes and dreams we need to have personal drive and resilience.

These people will help us achieve our hopes and dreams:

- parents and carers
- employers who give us a go
- friends
- Wi-Fi
- family
- teachers
- mentors
- adults willing to share their knowledge and experience.

In the future we want to:

- work
- do further study and training
- be successful
- do something we like and are good at
- have a balance in our lives
- be happy
- have a family.

These are some of the things that will help us achieve our goals:

- work experience and volunteering opportunities to help us learn job skills
- more entry level job opportunities
- flexible work to fit around school and study
- understanding the career and education pathways we can follow
- having conversations about careers early and often
- practical information
- life skills
- public transport.

Some of the things that might stop us reaching our goals are:

- lack of support from the adults in our lives
- where we live
- financial difficulties
- slow internet speeds and lack of Wi-Fi reliability
- being put under constant pressure to do well
- feeling like our choices aren't valued
- not learning the skills to prepare us for the future workforce
- not being able to get the information we need to make choices about the future
- our physical and mental health
- family responsibilities (needing to look after others).

HOPES AND DREAMS

All children and young people have the right to imagine what their futures will look like and to know there is support available to help them achieve their goals. How they perceive education and the economy is important in supporting them to make important decisions.

It also creates an opportunity for decision makers to think about the implications for the emerging workforce in Queensland and how to support children and young people today for the roles they will take on in the future.

Children and young people across Queensland are optimistic about their futures.

60% said they feel positive or very positive about their future.

They demonstrate clear understanding of their goals, the types of support they need to achieve them, and some of the challenges they face.

In the future, they want to experience success and move into employment, further education or training. Throughout the project, they identified the importance of education, employment opportunities and preparation for life after school as keys to their future success. Many children and young people also spoke about the importance of family and finding a balance between their responsibilities and the things they enjoy.

Children and young people were asked what they think is important in helping them achieve their hopes and dreams. From a list of factors provided, a significant proportion of respondents (90 per cent) indicated 'my skills, talent and ability' and 'my education' (87 per cent).

During focus groups, when asked what makes life a success, children and young people identified individual characteristics such as resilience, the ability to face challenges, finding what you love to do, being optimistic and being true to yourself as key factors. Most participants acknowledged the role they played in their own success.

'Success is…finding out who you are and having the courage to be yourself and once you are it is a big success.'

Secondary student, North Queensland

'For myself to achieve goals I will need to try my hardest at school….A positive mindset will also help with achieving my goals. Never give up.'

Postcard response, Far North Queensland

'Teachers and parents help guide me into my future but it mostly depends on me and how I go about achieving my goals.'

Postcard response, South East Queensland

'Well I guessed it 1st go - wanting to be an architect.'

Artwork submission, South East Queensland

Education

Most children and young people (76 per cent) reported education is important to them. Good teachers and schools were often listed by focus group participants when they discussed what they valued about their community.

In addition to the positive benefits of education, children and young people also value the contributions teachers and schools make in helping them achieve their hopes and dreams. In focus groups, most spoke about their teachers positively and saw their support as very important to succeeding at school, accessing further education and training, and fitting in.

> **'We need good teachers who help you understand and help you achieve your dream.'**
> Primary student, North Queensland
>
> **'Teachers can help you fit in when you start high school.'**
> Secondary student, South East Queensland

Schools in regions

In regional areas, schools further enrich the lives of children and young people by providing access to activities and opportunities that may not be available in the wider community. Children and young people in regional areas said teachers often share important information about activities or events happening locally and would like this to be provided regularly and consistently.

'School gives you lots of opportunities in a small town that isn't available otherwise. We wouldn't get access to district, regional or state sporting opportunities without school. School also has a wider range of sport than we can access in town. Netball and rugby are the only club sports available but at school we get to try different things.'

Secondary student, South West Queensland

Tailored learning

Children and young people said it is helpful when adults explain information in different ways to take account of different learning styles. They raised the importance of varied teaching methods. They suggested increasing the links between what they are learning and real-world scenarios to help them learn and understand the relevance of what they are being taught.

'Often teenagers are told to embrace their individuality and be different, but the school system forces all students to go through the same tests and assignment and make them answer it the same way. Young people should be able to choose what they study and not be forced to complete certain subjects.'

Postcard response, South East Queensland

'There needs to be a broader way of learning than how we are taught at school now. It shouldn't be all about books.'

Secondary student, South West Queensland

In general, children and young people highlighted the importance of having teachers they connect with. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students highly valued teachers who reflect their cultural heritage. They often spoke about how having more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers would improve their education by teaching in first languages and building their knowledge of culture and traditions.

Artwork submission,
South East Queensland

'More Indigenous teachers would help me achieve my future career goals because I grew up in the Torres Strait and English is a second language. I would be able to understand a bit more in school.'

Postcard response, Far North Queensland

'We need more black teachers. There are only white teachers in our school.'

Primary student, Central Queensland

'We need to teach traditional languages and culture backgrounds in schools.'

Postcard response, South West Queensland

'Life would be better for children and young people if we learnt more about Aboriginal history in school time and leaned how Indigenous people lived.'

Postcard response, South East Queensland

Introduction of the new Australian Tertiary Admission Rank system

In focus groups, many children and young people said the upcoming changeover to the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) system in secondary schools will mean a greater focus on individual performance, rather than the performance of their school or grade level. They acknowledged the benefits of this change.

> **'We keep being told how hard it's going to be but not giving details of why. They have some information nights but it's not really detailed.'**
> Secondary student, South East Queensland

Participants are concerned about the way the changes are being communicated. This was particularly true for current year 10 students who will be the first cohort to go through the system in 2020. They suggested schools provide them with better, youth-friendly information about how the ATAR system works, the new methods of assessment, and the way grades will be calculated. They were worried about the amount of change they will need to manage and about the new system being 'more difficult'. They would like to have clear, accurate information to answer their questions and resolve their concerns.

'I don't really know how the ATAR system is going to work but I don't want my whole life's work to be based on one exam and to impact the rest of my life.'

Secondary student, Central Queensland

'It makes it difficult to feel confident that it will be ok when you hear that even the teachers are failing the practice tests. If they can't do it how are they going to teach us?'

Secondary students, South West Queensland

Managing stress

Sixty per cent of survey respondents reported they were concerned or very concerned about the amount of stress in their lives. In focus groups, participants said the main contributing factors were school workloads, competing priorities and adult expectations.

School grades

Children and young people recognise the importance of good academic performance and many push themselves to succeed. Over half of survey respondents (54 per cent) indicated they were worried about their school grades and a third (34 per cent) worried their academic ability could be a barrier to achieving their hopes and dreams. This was even higher in Central Queensland where 63 per cent of survey respondents indicated school grades affect them personally and are of particular concern.

> **'I'm in an excellence class for maths and I have to keep getting A's to stay there. If for some reason I get a lower grade you can feel the disappointment from your teachers and parents.'**
> Secondary student, Central Queensland

'There is endless stress. I worry about when all the stress will end. Some days I just wish I could skip to the good parts of life because it feels like the stress is forever. I just want one second when I'm not stressing about something. All the Positive Education Program stuff does nothing to help the stress.'

Postcard response, no other details provided

In focus groups, children and young people worried about how their school grades will impact on their future success and said this causes them to feel stressed. They said it was especially unhelpful when adults reiterated the importance of getting good grades. This puts undue pressure on them and increases stress when they feel they are not meeting expectations.

'You kind of set expectations for yourself without knowing it. In maths and science, if I don't get in the A or B+ range I get really frustrated with myself knowing that I was so close but so far. When you know you can achieve it and you don't, you put extra pressure on yourself to achieve it. Having an older sister also creates added self-expectations because I want to be like her or do better than her.'

Secondary student, South East Queensland

Children and young people said it was not helpful when adults did not ask about school or take an active interest in how they were coping. Additionally, they discussed feeling demotivated and worried at times when adults did not celebrate small achievements or signs of progress, such as finally understanding a concept they had trouble with previously.

'Adults believe that they know what is best for us, but that is not always the case. They don't see things from our perspective. They think that they know everything but they don't. They don't listen to what you say and don't fully understand what the issue is.'

Secondary student, South East Queensland

Children and young people demonstrated that while they are worried, they have many ideas for how they could feel supported in managing this stress. They suggested parents and schools put less pressure on them to succeed, provide more time to complete tasks, and provide more opportunities for practical skills and career-directed learning.

'They could help us to prepare better. Once in Year 7 we had seven pieces of assessment due in one week. This year, this term, the maximum was three. The reduction in assessments was of great benefit to our mindset. For me personally, I feel a lot better when I can focus on assessments coming up gradually and not all at one time.'

Secondary student, South East Queensland

Balance and free time

Children and young people spend over 30 hours a week at school and many participate in extracurricular activities after school. They consistently raised the difficulty of balancing schoolwork, extracurricular activities and spending time with family or doing leisure activities. They reported feeling overburdened with homework and assessment, which they saw as contributing to their stress and not always helpful to their learning. This was a common statement from participants in both primary and secondary years.

'I'm getting home some nights at 6 pm and then I have dinner and then I have homework to do and then I miss a lot of sleep and feel tired all the time. And there is not a lot of time to spend with family.'

Secondary student, South East Queensland

Survey respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a statement about whether they get enough free time to do things they like. Just over half (55 per cent) of surveyed children and young people agreed with the statement. Focus group feedback highlighted the challenges in balancing school and home life and the sacrifices which often had to be made by children and young people to prioritise school.

'My parents encourage me to do an afterschool activity every day of the school week and that is a challenge because I don't have enough time.'

Primary student, Central Queensland

'If I were mayor I would take off some homework because kids are not getting family time because kids are spending too much time on homework.'

Postcard response, South West Queensland

'Life would be better if … we had less pressure and more time. For young people life is a race: a race to learn, achieve, to develop, and mostly, to experience. When we grow old work and family life suffocate us … Our only chance to grow is impeded by pressure from parents and schooling. Less emphasis should be placed on due dates and word counts, and more on growth.'

Postcard response, South East Queensland

Children and young people said they would like to know how to prioritise responsibilities and extracurricular activities around school. They also discussed the need for adults (and specifically teachers) to be mindful of competing priorities when allocating work and deadlines, and to provide more proactive strategies to help them before they feel overwhelmed.

Dealing with stress

Children and young people in focus groups said they would like diverse support systems to help alleviate stress and pressures arising from school and their other commitments. This included having access to adult mentors, peer-support mechanisms and informal support groups external to school where they are able to seek help.

'A stress management group would be useful. My weekends are pretty packed because I normally have two games of rugby and then cricket on Sundays. I have to do all my homework on Saturdays.'

Secondary student, South East Queensland

'There needs to be more communication and coordination between subject teachers regarding setting homework to avoid overloading students. There should also be optional revision rather than homework. Even when there is not much assessment my main problem is homework. The small amount of time that I have at home each day is taken up with homework.'

Secondary student, South East Queensland

'Having you here as someone that is not part of the school, we are more likely to open up and be honest with each other. I like that this is a discussion in a small group and we are not just being lectured at which is not a constructive way. I know logistically our school couldn't do this sort of thing every week but it would be really beneficial as it helps us to learn that everyone is different and has a different way of dealing with stuff.'

Secondary student, South East Queensland

Children and young people identified when adults are positive and encouraging, it helps them feel more confident in their abilities and less worried about school. They appreciated when adults offered opportunities to talk openly about issues and competing priorities.

Children and young people want adults to take an interest in their education and be available when they need them. Focus group participants recognised the stressors and responsibilities adults have in their own lives, which can be a barrier to them providing support with concerns about school. They identified the importance of adults seeking support to help reduce their own stress, which may improve their ability to support children and young people.

On the topic of education, children and young people contributed their thoughts on the things they need and provided advice to adults on how they can support them.

What do kids need?

- clear and accurate information about the new ATAR system, including study strategies, sample exams, assessment methods and structure
- the option to ask questions of people who know the new ATAR system or who have completed exams
- support, positivity, love, reassurance, acceptance, understanding and encouragement
- adequate food and sleep
- reliable internet
- acceptance and information about different pathways and choices other than university
- experience and opportunities
- study and life balance
- freedom, trust and independence
- additional support and time on assessments and exams
- time for relaxation and play
- less pressure.

What do adults currently do that is helpful?

- provide different opportunities from a young age
- give guidance and advice based on life experiences
- listen and provide support in decision making
- give support with homework
- provide financial support
- have a positive attitude which increases self-confidence
- consider and support mental health needs

What do adults currently do that is unhelpful?

- lack of information about the new ATAR system
- lack of alternative options for different learning styles
- lack of trust and support for students' decisions
- don't listen
- make decisions on behalf of students
- don't allow students to try different pathways, experiment and learn from their own mistakes
- instil pressure and unrealistic expectations
- make comparisons to others including siblings
- show negative attitudes and lack of understanding about the current generation and their needs
- talk too much about the future
- overreact to situations
- use unhelpful messages – i.e. 'you're ok' or 'you aren't trying hard enough'
- interfere without asking what they can do to help
- don't celebrate successes and achievements
- lack of support and explanations and feedback on assessment tasks
- give too much homework.

What keeps adults from responding well?

- not knowing what students need or how to help
- lack of or outdated knowledge
- transport and location barriers
- generational differences and comparisons
- unrealistic expectations
- social expectations
- stress, work, busy schedules and financial pressures
- arguments and disagreements
- substance abuse
- don't know what to ask or how to help.

What advice would you give to adults?

- teach proactive stress and time management strategies
- listen to the concerns of students and supply additional information when needed
- respect what young people have to say
- provide more information on grading criteria
- provide more practical learning opportunities
- give practice exams in earlier grades (Grades 5 - 8)
- have a central place where students can access relevant information
- give students opportunities to try to learn from their mistakes
- consider the opinions and thoughts of students
- have discussions in constructive ways and at suitable times
- be mindful of personal stress and how this impacts on students
- seek support or talk to someone if you are having issues
- support students to do their best
- ask how they can help
- be more trusting
- reduce stereotyping of teenagers
- don't 'over help' or become overinvolved
- put less pressure and stress on students.

The sources of support for children and young people when they are making decisions.

PARENTS

INTERNET

Teachers

COACH

MYSELF

PSYCHOLOGIST

FRIENDS

YOUTH WORKER

School counsellor

No one

Religious community

FAMILY
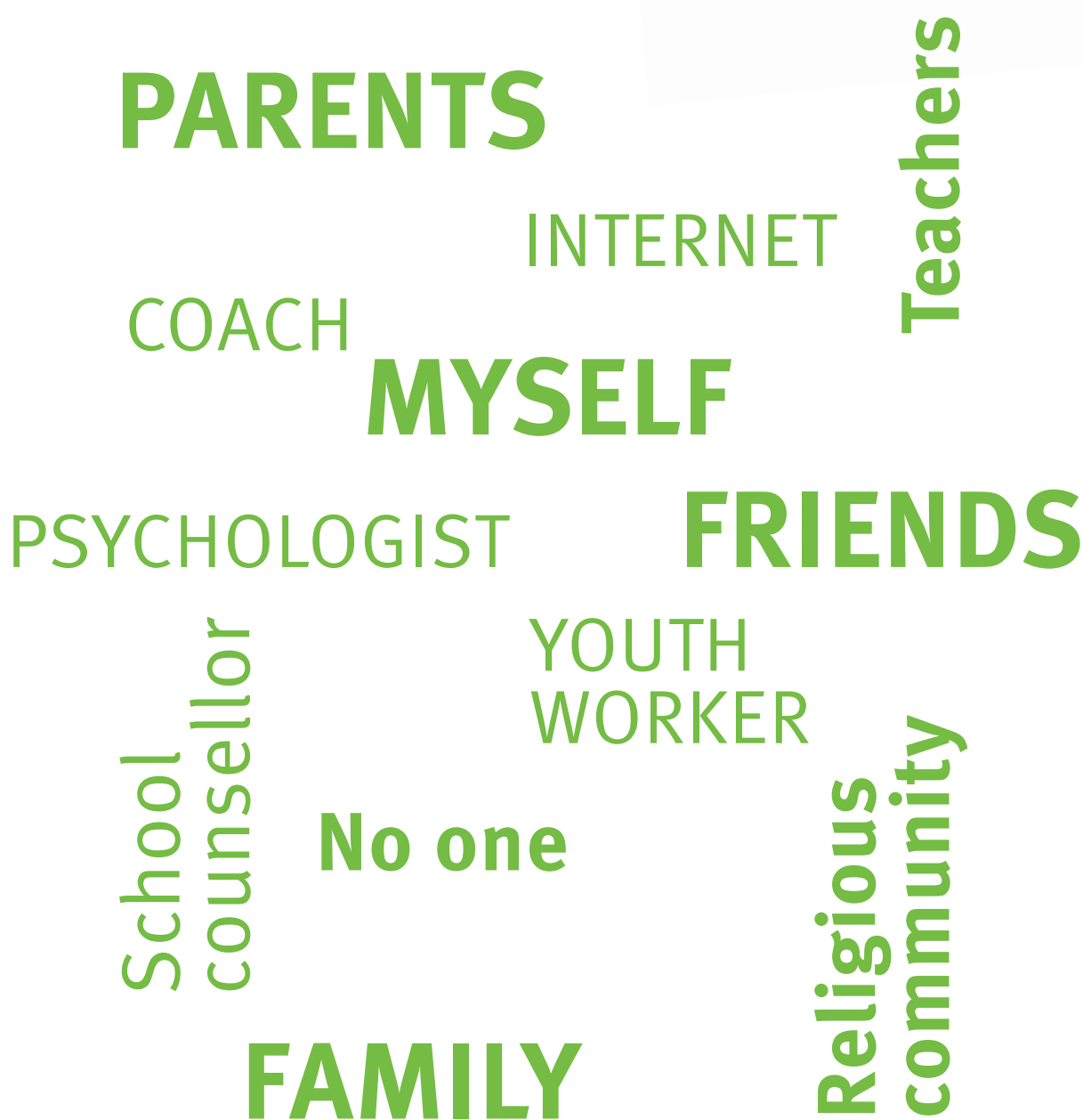
'When I grow up I want to be...'

*Artwork submissions,
South East Queensland and
Far North Queensland*

'a ballerina'

'a fireman'

'an astronaut'

'a policeman'

Planning for the future

Children and young people begin thinking about their careers at an early age and look to the adults in their lives as role models. Focus group participants spoke about the value they placed on being able to talk to others about their plans for the future, particularly with people already working in their field of interest. These people were seen as providing the most useful advice about careers because of their direct professional experience.

'I'd like to be a jet fighter pilot in the RAAF and I would speak to my father who is also in the air force.'

Secondary student, North Queensland

'I have a few career options. I try and talk to the person who is most related to the career/s I am considering. I have an idea of going into the Police Force or Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA). I have a lot of older friends who have graduated from University and I have talked to them about options and gap years etc.'

Secondary student, South West Queensland

As they consider their future plans, children and young people turn to a range of people for advice. It is important to understand who these sources of support are and to make sure these people have the adequate knowledge to help children and young people make informed decisions.

Most (82 per cent) children and young people said they make their own decisions about their future but parents, carers and other adults were important sources of advice.

'My parents will help me with my future career. I have always been able to rely on them with anything. I have always been able to come to them with my problems. I know that they will support me no matter what I choose to do in the future.'

Postcard response, South East Queensland

Children and young people choose to speak to these people about their aspirations:

69%
parents or carers

36%
their friends

29%
other family members

26%
teachers

The LSAC data reports a slightly higher proportion (85-90 per cent) of Queensland respondents between the ages of 14 – 17 years said they would discuss their future plans with their parents than was shown in the Growing up in Queensland survey results. The LSAC results show girls are more likely than boys to discuss their plans with friends. Young people living in non-metro areas are less likely to talk to a school career counsellor and friends than children living in metro regions.[35]

Survey respondents reported having conversations about their future frequently (46 per cent) or sometimes (34 per cent), while 16 per cent of survey respondents said these conversations 'rarely' occur. Focus groups gave some insight into why children and young people may choose not to discuss their future plans.

'I think you are constantly thinking about it and wondering if in a few years' time ' am I going to be able to do this?'... With so many people constantly talking about it, you feel a bit of pressure.'

Secondary student, South West Queensland

'You can have an idea and talk to someone about them but if you have big dreams, they are not talking you out of it as such, but tell you all of the risks and chances of doing it and it kind of like puts you off it.'

Secondary student, South West Queensland

As discussed previously, regular and early conversations with experienced adults was a common request from children and young people to help them make decisions about study and careers.

'Help me and other Queensland children better understand the variety of options in the workforce. If this was implemented in late primary school and early Secondary many young minds would have a career that they truly enjoy.'

Postcard response, Central Queensland

'The subjects in city schools are completely different and they open up a huge range of different things to study in the future at university with different job opportunities e.g. film.'
Postcard response, South West Region

'I'm really interested in photography. It would be great to find someone local who could mentor and teach me. At the moment I rely on YouTube.'
Secondary student, South West Queensland

'More opportunities for people like us to get together regarding interests that could become career opportunities. That way we can work together …. The current situation is good but a bit isolationist. It would be great to discover all these like-minded people.'
Postcard response, South East Queensland

More broadly, children and young people raised the idea of being able to draw upon the expertise of people in their local community as a possible avenue to gain experience and knowledge in fields of interests or hobbies. This was also discussed as an education opportunity in regional centres, where more specialised subjects may not be offered in schools.

Only 8 per cent of survey respondents said they would talk to a school counsellor when they were making decisions about their future. In both primary and secondary schools, students demonstrated they were often unsure of who their career counsellor or guidance counsellor was and what their role was in assisting them to make decisions about their future. Some survey respondents (9 per cent) indicated 'lack of school support' as something preventing them from achieving their hopes and dreams.

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35   Australian Institute of Family Studies. (2018). *Children Living in Queensland: Learnings from Growing up in Australia Technical Paper*. Unpublished.

'We need more one on one time with career counsellors or teachers to help younger students understand their options in depth.'

Postcard response, South East Queensland

'Lack of information' was identified by 18 per cent of survey respondents as something potentially stopping them from achieving their hopes and dreams. Children and young people in focus groups said online information was often overly complicated or too general to be useful in making informed choices about education, training and other life decisions.

Specifically, they spoke about the difficulties in accessing clear information about their financial, physical, sexual and mental health. Information was spread across many sites, was too hard to find or too difficult to understand because of the technical terminology used. Most of the time they wanted to talk to a person to get answers to their specific questions.

Support in achieving future goals

As part of the survey, we asked children and young people about the things which might stop them achieving their hopes and dreams. In addition to finances (58 per cent), the availability of jobs (38 per cent) and academic ability (34 per cent), responses included their physical or mental health (26 per cent), family responsibilities (20 per cent) and having a disability (5 per cent).

Health

Demographic data highlighted that 33 per cent of Queensland children and young people, who responded to the survey, had personally experienced a long-term health problem or condition lasting six months or more. Eleven per cent reported having a long-term disability.

Of the survey respondents, 45 per cent listed health in the top 10 issues for children and young people. When we explored this issue in focus groups, the concerns related to their own health and the health of family members.

Children and young people often spoke of their fear of dying or losing friends and loved ones. They ranked these concerns as having a high impact on their lives but not something they necessarily considered on a frequent basis, unless the issue is currently affecting them.

Many children and young people receive support when they are living with chronic or terminal illness or disability. The same is true when people close to them are ill or die. However, it is important that appropriate support is available to all children and young people.

'An individual doesn't get cancer, a family does. People take breathing for granted. They don't know how lucky they are.'

Primary student, South West Queensland

'I've learned not to take things for granted... Not everything will go to plan, but you have to learn to deal with it.'

Secondary student, South East Queensland

Caring for others

As part of the survey, respondents were also asked whether they do extra work to help care for, or do things for other people.

While results were fairly consistent across the state, children and young people in South West Queensland reported the highest rates of caring for someone elderly (43 per cent), someone who is sick (49 per cent) and someone who has a disability (31 per cent). This may be indicative of the level of services and other support available in their communities.

Around 60 per cent of children indicated they helped care for a family member living in the same home and 28 per cent helped care for a family member living elsewhere. In addition, around 12 per cent helped care for a neighbour.

Queensland children and young people mostly provide care for:

53% younger children

40% someone who is sick

37% someone elderly

26% someone with a disability
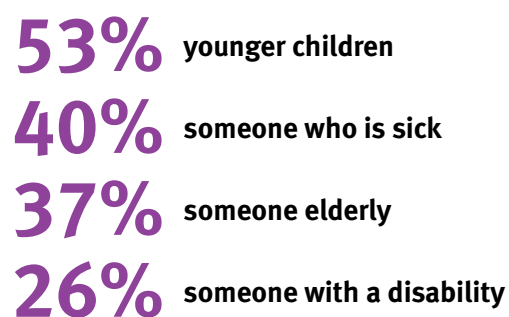
Children and young people say these are possible barriers to them achieving their goals

FINANCES

Gender

Social media opinions

Lack of school support

Family responsibilities

Self doubt

Race & Ethnicity

Lack of family support

Lack of information

ACADEMIC ABILITY

LACK OF JOBS

WHERE I LIVE

Other discrimination

Language difficulty

RELIGION

DISABILITY

Cost of licences

Sexuality

Physical & mental health

LSAC results reveal similar levels of caring responsibilities as shown in the *Growing up in Queensland* survey. They report 41 per cent of children aged 14 - 15 years said they have a responsibility to care for a parent or step-parent, grandparents or siblings. LSAC participants aged 16 - 17 years living in non-metro regions provided care for someone more frequently and for more hours each day compared to those living in metropolitan areas.[36]

Having a live-in family member requiring care was the most common response across every Queensland region. However, in Far North Queensland children and young people are less likely to help care for family members who live with them (52 per cent) and are more likely to care for their neighbours (17 per cent) than children and young people in other parts of the state. This may be indicative of the types of services available in their communities or the relationships they have with non-family members.

In focus groups, children and young people described the type of care they provide for others. This includes wide-ranging responsibilities such as looking after younger brothers and sisters or other children in their homes, through to helping others with self-care, mobility, communication or maintaining a home or property. These pressures are more pronounced in rural and regional areas where children and young people feel additional responsibility to help their families, particularly where there is illness or hardship because of the drought.

20% of survey respondents said family responsibilities could be a barrier to achieving their dreams.

'Looking after younger siblings, you have to take responsibility to be organised and on time, cook, take on some parental responsibility and step up to meet expectations. It helps reduce stress on parents and helps them out.'

Primary student, North Queensland

Survey respondents were asked whether helping care for others meant they have less time for other activities. The majority (53 per cent) indicated their caring responsibilities do not stop them from doing any other activities. For others, these responsibilities may have longer-term impacts because they said they have less time to do homework (23 per cent), go to school (5 per cent) and do schoolwork in class (5 per cent).

Additional support may be required for children and young people who have caring responsibilities affecting their ability to complete expected school tasks, particularly when their immediate family members may not be able to take on these responsibilities. People in the community, services and school can be vital supports in these circumstances.

As discussed previously, academic stress is a serious concern for children and young people. They are looking to the adults in their lives to help them manage their responsibilities so they have the best chance to achieve their future aspirations.

Life skills

Participants spoke about wanting to have practical information and skills to prepare them for life as an adult. In particular, children and young people want to know how to apply for a rental property, how to vote, and how to budget and manage finances.

'More future days focused on life after school. Explaining the real world to your 11 and 12s. Example - what is tax and super? How to claim tax and grants. Help prepare us for life after school.'

Postcard response, Central Queensland

36 Australian Institute of Family Studies. (2018). *Children Living in Queensland: Learnings from Growing up in Australia Technical Paper*. Unpublished.

They also spoke about the need for skills and knowledge to write a good resume and job application and to perform well at an interview.

Across the state, children and young people said they feel underprepared for the practical skills they need to be an independent adult.

'As a teenager I feel like money is something I am clueless about. I think learning more about how to handle money and basic after life skills will be crucial for our future and to find our own success and help others. I think running courses on how to deal with money, banks, writing invoices, buying houses, budgeting, and other related things would be very helpful (incorporating this into school curriculum would be preferable).'

Postcard response, South East Queensland

'Life would be better if there was an area/facility where it was free and there were lots of beneficial activities for example, qualified people who can teach children life skills e.g. cooking, tax, as well as having someone to talk to and sporting activities.'

Postcard response, South West Queensland

Further education and training

When children and young people in Queensland were asked about their future plans, 80 per cent indicated interest in further training or education, for example university or TAFE qualifications.

University and vocational courses are the main point of entry into the types of careers they were seeking; however, reaching this goal was often seen to be affected by the individual's location and their family's financial status.

One in four (25 per cent) survey respondents said 'where I live' could be a barrier to achieving their hopes and dreams. For example, in rural and remote areas, children and young people spoke about having to move away to larger towns or cities to pursue careers in areas of interest. They also felt their schools did not offer the same opportunities as some schools in the city and this would disadvantage them when applying for university.

'I really want to go to university but it's more offered towards the bigger schools in bigger cities. It depends on what school you go to, like if you go to a grammar school or a state school, it depends what looks good paper. For example. a (private school) education would look better on paper than say a (country) state secondary.'

Secondary student, Central Queensland

They were aware of the high cost of moving away and living independently, and the financial implications for their families, so saw these as barriers to achieving their ambitions. More than half (58 per cent) of children and young people said financial difficulties could be a barrier to achieving their dreams.

Twenty-three per cent of survey respondents indicated their desire to complete an apprenticeship. Some (survey respondents (14 per cent) said the cost of obtaining licences and tickets is too high, indicating this may be an issue for those who are seeking a trade career pathway.

'I'm excited about moving away (to University) but worried about getting a job and balancing work, study and having enough money to live. It's a big thing to leave my parents behind without extra help. We have a responsibility to support ourselves and not burden our family.'

Secondary student, Central Queensland

The Growing up in Queensland results cannot report on the differences in gender preferences for further education and training but LSAC data provides some detail on these differences. The LSAC results shows a higher proportion of 16 - 17 year old girls said they would like to complete a university degree (52 per cent of girls and 38 per cent of boys), while boys of the same age were more interested in completing an apprenticeship, traineeship or working in the family business (28 per cent of boys and 2 per cent of girls).[37]

37 Australian Institute of Family Studies. (2018). *Children Living in Queensland: Learnings from Growing up in Australia Technical Paper*. Unpublished.

> 'I was trying to do a TAFE course online but I didn't have the Internet so I had to do a five hour return trip to Brisbane to do it.'
> Secondary student, South West Queensland

The ability to access training and education in regional and rural areas is seen as restricted. They are aware of options for online study but limitations with internet speed, reliability and associated costs are seen as barriers to this education avenue.

Many secondary students who participated in focus groups spoke about their school emphasising the importance of obtaining a university qualification. Many said they would like more advice about and emphasis on alternative pathways, such as vocational education.

'In schools they focus on university, we need more information about TAFE and other options and courses, broader information and pathway options.'

Secondary student, South West Queensland

'I think secondary schools need to have a program where they visit a day of work- like they have options (nurse, engineer, shop manager etc.) and maybe that will help us achieve our goals in life.'

Postcard response, Central Queensland

'More opportunities for young children to be involved in the career they wish to be a part of. School and your OP score may help to get in to uni, but it isn't always possible to achieve this. More chances of alternate pathways would be helpful for children/students to achieve their future career goals.'

Postcard response, Central Queensland

'There are lots of misconceptions about how hard jobs are e.g. farm work is a lot harder than people think – people making judgements based on what you do and their incorrect ideas about them. They believe you are selling yourself short it you decide to work as a ringer rather than going to university.'

Secondary student, North Queensland

Entry-level skills

When children and young people were asked about their plans for the future, the majority of survey respondents (92 per cent) indicated they were planning to get a job or look for work. Most focus group and workshop participants indicated it was important to them to have gainful and fulfilling employment in their profession of choice.

Children and young people in focus groups spoke passionately about needing more work experience opportunities so they can develop and demonstrate the skills valued by employers. Across the state, they spoke about the difficulty of finding work requiring little to no prior experience.

'I've been putting my resume into a lot of different places and it's just really difficult. A lot of kids get very let down by how many people let them down so they give up trying and start taking money from their parents instead of trying to get a job.'

Secondary student, South East Queensland

They emphasised the importance of on-the-job training, which they said required an employer who was willing to invest in supporting their development. Despite these difficulties, children and young people in focus groups were eager to seek work experience opportunities using their networks and expressed an eagerness to develop skills and a strong work ethic to improve their employability and achieve future goals.

Children and young people in rural and remote areas spoke about the problems they experience when they want to access local employment opportunities. In these areas, part-time or casual positions outside of school hours are limited. Further, a lack of public transport in the region makes them reliant on parents or carers to drive them to and from work. For some children, this might mean parents have to travel long distances at night to collect them after their shift.

'I travel for [a] significant amount of time to get to school – school buses leave right on 3pm so this restricts whether I can access extracurricular activities or work. If you want to do these things this means parents have to travel a long way to pick you up. You get home when things are closed so you don't get the opportunities kids in bigger towns get.'

Secondary student, Central Queensland

'There are not a lot of public buses that service where I live. I can't use public transport and I have to get my parents to drive me.'

Secondary student, Far North Queensland

Children and young people said volunteering is a good way to gain useful skills to improve future employability as well as give back to the community. In this way, volunteering is seen as an equivalent to work experience. However, participants under the age of 18 said they were often prevented from volunteering due to their age. They said many organisations will only allow them to participate as part of a school activity, such as collecting donations.

'Even volunteering is difficult to get into if you are trying to get experience. We wanted to help out at the Children's Hospital and we found out you have to be aged 18 to volunteer.'

Secondary student, South East Queensland

Children and young people want to understand different career pathways and types of jobs. They want to have this knowledge before they need to make decisions about their future and would like to have information and conversations earlier in their schooling and more regularly. Making decisions about subjects, courses and future careers, while seen as critical for their future success, is also a time of great stress for children and young people.

"Now that we are coming to the end of school there is a lot of pressure on us trying to figure out what we want to do for the rest of our lives. The information we receive about our options is pretty good for those who know exactly what they want to do but we are expected to know exactly what we are doing as soon as we graduate.'

Secondary student, South West Queensland

'There is not a lot of info about Uni until you reach Year 12. It would be good to have information earlier and about a range of options. There is a tertiary tour which is optional in Term 3 – seems too late to me.'

Secondary student, Central Queensland

In a few focus group sessions, participants spoke about wanting to start their own business and wanting to get more information and support to help them achieve this dream. While the topic of youth entrepreneurship was not widespread, it was passionately discussed when it was raised.

'Why can't we get someone to teach us how to start and run our own business?'

Secondary student, South East Queensland

The future workforce

When discussing their education and career paths, children and young people in focus groups worry about the availability of jobs in the future, mainly due to automation and the digitisation of the workforce. They recognise relevant skills in the workforce are changing from their parents' and carers' generations. They are unsure how to determine the most important skills to safeguard their future employability and how to obtain these skills.

38% said 'lack of jobs' could be a barrier to achieving their dreams

'As we get older the creativity is stripped away from you – no play the older you are – jobs are going to be replaced with robots – so creativity is the most important thing – robots can't do creative things. Schools need to be flexible in what subjects they offer so you can do subjects that you want to do. The world is changing and the school curriculum should be changing with it.'

Secondary student, South East Queensland

'I believe that expansions on subjects would help myself and other Queensland children better understand the variety of options in the workforce. If this was implemented in late primary school and early secondary many young minds would have a career that they truly enjoy. A new variety of subjects in the sciences, humanities and many more is a great way to give opportunities no one had in the first place.'

Postcard response, Central Queensland

The skills and the ways people will work in the future are changing. The way we skill young people for their careers must change too if businesses are to maintain their competitiveness in a global economy.[38]

'(We need) a chance to try out future careers as a glimpse for our future. To already shape a dream for our own self. More than just usual education at school … Getting people to visit for extra education … e.g. learning about yourself (like confidence lessons).'
Postcard response, South East Queensland

'At my school you can do traineeships through school but once you have left school there is little support (through the traineeship) in finding a job. You are left on your own. Schools should regularly bring in professional mentors to inspire students in their career path, e.g., visits from lawyers and nurses to talk about their occupation. Schools should be more proactive in helping us find employment and apprenticeships.'
Youth group participant, South East Queensland

'How I would like to learn about the opportunities of how to get a job. In a fun park area in the middle of the city, we get to have a go at the job.'

*Artwork submission,
South East Queensland*

38 Committee for Economic Development in Australia. (2018). *VET: Securing skills for growth*. Retrieved October 4, 2018, from www.ceda.com.au/Digital-hub/Blogs/CEDA-Blog/Sep-2016/Vocational-education-and-training-issues-go-beyond-VET-FEE-HELP-Professor-the-Hon-Stephen-Martin

As part of focus groups, children and young people developed an action plan presenting their views and suggestions to adults on the topic of employment. The following is a summary of the key points they raised.

What do kids need?

- employment experience and opportunities
- independence
- safe and reliable ways to get to work
- guidance and support
- positive and supportive role models
- encouragement and support from teachers.

What do adults currently do that is helpful?

- drive kids to work
- act as positive role models
- show support
- help young people choose pathways that are positive and will lead to success
- provide work experience opportunities.

What do adults currently do that is unhelpful?

- limit opportunities for work over school holidays
- take too much control over decisions
- believe they always know what is best without listening to the needs and concerns of young people
- don't see things from a young person's perspective
- lack understanding about the issues facing the current generation
- don't take concerns seriously.

What keeps adults from responding well?

- lack of awareness of the difficulties young people have in finding employment
- restrictions or requirements which prevent opportunities being offered
- difference in mindset, attitudes and upbringing.

What advice would you give to adults?

- give young people freedom and opportunities to gain experience
- be supportive and understanding
- listen to the needs and concerns of young people
- take into consideration the challenges young people face today
- offer subjects that build skills for future employment especially for young people who don't plan to go to university
- recognise the valuable contribution and perspectives young people can offer
- have greater awareness of generational differences and changes
- consider different options and solutions
- understand the situation fully before making judgements.

Responding to what we have heard

Children and young people across Queensland are optimistic about their futures and demonstrate clear understanding of their goals, the types of support they need to achieve them and some of the challenges they face. In the future, they want to experience success and move into employment, further education or training. Many children and young people spoke about the importance of family and finding a balance between their responsibilities and the things they enjoy.

When children and young people discussed how they were going to achieve their future hopes and dreams, one of the most important factors they considered was their support system. This was reflected in focus groups when they spoke about needing to talk to people who had knowledge and experience and could guide them in making decisions.

Most survey respondents said they knew how to find people and services when they needed help. However, many also said there should be more support available to them within their communities.

Fewer than half of children and young people (44 per cent) said they would use the internet (including web sites and social media) to find support. This suggests alternative resources need to be made available for children and young people and the people who support them.

For adults considering how to support children and young people in making decisions about their future, it is important to reflect on the information available to them and ask children and young people if they know how to find it and if it is helpful. This can be an opportunity for adults to answer questions or assist children and young people to find what they need.

The changing world of work and the skills they need to succeed are key areas of concern for children and young people. They also recognise they need information and life skills to make good choices about their future and successfully transition into adulthood. They are looking to the adults in their lives to help them do this.

Children and young people have lots of ideas and suggestions for what adults can do to support them in achieving their hopes and dreams. A summary of these follows.

Focus group

LIFE SKILLS

What did children and young people say they want to know?

We want information that:

- will help us prepare for becoming an adult and assuming adult responsibilities
- is practical, easy to understand and easy to find when it is needed
- incorporates life skill topics as practical examples in education subjects
- will help us manage finances and learn how to stay physically, mentally and sexually healthy
- tells us how we can have a say.

Adults could consider:

- do children and young people in your community have the practical skills they need to navigate life after school?
- how can you provide life skills information to children and young people that is suitable to their needs?
- do you have conversations with children and young people about the life skills they want and how they would like to learn them?

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

What did children and young people say they need for their training and education?

We want:

- information on different education options and pathways
- education programs that take into account our interests, what's relevant today and for our life after school and how we like to learn
- support in having a school-life balance and help to manage stress
- you to be aware we may have many responsibilities in our lives
- mentoring so we can learn from experienced adults.

Adults could consider:

- do you provide adequate information to children and young people about different career pathways?
- how do you support children and young people in finding the things they enjoy doing, and the ways in which they learn best?
- do you support children and young people to make connections with community members to help support them in pursuing their dreams?

EMPLOYMENT

What did children and young people say they would do to help them get a job?

We want:

- work experience and volunteering opportunities
- career conversations early and more often
- opportunities to hear from industry professionals
- to learn relevant skills at school to prepare us for future work opportunities
- accessible and affordable public transport
- support and assistance for young entrepreneurs.

Adults could consider:

- how can you provide relevant information to children and young people about different career options from an early age?
- how can you create more opportunities for children and young people to forge connections with industry professionals?
- can you investigate or consider flexible work experience and volunteering opportunities to give children and young people the chance to build their skill set?
- are organisational policies barriers to children and young people participating in volunteering opportunities that would help them develop employment skills?
- do you have regular conversations about the way you can support children and young people to find pathways into the careers that interest them?

THE BIG PICTURE

Children and young people discuss the issues most important to them and give advice to adults

We need the adults in our lives to:
- take us seriously
- pay attention to us
- be interested in our lives
- talk to us
- be good role models
- keep their word
- stay calm
- help us stay healthy, both mentally and physically
- accept us for who we are and don't compare us to others
- encourage us, don't criticise
- help us manage our time and stress
- get help if they need it.

Our advice to adults:
- take the time to listen
- check in to see if we are okay
- you don't always need to solve the problem for us
- try to understand the issue from our perspective
- trust us
- be open minded and forgiving
- recognise that, like you, we need a balance between school and the other things in our lives
- don't judge, assume or interrupt
- if you are going to change things, ask us what information we need and be ready to answer our questions
- celebrate the small things as well as the big things.

We worry about:
- bullying and cyberbullying
- mental health
- our education
- drugs and alcohol
- the environment and climate change
- employment
- equity, discrimination and racism
- crime and safety
- domestic and family violence.

THE BIG PICTURE

The QFCC's vision is to make Queensland a safe place where children, young people and their families thrive. Through the Growing up in Queensland project, we asked children and young people about the issues of greatest importance to them and their peers.

Worries are a normal part of life. Children and young people worry about different things as they age. Understanding what concerns them helps adults determine if their level of worry is healthy or if they need more support.

Adults have an important role to play in assisting children and young people to deal with the things that concern them before they become too stressed or anxious.[39] Stress can derail children's development. Caring adults can protect children from the impact this can have on their learning, behaviour, and physical and mental health.[40]

The survey responses and focus group discussions demonstrate children and young people across Queensland have a thorough understanding of good outcomes for their communities. Their worries and concerns reflect their awareness of contemporary, localised and broader issues and of how these potentially impact their lives and the lives of people around them.

Throughout this project children and young people identified key issues of concern for people their age and provided sound ideas for how adults can help and support them. Their practical and innovative ideas, views and opinions provide an important source of information.

Leaders and decision makers need to hear their views when planning for a strong future for their communities and for the state as a whole.

We have identified the 'big picture issues' in this section from an analysis of all project data sources. We gathered the information by asking children and young people about issues of importance to them in multiple ways.

> 'I worry about my job or what kind of life I will have.'
> 'I worry about my family and whether they will be safe.'
> 'I worry about the environment.'
> Primary students, Far North Queensland
>
> _____
>
> 'I worry about people robbing and committing crimes.'
> 'I worry about getting sick and there not being any help.'
> 'I worry about drought.'
> 'I worry about protecting wildlife.'
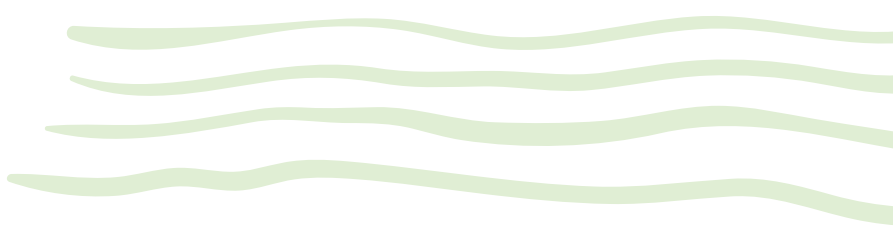> 'I worry about World War III starting.'
> Secondary students, South East Queensland

Survey respondents were asked to identify the '10 most important issues for you and people your age, in Queensland, today' from a list of 26 predetermined topics. A free-text option was also provided where respondents could suggest additional issues. From this list they were asked to identify the top issues for them personally and to provide solutions.

Additionally, the survey them to indicate how concerned they were about 16 issues impacting on children and young people, by ranking their level of concern on a scale from 'not at all concerned' to 'very concerned'. These questions formed the basis for the quantitative analysis for each issue discussed in this section (as well as for previous sections of this report).

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39 Kids Health. (2018). *Helping kids handle worry*. Retrieved October 3, 2018, from www.kidshealth.org/en/parents/worrying.htm
    Health Direct. (2018). *Anxiety in children*. Retrieved October 3, 2018, from https://healthdirect.gov.au/anxiety-in-children
40 National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2010). *Persistent Fear and Anxiety Can Affect Young Children's Learning and Development*.
    Working Paper No. 9. Retrieved October 3, 2018, from www.developingchild.harvard.edu

The most important issues for children and young people in Queensland today

MENTAL HEALTH

LGBTIQ ISSUES

Education

Safety & protection of children

Terrorism

Online safety

CRIME

Environment

Politics

DRUGS

ALCOHOL

RACISM

BULLYING

Safety & violence

International relations

Homelessness

Animal cruelty

Domestic violence

EQUITY & DISCRIMINATION

Climate change

Health

Population issues

Economy

CYBERBULLYING

EMPLOYMENT

Immigration

During the focus groups and workshops, we asked children and young people across the state to individually write their worries and concerns on sticky notes. These were grouped into common themes and discussed in terms of their level of impact and frequency. High impact and high frequency issues were explored in more detail.[41]

There was a high degree of congruence between the issues of importance identified by survey respondents, and the concerns of high frequency and impact raised in focus groups.

This section further explores the top issues of bullying and cyberbullying, mental health, drugs and alcohol, and the environment and climate change.

Other issues that were important to children and young people, such as education, employment, and crime and safety have been discussed in previous sections.

Bullying

Children and young people in Queensland are concerned about the detrimental impacts of bullying and cyberbullying on people their age. When they were asked to select the most important issues, bullying was the most selected overall. Sixty eight per cent of all respondents selected bullying and 56 per cent selected cyberbullying as a 'most important' issue.

During focus groups, participants spoke about the prevalence of bullying in person and online.

'Bullying happens a lot in our society and you start believing you're not a nice person and take it all on yourself and you don't need that stress. And you can have suicidal thoughts and cry every night. It definitely has a high impact on the person receiving it. I don't think there is more of it since our parent's day but the intensity of it has increased.'

Secondary student, Central Queensland

A focus group worry matrix

Grouping Worries

41 For more detail on the School focus group techniques please see the Appendix.

Survey respondents provided information about the frequency of bullying and cyberbullying. When asked if in the past three months, they had been bullied, almost half (45 per cent) reported being bullied face-to-face while almost a third (30 per cent) reported being cyberbullied. This indicates a reasonably high proportion of Queensland children and young people feel they are regularly bullied.

'Once or twice" in the past three months:

30%
said they had been bullied face-to-face

23%
said they had been cyberbullied

When asked about their own involvement in acts of bullying, nearly one in five (19 per cent) survey respondents admitted to bullying another young person face-to-face over the past three months. Ten per cent reported being involved in cyberbullying another young person, either as an individual or as part of a group.

While face-to-face bullying was reported as the most common form of bullying by survey respondents, cyberbullying was viewed as being premeditated and more calculated by focus group participants. For example, the creation of fake accounts, threats to expose 'secrets', and deliberate acts of online trolling were commonly referenced in focus groups as targeted acts of cyberbullying.

> The LSAC data indicates acts of bullying are experienced at a much higher rate at school for young people aged 15 - 17. The act of bullying most commonly experienced at school was reported to be 'Someone told others not to be my friend' (94 per cent of 14 - 15 year-olds) and 'Someone spread rumours about me' (84 per cent of 16 - 17 year-olds).[42]

Children and young people were asked to think about the reasons behind bullying and unfair treatment. Survey respondents were asked to consider whether they had *witnessed* any 'unfair treatment in the past 12 months' based on a list of issues. More than 70 per cent of respondents said they had.

They were then asked to consider whether they had *personally* experienced unfair treatment in the past 12 months. More than half (56 per cent) of children and young people reported they had. Most commonly, children and young people reported they had experienced unfair treatment in the past 12 months based on their body size or shape (23 per cent) and physical appearance (20 per cent).

'You have to do the right thing, look the right way, making other people happy but not yourself. It puts a lot of stress on you. It has a big impact on you.'

Secondary student, Central Queensland

Other experiences of personal unfair treatment steamed from issues based on their:

- 'thoughts/opinions/status/pictures shared online' (17 per cent)
- mental health (16 per cent)
- personal relationships (16 per cent)
- gender (15 per cent)
- age (14 per cent).

Fewer children and young people had experienced unfair treatment based on sexuality (10 per cent), skin colour (9 per cent), cultural background (9 per cent), physical health (7 per cent), religion (7 per cent), gender identity (4 per cent) and disability (3 per cent).

In focus groups, participants said bullying did not only occur between others their age, stating it was sometimes perpetrated by adults.

'Bullying doesn't always happen at school and it isn't always just kids - coaches can put players down.'

Primary student, Central Queensland

42 Australian Institute of Family Studies. (2018). *Children Living in Queensland: Learnings from Growing up in Australia Technical Paper*. Unpublished..

Children and young people said bullies can often be friends or part of their social group. Being bullied or excluded by peers were seen as the most isolating experience of bullying. The strong developmental need for children and young people to 'fit in' and have peer acceptance accentuates the stress arising from bullying in this type of situation.

'Some kids will say that if you don't do what I want then I'm going to spread stories about stuff you have done so no-one will want to be friends with you. You don't want to do it but you don't want to be alone.'

Secondary student, South East Queensland

'Cyberbullying is like a disease - when someone does it everyone will too. Most times cyberbullying is when you are alone and it makes you isolate yourself as you don't usually get cyberbullied in a crowd.'

Postcard response, South East Queensland

In the LSAC study children report - 'Someone said mean things to me' (36 per cent of 14 - 15 year-olds) and 'Someone stopped me joining in' (56 per cent of 16-17 year-olds) as the most common experiences of bullying outside of school. Across both age groups, acts of bullying were experienced most often via face-to-face interactions, followed by text messages and open forums.[43]

In focus groups, we asked participants to consider what could be included in an action plan to address the issue of bullying for people their age. They suggested a range of strategies to help support them in relation to this issue, as they said avoiding or ignoring bullies does not always work.

'Solving the problem implies focussing on the cause as well as the issue. Solving cyberbullying means asking why kids are bullying online, rather than directly telling them to stop. We should not restrict, but rehabilitate. Further, often when victims do report incidents they are ignored or dismissed as minor. We must listen when kids speak out, and resolve it appropriately.'

Postcard response, South East Queensland

'Friends need to be more proactive in reporting cyberbullying. They should for example, take a screenshot of the offensive material.'

Survey response

'I think that there needs to be systems within social networking and other related networking sites that can identify cyberbullying and take action against it - for example, the system could kick the bully out and report them to the admin who would then take appropriate action - as well as harsher punishments for the bully in question.'

Postcard response, South East Queensland

'I think that if a young person or child gets cyberbullied they should click the report button and then the moderator people will ask questions to the person as to why they reported them. The child will copy and paste it to them and the moderators will check whether or not to block them from the website for 3 months. They need to make a text website for kids to stay safe.'

Postcard response, Central Queensland

43   Australian Institute of Family Studies. (2018). *Children Living in Queensland: Learnings from Growing up in Australia Technical Paper*. Unpublished.

Children and young people particularly emphasised the need to have resilience and courage to tell someone when they are being targeted by a bully. They spoke about needing more problem-solving skills and requiring assistance in finding helpful resources and resolutions. They consider having help and support from parents and trustworthy teachers, having friends and someone to talk to as essential factors in addressing bullying issues.

> **'I left school because of bullying. The teacher didn't understand what I was going through in my life and said they didn't care. I couldn't focus.'**
> Youth group participant, South East Queensland

They said it is helpful when adults take the time to listen to them and take their concerns seriously. They value when adults provide comfort, support without judgement, and give advice which considers all aspects of a situation.

Children and young people value hearing about adults' own experiences but want them to recognise there are differences. They said generational differences often cause adults to be out of touch with what may be happening in their lives, particularly in online settings.

Children and young people said it was important for adults to intervene when appropriate; however, it was critical for adults to not 'jump to conclusions and solutions'. They suggested it would be more helpful for adults to ask how they can help before they take action. In particular, children and young people indicated the need for adults to speak to the school when appropriate and to come up with a solution together.

'Talk with the child then talk to the school to develop a strategy together based on the actual situation – including the bully to understand what is happening.'

Secondary student, South East Queensland

When asked 'what do adults currently do [in relation to bullying] that is unhelpful' children and young people often said it was unhelpful when adults did not listen to them. Likewise, they said they do not find it helpful when adults tell them 'not to worry' and 'everything will be okay' or to 'sort it out' for themselves. They said being told to ignore bullying was also unhelpful.

Children and young people said the amount of time it took for adults to respond to reported bullying was often problematic. They said adults often hesitate because they are unsure how to discuss the issue, for example with teachers or the parent of the bully. Children and young people said adult responses were often inadequate or did not fully solve the problem and, in some instances, made things worse.

'Parents and schools always say that they don't tolerate bullying, but when it occurs they don't do anything about it. Even if they do something about it, the problem always re-occurs.'
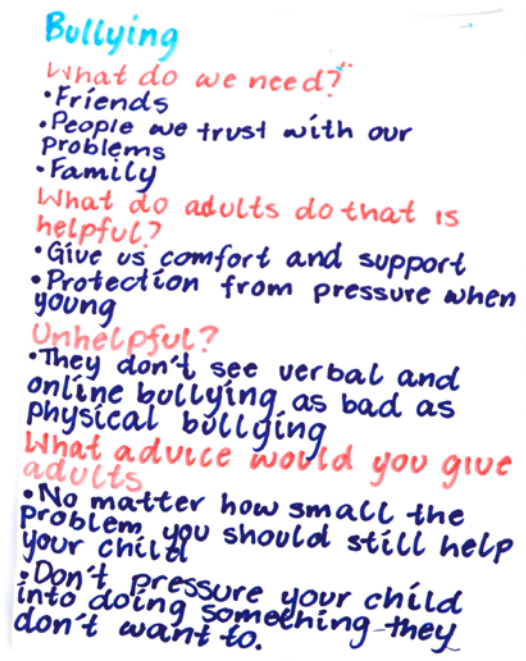
Secondary student, South East Queensland

Bullying poster

Primary school
Far North Queensland

Bullying action plans

> **'Parents and teachers need to provide positive goals to prevent the bullying and provide moral support to help you work through the bullying.'**
> Secondary student, South West Queensland

Children and young people spoke about adults (in particular, parents and carers) being distracted by their phones or 'too busy' with work and other responsibilities to be supportive with bullying issues. They want adults to be better at recognising the seriousness of bullying and to give their attention to the conversation.

'They should enquire more to see if bullying exists rather than assuming that everything is okay.'

Secondary student, South West Queensland

Children and young people have strong ideas about how adults can support them in dealing with the issue of bullying. In focus groups they said a sense of community was needed in schools and wider settings to help them feel supported.

This suggests children and young people recognise the role communities play in creating social cohesion and setting standards to help children and young people address bullying issues.

They also spoke about the importance of a positive environment and of having open conversations about the impacts of bullying - to prevent it from happening. They said it is important to understand the reasons people bully others and provide support to help them address the underlying reasons for their behaviour.

Focus group participants discussed the significance of having peer-to-peer support systems in place to help stop and prevent bullying. Survey respondents also supported this notion with 66 per cent indicating friends are useful or very useful sources of help with an important issue, like bullying.

What do kids need?

- to be listened to and taken seriously
- more support in schools and more guidance at home
- people who care for, love and support them, specifically someone they can trust and talk to, including friends, parents, carers, other family and professionals.
- access to information, more help options, and easily accessible reporting tools
- internet protection and for adults to watch out for what kids do online
- to have resilience, confidence, courage and bravery to stand up for themselves.

What do adults currently do that is helpful?

- support kids and give good advice and strategies
- comfort kids and try to cheer you up
- talk to you and be willing to listen
- they are supportive and encouraging
- try their best to help with the situation
- speak to other adults like teachers and the principal
- provide access to resources
- try to prevent bullying
- teach self-defence, resilience and problem solving strategies
- have time for kids and be there when we need them
- created websites to report bullying.

What do adults currently do that is unhelpful?

- not being aware of what is happening
- tell kids 'it's alright', 'ignore it' or 'sort it out between yourselves'
- tell us to 'tell a teacher'
- confront the bully or other parents themselves
- they control the situation too much or take it too far
- they embarrass us / talk too much / yell
- spend too much time at work, on the phone or watching TV
- get involved, but don't take action
- give you advice about things you are already doing
- give you bad or out-dated advice or facts or opinions
- doubt you are telling the truth
- promote violence through their own actions.

What keeps adults from responding well?

- not enough knowledge of how harmful it is or the different types of bullying
- not knowing what to say or how to help
- wanting kids to work through it themselves
- not knowing what we are going through
- lack past experiences so don't know much about the situation
- only looking at one side
- being busy with work, other siblings or being stressed
- not caring
- assuming the school will sort it out.

What advice would you give to adults?

- be aware when bullying is happening
- keep checking in with children, ask more questions and monitor the situation
- keep your word
- try to stop bullying before it goes too far
- share past experiences and how you recovered from the issue
- put down your phone and be there to support your kids
- tell the school or talk to the other parents
- learn more about bullying
- stop being overly protective
- take time off work and help if it is needed
- listen properly, understand and take the problem seriously
- look at the situation from a kid's point of view
- don't pressure your child into doing something they don't want to do
- set up a peer-to-peer support system
- encourage others to know how to respond
- be more proactive when it comes to bullying
- lead by example, don't swear at your kids, use violence or make a gang – stand up and say it isn't okay
- talk with the child then talk to the school to develop a strategy together
- do things like 'r u ok day' and 'bullying no way' day
- direct the information at the people being bullied
- create a greater sense of community in schools.

Mental health

Children and young people in Queensland have a strong understanding of both positive mental health and of mental illness. Through the survey and focus groups they spoke about the importance of having strong mental health and of their worries and concerns about themselves and people they know who are experiencing mental health issues.

'There needs to be more of a push for schooling systems based on positive mental health and safe amounts of stress.'
Survey response

'Stress gets very overwhelming. When I'm stressed I start to compare myself to others and it affects the way I think. The more I think about it the worse it gets. It impacts on my self-worth.'
Secondary student, South East Queensland

67% identify mental health as one of the most important issues

26% said physical or mental health was in the top three things that may stop them from achieving their hopes and dreams

A third (32 per cent) of survey respondents said they had witnessed unfair treatment of others due to mental health. In Central Queensland, this was much higher, at 50 per cent.

When asked if they had personally experienced any unfair treatment due to mental health, 16 per cent of survey respondents indicated they had. This was again higher for children and young people in Central Queensland where 27 per cent said they had experienced unfair treatment due to mental health.

'I felt as though I was being judged about my physical appearance and the state of my mental health.'

Survey response

For survey respondents who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer or questioning, mental health was the top issue selected (82 per cent). Whereas it was the third highest issue selected by those who did not identify (64 per cent).

Focus group participants, who identified as LGBTIQ+, spoke of the isolation they felt from their peers and family members who may not understand or accept their gender identity or sexual orientation. Being able to connect with others from the LGBTIQ+ community is a critical form of support for these young people.

Responses regarding mental health as a top issue for respondents of different gender identities varied. Mental health was identified as a top issue for 80 per cent of respondents who identify as transgender, 74 per cent of females and 64 per cent of respondents who identify as 'other' genders, compared to 52 per cent of males.

Children and young people see mental health as a key public health priority. They identified a need to increase the focus on early identification of mental health issues and reduce the stigma of seeking help for mental health concerns.

> '**The stigma of mental health needs to be obliterated as that is a significant barrier to most people receiving help.**'
> Survey response

> '**Life would be better if young kids are supported more mentally with mental health problems. Either in school where mental health is talked about or at home.**'
> Postcard response, South East Queensland

'I feel like we should all go to the counsellors at least once a term. I was ashamed and embarrassed that I had a mental issue. I thought that if I went to the counsellor I would be seen as 'damaged'. So I never really told anyone except my mum. I talked to a teacher about it and she encouraged me to reach out and talk about it to someone. It was actually a relief to hear that someone could help me.'

Secondary student, South East Queensland

The mental health of others

While children and young people are concerned about their own mental health, they are also concerned about the mental health of their friends and families. In Central Queensland, focus group participants spoke about the impact drought and unemployment has on their parents and their community. They worried about how they can support them in these circumstances. Others discussed the impact of local suicides and praised workplaces which had introduced professional support systems in these circumstances.

'There were three suicides recently where my dad works. Everyone had to go through counselling. They actually enforced it and they figured out there were a lot more people that could have benefited from counselling and they might have been able to prevent it.'

Secondary student, Central Queensland

Children and young people in focus groups want to be well informed about mental health. They want to understand the behaviours associated with different mental health problems so they are well equipped to respond in situations where someone is experiencing mental health issues.

'We need to teach people how to be aware of symptoms and how to help people with mental illness.'

Survey response

'They need a place to go when they suffer from mental illnesses e.g. anxiety, depression etc.'

Postcard response, South East Queensland

The ways in which children and young people arrive at their understanding of mental illness has implications for their responses to people experiencing mental distress. Children's and young people's views on mental health issues are shaped in part by the views of the adults they speak to, as well as what they see in the media and social media. However, focus group discussions indicated much of what they know is drawn from their own personal experiences or what they have witnessed in others.

'Mental health needs to have more support as I know I have issues, but I'm too afraid to talk to people about it as I find it hard to share my feelings.'

Survey response

'I think that there should be more awareness on this issue in a place where you don't have to talk to people yet still find a way to help yourself.'

Survey response

Children and young people recognise media messages can influence perceptions of mental health. They said the majority of media messages about mental illness are negative, such as blaming mental illness for violent crimes and being provided as an explanation for anti-social behaviours.

Qualitative survey comments and focus group feedback indicated children and young people want to see improvements in mental health support. This includes the need for more check-ups on children, less pressure in school and more general awareness of mental health issues. Some feel it is still treated as a 'taboo' topic and it needs to be easier to talk to teachers and school counsellors about the issue.

What worries us

Where to go for help

Children and young people spoke about the need to talk to counsellors. However, many focus group participants did not know who their school guidance officer was. At the end of focus groups, participants were provided with a 'support card' with details of helpline numbers and websites and with space for them to write the contact details for their guidance officer. Few already knew this information or where to find it.

There was a perceived lack of privacy about talking to guidance counsellors, with many believing information in counselling sessions would be communicated to the school or parents. One group discussed a health and well-being survey conducted in their school where results were communicated to parents if there was concern.

Children and young people said these beliefs and experiences restrict their willingness to engage and be honest with support services offered in school settings.

Suggested solutions

In focus groups, participants were asked to consider what could be included in an action plan to address the issue of mental health for people their age. Responses included having empathy and being concerned with helping or supporting those affected.

Children's and young people's attitudes to mental health issues are developed and mature in nature. Overall, they suggested they need opportunities to seek help, mental health education, good support systems, and people they can talk to.
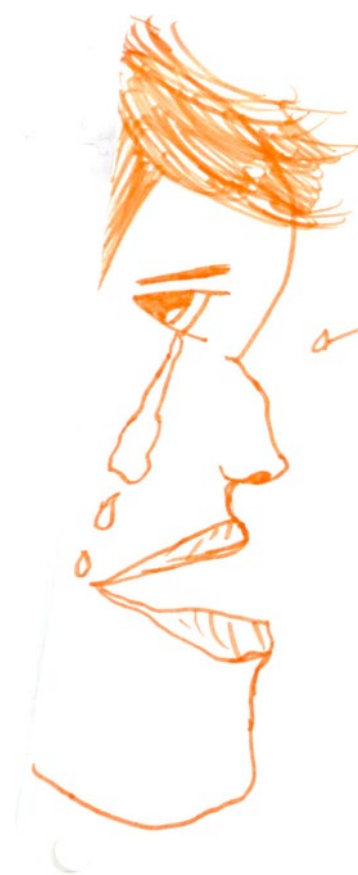
Primary student, Far North Queensland

'Sometimes I feel like the school counsellors aren't always asking the right questions. They make some simple insecurities sound so serious that they put you off wanting to discuss it. They try and make you feel comfortable but it's really not a nice place and I found it really hard to open up. Sure, I could talk but I felt more anxious in the counsellor's room than before I went and it was getting to the stage where nothing was really changing. Actually it was getting worse and I didn't really feel any better for going there. She had a keyboard and was typing all these notes. There is something about the counsellors that we are all frightened about.'

Secondary student, South East Queensland

'Conversations like this are more useful than talking to people at school. Being with people your own age who understand what's happening in your life and can support you and talk you through. Rather than adults who don't get it.'

Secondary student, South East Queensland

Adults who listen without judgement and who support them to seek help are particularly useful along with youth services such as headspace. On the other hand, they find adults who assume they understand the situation, dismiss their issues or provide advice based on experiences of their own generation are unhelpful.

Children and young people suggested adults should be open-minded, available, willing to learn, forgiving and calm when approached about mental health issues. They also suggested adults reduce the amount of pressure they put on children and young people, including trusting them to make their own decisions, not comparing them to others (including siblings) and not picturing them as a 'perfect kid'.

Two out of three survey respondents (66 per cent) found friends to be useful when they needed help with an important issues. A similar proportion (62 per cent) found family including carers useful while 44 per cent and 43 per cent found the internet and social media and professionals (including teachers) helpful.

These results suggest there is a need for more peer-support training and information to help children and young people to effectively help one another if they are struggling with mental health concerns. Peer support programs were discussed extensively in focus groups and action plans.

Familial and friendship structures are clearly critical to children and young people, particularly as professional and online supports are not the first choice when seeking help.

The emphasis children and young people place on the importance of their mental health suggests the prevalence and significance of concerns about mental health in childhood and adolescence is greater than often assumed. Being emotionally well and being able to handle everyday things were seen as advantageous to achieving their goals.

70% said good physical and mental health is one of the top issues

Because of the sensitivities of talking about mental health and associated risks, traditional approaches to health education do not always adequately address the topic of mental health. Children and young people identified the need to provide opportunities for individual learning about mental health in ways which take their own perspectives into account.

Creating a culture that supports the development of more positive attitudes about mental health was seen as a major step in addressing mental health issues. So too was having peer supports and services targeted at people of their age groups.

Who do young Queenslanders turn to when they need help?

66% friends

62% family and carers

44% internet and social media

43% professionals

What do kids need?

- good support systems and people to talk to
- positive family life, sleep, food, physical activity and people around them who will listen
- to know they are being taken care of
- a good environment to learn in
- affection from others
- more opportunities, and easy access to seek help
- understanding about mental health and less stigma
- education on mental health
- self-confidence and ability to trust someone
- adults who understand the importance of good mental health
- supportive and positive family and friends to help them through if they have issues.

What do adults currently do that is helpful?

- provide support services such as headspace
- try to understand what you are going through (help you seek help)
- be good listeners
- provide care
- provide counselling services
- give advice
- support you in getting help
- try to understand the situation
- try to help
- listen without judgement and show support.

What do adults currently do that is unhelpful?

- make assumptions about the situation
- don't understand or lack education
- don't listen, don't take it seriously or dismiss the issue
- talk about the situation to others without permission
- not talking to children
- not spending enough quality time with kids
- taking 'good' as an answer to 'how are you?'
- avoiding tricky topics
- being judgmental or acting disappointed
- not caring enough
- giving advice based on their generation without realising things are different
- treating concerns as an overreaction or 'just a phase'.

What keeps adults from responding well?

- not being educated on the issues
- having old fashioned views
- not understanding the full situation
- underestimating the seriousness of a problem
- needing to do 'more important' things
- how they were raised
- not understanding social media and that you can be bullied online.

What advice would you give to adults?

- don't treat kids differently because of mental health
- give kids a chance to explain their problem, without assuming, judging or interrupting
- don't brush the problem off
- give the right amount of support
- find the help kids want and need
- be open, honest and kind
- research, listen and try to understand
- be open minded and willing to learn
- give comfort, space and affection and have empathy
- let people come to you in their own time
- let kids experience things for themselves
- know that even though you are older you have things to learn also
- trust us to make our own choices
- stop picturing us as a perfect kid and stop comparing us to others
- trust us to come and ask when we need help
- take time to listen and reply with open ended questions instead of what you 'should' do or what is right and wrong
- be more forgiving and calmer, as most kids have to deal with mental health issues and all they need is someone who is understanding and supportive and is not disappointed and angry.

Drugs and alcohol

Drugs (67 per cent) and alcohol (59 per cent) were the second and fourth most important issues for children and young people in the survey overall. Drugs and alcohol featured in the top five issues for children and young people in all regions, regardless of their cultural or racial background.

When discussed in focus groups, the two were often connected, so we have presented them together in this report.

When survey respondents were asked how concerned they were about drugs and alcohol, 17 per cent indicated they were concerned or very concerned about drugs, and 16 per cent indicated they were concerned or very concerned about alcohol.

Children's and young people's perception of drugs and alcohol changes as they age. Survey respondents in the older age bracket (16 - 19 years) indicated more concern about both drugs and alcohol than their younger counterparts (9 - 12 years and 13 - 15 years). Similarly, drugs and alcohol were raised as issues in focus groups in secondary schools more often than in focus groups with primary school children. This may indicate a growing awareness because of changes in social experiences as they grow up.

Drugs were reported as a bigger issue than alcohol for respondents in all regions. In Central Queensland, children and young people reported drugs as the top issue (78 per cent) for people their age today.

> '**More needs to be done to keep teenagers from ruining their lives using drugs for recreational purposes.**'
> Survey response

> '**Make it a drug free zone. Do up the parks to make it a better community. Put BBQ's in parks. More for the youth to do.**'
> Postcard response, North Queensland

Reasons children and young people are concerned about drugs and alcohol include:

- what they perceive as easy availability
- the social and physical consequences of drug or alcohol use
- safety in the community
- the behaviour of people affected by drugs or alcohol.

Reasons children and young people consider themselves at risk of drug use vary. They deal with life's challenges in ways not dissimilar to adults. They develop coping strategies by learning from others around them as well as through trial and error. They are at an age where they like to experiment, take risks and are susceptible to peer pressure. Drugs and alcohol are also seen as options to deal with boredom in communities where there may be limited recreational options available to teenagers.

'I have friends who drink alcohol and do drugs but I have chosen not to. But they are still my friends. That is their choice.'

Youth group participant, North Queensland

As discussed in the My community section of this report, substance misuse is a key reason for children and young people feeling unsafe in their communities. In focus groups, children and young people identified violence (especially domestic and family violence), drink driving and fighting as key concerns related to the use of drugs and alcohol in the community. They saw injectable drugs like heroin and ice (crystal meth) as socially unacceptable and the leading contributors to crime associated with drugs in the community.

Children and young people said they are regularly exposed to a variety of drugs, both legal and illicit, as well as alcohol. Different patterns of use for drugs and alcohol raised varying levels of concern for people their age. For example, drinking alcohol is commonly associated with socialising and 'unwinding' whereas binge drinking and alcohol addiction are seen as health and social concerns.

Focus group participants indicated teenagers have easy access to alcohol, both in the home and among older peers. They see this as having an impact on their social and health outcomes. Some said alcohol laws should be more severe to prevent children and young people being affected by the negative consequences of alcohol misuse.

Suggested solutions

Participants suggested children and young people need more information from an early age about the impacts on their health and about how to develop a balanced relationship with alcohol. There was some level of confusion about responsible alcohol use. Children and young people said they do not know how to measure a standard drink or reduce the risk of harm arising from drinking.

When asked to think about what 'needs to be done' about the issue of drugs and alcohol, survey respondents highlighted a need for harsher penalties for drug use and more strategies to make young people less susceptible to peer pressure.

Action Planning

Completing the worry matrix

They said it is helpful when adults have open and honest conversations about drugs and alcohol early on, explain the risks and set a good example. Children and young people said they rely on adults to teach them how to avoid people who use drugs or alcohol and how to say 'no' if they are offered drugs or alcohol. Parents and carers were seen as being in the best position to provide this type of guidance.

Children and young people identified some unhelpful things adults do, including being drunk or using drugs in front of kids. They said sheltering them from drugs and alcohol and then getting angry or kicking them out when there are incidents of drug or alcohol misuse is also unhelpful.

Children and young people said adults' own misuse of alcohol or drugs and their fear of encouraging drug use by talking about it are two of the key reasons adults are not responding well to the issue. Lack of education about drugs and alcohol and not knowing how to talk with children about it were identified as additional barriers to adults not responding well.

Children's and young people's advice to adults included educating themselves, teaching kids about drugs and alcohol from an early age, explaining the risks thoroughly, and being a good role model.

Other strategies discussed in focus groups included the provision of regular, reliable public transport to reduce risks of injury and fatality associated with drug use and drinking and driving, particularly in rural areas.

Harm reduction also featured highly on children and young people's suggestions for managing issues relating to drug and alcohol use. They saw control and regulation as other appropriate responses.

ACTION PLAN: DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

What do kids need?

- for adults to sit down and explain the risks
- information on the types of drugs and their effects
- advice on how to avoid drugs like coke, ice and heroin
- support and love
- protection and explanation
- to be taught how to say no and avoid people who use drugs and alcohol
- something to be happy about besides drugs
- to learn how to manage peer pressure
- to be reminded that you are there for them and you can talk to them
- to talk to parents
- reporting mechanisms
- to be taught how to avoid drugs and what to do if they are offered to you.

What do adults currently do that is helpful?

- tell kids not to take drugs
- explain the dangers and risks
- set a good example
- address the problem
- warn them about it.

What do adults do that is unhelpful?

- use drugs in front of their kids
- shield kids from drugs and alcohol completely
- kick kids out or get angry when alcohol or drugs are used
- use drugs when stressed
- abuse kids
- spike drinks
- don't teach kids about the risks.

What keeps adults from responding well?

- not having information or knowledge themselves
- having an addiction or using drugs
- not knowing that kids are using drugs or alcohol
- avoiding talking about the issue because they don't want to encourage drug taking by talking about it
- fear of their kids being taken away.

What advice would you give to adults?

- lead by example - don't take drugs, stop smoking
- teach kids about drugs and alcohol when they are young, and explain things thoroughly
- check up on your kids and ask how they are going
- don't hide things from your kids - be open so they will be
- do more research
- be calm.

Environment

Children and young people showed a strong appreciation for the natural environment. The themes of the importance of taking care of the natural environment and concern for its well-being recurred in survey responses, focus groups, postcard responses and artwork.

30% said the environment is one of the most important issues

23% said climate change is one of the most important issues

We need to keep creeks clean and clean up rubbish.

Artwork submission, South East Queensland

During focus groups, when asked 'what do you need in your community to make it better for people your age?' many suggested more green and natural spaces. They saw existing places such as parks, local rivers, dams and beaches within or around their communities as valuable assets, and demonstrated a desire to help preserve these green spaces both for current and future generations.

Young children also showed they had a similar concern for green spaces through their artwork.

'Help clean our environment and care for our community throughout our state.'

Postcard response, South East Queensland

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, the importance of 'caring for country and culture' was discussed as being a strong part of identity. They said caring for country keeps culture strong, making it especially important to them. Additionally, they expressed a desire for more opportunities to spend time on country with Elders, learning traditions, bush medicine and hunting.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people discussed their concern about sacred sites being destroyed by mining and other development activities. They worried about future generations not having the opportunity to see these places of importance and expressed a desire for more opportunities to work on country, for example as rangers.

'I am worried about my country being destroyed by mining. The next generation won't see what I've seen, sacred sites and dreaming.'

Primary student, Far North Queensland

Children and young people discussed at length their concerns about the negative impact of human activity on the environment. They expressed concern about environmental issues they believe they are inheriting due to decisions made by generations before. Specifically, they spoke about the reliance on finite resources such as coal, oil, and gas and discussed an urgent need to transition to renewable sources of energy.

'I think it is important for all young people to make a difference in our world. Whether it is helping the environment or caring for their people they deserve the rights to make a difference or change the way we look at things.'

Postcard response, South East Queensland

Children and young people who live in areas renowned for their natural landscapes are acutely aware of environment degradation. For example, in North and Far North Queensland, children and young people almost universally discussed their concern about the decline of the Great Barrier Reef. They spoke about climate change and coral bleaching being a cause for concern in their regions and of the need to preserve the reef.

Children and young people are passionate about raising awareness of the ways adults can reduce their environmental footprints. They listed reducing

plastic use, recycling, composting, using public transport, carpooling and reducing water and electricity consumption as things people in the community can easily do to reduce their impact on the environment.

They identified a need for more community-based environmental resources such as community gardens, waste disposal amenities, e-waste recycling facilities and container refund schemes. Community programs such as clean-up days and recycling education initiatives were seen as essential. Many children and young people spoke about their involvement in initiatives such as *Clean up Australia Day* and *Earth Hour* and wanted to see these types of programs expanded more broadly.

'Governments need to respect the environment over development.'
Primary student, South East Queensland

'Housing estates are impacting on the environment and green spaces.'
Secondary student, South East Queensland
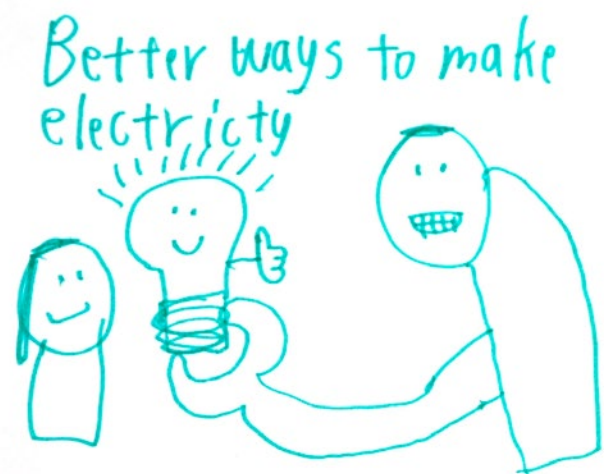
Primary school focus group, Far North Queensland

> **'I would install more solar power so the environment is healthier.'**
> Secondary student, North Queensland
>
> **'We need to protect and preserve the natural environment for future generations.'**
> Secondary student, South West Queensland

When focusing on a global scale, children and young people are concerned about the impacts of climate change on the environment. They discussed how world leaders need to work together to find solutions to address climate change before the impacts are too great and irreversible.

Focus group participants were asked to consider what could be included in an action plan to address the issues related to the environment. They suggested adults role model environmentally friendly practices, laws and legislation to curb environmentally damaging activity, and industry transitioning to renewable energy production.

They said it was helpful when adults were aware of environmental issues and able to teach children good habits to care for and protect the environment. Children and young people said it would be helpful for adults to speak more openly about issues affecting the environment to increase awareness in the community.

Large-scale development and urbanisation were also concerns at the community level. In particular, children and young people referred to land being cleared for housing developments with little regard for wildlife and natural habitats. In one group, participants spoke about the impact of housing developments on the local koala population due to loss of habitat.

The Great Barrier Reef

Artwork submission,
South East Queensland

ACTION PLAN: ENVIRONMENT

What do kids need?

- healthy and clean environment
- less development and land clearing
- protection of natural spaces for all species and future generations
- transition from coal to renewable energy
- reduction of electricity and water consumption
- reduction of plastic use
- strong regulation and fines for littering
- consideration of the effects of smoking on the environment, health and others (passive smoking).

What do adults currently do that is helpful?

- act as positive role models with regards to energy consumption, waste disposal, plastic use and public transport usage
- teach children good habits to care for and protect the environment
- be aware of environmental issues
- quit smoking.

What do adults currently do that is unhelpful?

- overconsumption of water and energy
- litter
- create food waste
- use cars instead of public transport
- smoke
- cut down trees.

What keeps adults from responding well?

- financial pressures.

What advice would you give to adults?

- be aware of and reduce energy and water consumption
- reduce plastic use
- reduce consumption of 'useless' things
- use environmentally friendly products
- get involved in community events like clean up days and Earth Hour with the family
- be more honest about environmental issues in the world so that young people become more aware and can help.

Responding to what we have heard

Children and young people said when they are worried, having meaningful conversations with adults helps them feel less stressed. Almost all survey respondents indicated it was important for parents and carers to trust, accept, support, listen, understand and spend time with them.

When children and young people were asked what they want from decision makers, 21 per cent of survey respondents indicated they wanted support and help with problems and issues they face. This suggests there are opportunities for adults to provide practical assistance.

Children and young people said they need support from adults to help manage the things they worry about, whether they relate to bullying, mental health, drugs and alcohol, or the environment.

WHAT DID CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SAY THEY NEED TO MANAGE THEIR CONCERNS?

We would like adults to:

- be present, pay attention and make time for us when we need you
- listen without judgement and take us seriously
- have open conversations about:
  - what is happening in our lives, especially at school and in our friendship circles
  - how you can support us
- work with us to identify solutions
- provide us with youth friendly information that is clear, direct and shows us where we can get help and where we can report problems if needed
- create and provide access to programs and training to help young people support their peers
- provide opportunities for us to have a say and to take action on issues that are important to us.

WHERE TO FROM HERE

There are many steps children and young people take on their journey to adulthood, from finding their place in their community to making decisions about their future and responding to the issues affecting them. Each step presents an opportunity for adults to support children and young people in their journey by listening to their opinions and understanding what they need.

The results of the Growing up in Queensland project provide signposts for ways adults can assist children and young people to feel safe in their communities, achieve their hopes and dreams and navigate their concerns.

Two key messages have come through strongly from the children and young people who have participated in the Growing up in Queensland project:

1. They are passionate about having the opportunity to participate in conversations about issues impacting on their lives. They want adults to respect their opinions and include them when they are making decisions.
2. They value face-to-face connections with people. They want to have conversations with the adults in their lives to help them make decisions about their future and deal with the things they worry about.

Listening to the voices of children and young people gives parents, governments, community service providers and business leaders the opportunity to understand what they need and impact on their lives in positive ways.

There is much more that can be done to help children and young people forge stronger connections with the people in their lives. This generation is often characterised by adults and portrayed in the media as being focused on 'social media and selfies'. The Growing up in Queensland project has shown they are much more than what they do online.

While the internet is a vital part of their lives for study, communication and friendships, we do them a disservice by driving them to primarily online sources of knowledge and experiences. Their need for information, entertainment and support cannot be solved with websites alone. Children and young people crave direct human connections.

The vast majority of what they have told us can be summarised as wanting adults to pay attention, have respectful conversations, and listen to what they have to say about the things important to them.

What will the Queensland Family and Child Commission do?

We will delve deeper into the issues raised by children and young people across Queensland as a result of their engagement in this project. The findings will inform ongoing policy, advocacy and community education work.

Our Youth Advisory Council will investigate youth-led projects directly linked to findings from the Growing up in Queensland project.

We will continue to engage in partnerships with service providers, policy makers and government to take action on the issues raised in this report.

What can you do?

Throughout this project, children and young people generously volunteered their opinions and provided their insights. Through their contributions they conveyed a clear message of optimism about their future.

They described what they need from adults to make good decisions and achieve their goals. They hope this will be heard by adults who will respect and value their ideas and use them to make a difference.

We now encourage the Queensland community to act on this.

The Growing up in Queensland project shows children and young people have a lot to say and it is worth listening to. This report provides evidence for government and business to draw on when making decisions affecting them.

By including the voices of youth in planning, designing and the way we work, leaders in government and business will achieve better outcomes for communities.

'Being heard (is really important to children and young people). Most children's opinions are overlooked. Some opinions are silly but some children have sensible opinions that could really make a difference. Children think differently to adults but that is sometimes a good thing. This ... is giving me a chance to be heard. Now it is up to you to listen.'

Postcard response,
South East Queensland

APPENDIX

PROJECT DESIGN AND METHODS

Ethics

All research methods received ethics approval.

RESEARCH METHOD	APPROVING AUTHORITY	DATE APPROVED
Online survey School and youth group focus groups	Townsville Health and Hospital Service Human Research Ethics Committee	26 February 2018
All other methods	Children's Health Queensland Human Research Ethics Committee	11 June 2018
Research in state schools	Queensland Department of Education	13 March 2018
Research project and techniques	Catholic Education Commission	21 March 2018
	Independent Schools Association of Queensland	18 April 2018
Focus groups in Catholic schools	Diocese of Cairns	29 March 2018
	Archdiocese of Brisbane	30 April 2018
	Diocese of Toowoomba	27 June 2018

Methods

The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) selected a range of methods to provide Queensland children and young people with as many opportunities to participate as possible. We conducted an extensive program of face-to-face focus groups to talk directly to children and young people across the state. Written and artistic activities and an online survey provided alternative avenues for participation.

The Growing up in Queensland project design targeted the whole population of Queensland youth to include a cross-section of children living in urban, regional and remote centres. We made provisions to specifically include the views, thoughts and opinions of young people from minority groups, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander young people, and asylum seeker and refugee young people.

We also involved young people in designing and critiquing the project methodology and identifying specific topic areas for investigation. The QFCC held two workshops with student representatives from St Peters Lutheran College in Springfield and Arethusa College Spring Hill. The QFCC's Youth Champions reviewed both the survey questionnaire and focus group guides and provided insights on length, question phrasing and activities.

A range of trials were conducted before the project was fully implemented:

• We trialled the survey with students from Montessori International College before it was publicly released.

• Students from St Mary's Catholic College in Kingaroy participated in trial focus group sessions, which assisted the project team to refine timing, activities and questions.

• Arethusa College in Wondai provided the opportunity to trial the focus group session with several Aboriginal students, which supported the project team in better engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

• C&K Murgon provided the opportunity to test the teacher-led art activity with their students. This helped refine the questioning and activity for young children.

The participation of children and young people during the design and trial phase provided valuable insights and contributed to the overall response rate and quality of the findings.

Online survey

We published an online quantitative survey on the Queensland Government's Youth eHub.[44] The survey consisted of 50 questions covering the three lines of inquiry (my community; hopes and dreams; and the big picture) and took approximately 20 to 30 minutes to complete. Respondents were presented with a range of pre-populated options under each question as well as free-text fields. With the exception of four demographic questions (gender, year of birth, postcode and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identification), no question was mandatory.

All participants who completed the survey and registered their details with the Youth eHub were eligible to enter the draw to win one of twenty $50 gift cards. This was the only incentive provided.

The survey was promoted to all secondary schools and libraries in Queensland via a poster. Information and posters were also sent to community organisations, local councils and members of parliament. A Facebook and radio campaign was implemented to raise awareness across the state.

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44   The Youth eHub is an online youth engagement portal managed by the Office for Youth - https://e-hub.engagementhub.com.au/

The QFCC consulted with Dr Hannah Thomas (Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Queensland Centre for Mental Health Research and Honorary Fellow, Centre for Clinical Research, Faculty of Medicine, the University of Queensland) during the development of the online survey. Doctor James Scott, (Associate Professor and Consultant Psychiatrist, the University of Queensland and the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital) also reviewed and supported the survey content and design.

7.7% of survey respondents identified as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or South Sea Islander

School-based focus groups

School-based focus groups were held across the state. Of these 61 per cent were held in state schools, 21 per cent in independent schools and 18 per cent in Catholic schools.

These sessions involved a mixture of group discussions and activities to explore the three lines of inquiry. Target locations were selected through an analysis of Queensland's youth population by statistical division. We invited a selection of state, Catholic and independent schools in visited areas to participate in focus groups on specific dates in the region.

Schools nominated the grade levels participating in the focus group and selected participants based on guidelines provided by the project team. The guidelines asked schools to draw participants from the whole student body, not just student leaders, in order to give a wide cohort of students the opportunity to have their voices heard. The participation of children with disabilities and lower levels of English proficiency was dependent on the school being able to provide support staff.

Schools were specifically requested to not invite a student experiencing problems with anxiety, depression or any personal/family issues, to avoid potentially impacting on their well-being.

The discussion in focus groups included what the word 'community' meant to participants and explored the strengths and areas for improvement in their communities. Groups also discussed their hopes and dreams and what they need to achieve these. Activities were facilitated to explore the issues which worry and concern young people. The common themes were discussed in more depth.

19% of focus group participants identified as Aboriginal and/ or Torres Strait Islander

Focus group

Action plans were completed in small groups and in some instances completed as a whole-group activity if time was limited. Participants were asked to select a concern (for example *bullying)* and then answer the following questions about the issue:

- What do kids need?
- What do adults currently do that is helpful?
- What do adults currently do that is unhelpful?
- What keeps adults from responding well?
- What advice would you give to adults?

Youth group workshops

Youth group workshops provided young people from minority groups with the opportunity to participate. These groups included asylum seeker and refugee youth, young people experiencing homelessness or experiencing mental or physical health issues and LGBTIQ+ young people.

Workshops were led by project staff, with youth workers providing support to participants during and after the workshops if needed. These focus groups were conducted regionally and in the Brisbane area.

Teacher and librarian-led artwork activity

The QFCC provided resources for teachers and librarians to lead discussions and capture artistic pieces and statements from children and young people aged 4 - 6 years old about life in their community now and how they would like their community to look in the future.

The resources were developed to be used in children's library programming and for students enrolled in Kindergarten, Prep and years 1 and 2.

Aspects of this activity were also included in the *Meaningful Lives* youth-based program in libraries and the Young Writer's camp held by the State Library of Queensland in Brisbane, Mareeba and Redlands.

Written responses

Five different 'thought postcards' were supplied to regional libraries through the State Library of Queensland as well as to interested schools and other organisations working with children. These contained individual open-ended questions pertaining to the three lines of inquiry:

- What opportunities are important to all children and young people?
- Life would be better for children and young people in Queensland if...
- Who or what will help you achieve your future career goals?
- If you were the mayor, what would you change about your town to make it a better place to live for children and young people?
- What do you think needs to be done to support young people who are being cyber-bullied?

The questions were incorporated into an activity as part of the State Library's *Meaningful Lives* program.

Locations

Focus groups and workshops were conducted across the state in more than 40 locations.

The Growing up in Queensland results have been analysed for five regional areas – South East Queensland, Central Queensland, South West Queensland, North Queensland and Far North Queensland. Findings were generally consistent across regions. Any differences have been noted in the report.

Consent

Individual consent was sought for all data collection activities for participants under 18 years old.

In seeking consent for children and young people to participate in the research, the QFCC drew on the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and used a rights-based research approach.

The UNCRC requires children to be treated with dignity and respect and for specific rights to be upheld in the research process. Central to this approach is the need to provide children with clear, understandable information about the research, the role they have in the research and how the information they provide will be used.

Students invited by schools to participate were given a project information sheet to allow them to choose if they wanted to be involved. If they agreed, the consent form sought the student's consent before their parents' or carers'. Equally important in this rights-based research was for children and young people to be able to withdraw from the research at any time. Focus group participants were informed they could leave the discussion at any time without needing to provide an explanation.

Participant support

Although the focus group discussions did not seek to explore sensitive topics, the QFCC prepared support mechanisms for any participants who might feel upset by the issues raised.

At youth group workshops, service staff were present and available to provide support during the session as well as follow up with all participants in the days after the workshop. School staff were either located in the room where focus groups were conducted or were in close proximity to provide support if needed. No participant was required to remain in the room if they were distressed and support would be given immediately in those circumstances.

At the end of each workshop and focus group, participants were given a support card. This item had space for them to write contact details for youth workers or school counsellors. The cards also provided contact details for several help lines and websites relevant to the age group of the participants.

Survey participants were given information about support services at the beginning and end of the survey. In addition, survey respondents could contact the QFCC directly for support in connecting to a youth mental health specialist.

Growing up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children

The Australian Government Department of Social Services, the Australian Institute of Family Studies and the Australian Bureau of Statistics regularly conduct *Growing up in Australia*: *The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children* (LSAC). This is a national study designed to provide an in-depth understanding of children's development and lifetime well-being in Australia's current social, economic and cultural environment. It is intended to contribute to the evidence base for future policy and program development.[45]

The QFCC commissioned the Australian Institute of Family Studies to provide a technical paper identifying areas of overlap between the lines of inquiry in the Growing up in Queensland project and information available in LSAC about the lives of Queensland children.

Areas of overlap between the two datasets include:

- personal relationships with friends and family
- children's perceptions of safety in their neighbourhood
- career and educational aspirations
- help-seeking behaviour
- what children worry about
- experiences of bullying and discrimination
- how children spend their time.

The technical paper reported on aspects of the lives of children in Queensland, how their lives (and views about different aspects of their lives) change over time, and what is important to them.

Findings from the Australian Institute of Family Studies technical paper are provided throughout this report to further explore common themes and to provide information not available through the Growing up in Queensland results. This technical paper used findings from the pre-released Wave 7 data.

However, the LSAC data and Growing up in Queensland results are not directly comparable. LSAC is a longitudinal study, using a representative sample.[46] The changing experiences, attitudes and opinions can be reported as being broadly representing the views of other children their age. Growing up in Queensland is a snapshot of a large group of Queensland young people at one point in time using a convenience sample.

Limitations

The Growing up in Queensland project adopted a convenience sample approach to increase the response rate and target identified locations to make sure children from urban, regional and remote areas were represented. The results may not represent the views of all Queensland children and young people, particularly those who are not engaged in education or whose parents did not consent to their participation in the project.

To overcome some of the limitations imposed by convenience sampling, we reviewed child-centred research conducted in Australia to assess congruence between findings and the opinions expressed by participants in the Growing up in Queensland project.

The Growing up in Queensland survey limited the number of mandatory questions to increase the response. Not all respondents who accessed the survey answered each question and some respondents dropped out of the survey before the mandatory demographic questions. This limited the extent to which analysis has been undertaken for age, gender or location of residence. More generally, quantitative research is subject to survey error and is a snapshot of people at a point in time.

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45 Growing up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children is a major study following the development of 10,000 children and families from all parts of Australia; https://growingupinaustralia.gov.au/
46 the same group of children are asked questions at different points in time

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