



Queensland  
**Family & Child**  
Commission

Policy Submission

# QFCC Submission on the Queensland Youth Strategy Discussion Paper

November 2022

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## Background

The Queensland Government released the Queensland Youth Strategy (the strategy) in October 2022 for consultation. The strategy acknowledges the contemporary and emerging priorities and challenges affecting young people in Queensland. It will extend the government's commitment to support young people develop skills and knowledge through youth leadership and youth engagement, enabling them to shape the policies, programs and services that impact them.

The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) is the statutory body of the Queensland Government responsible for promoting the safety, wellbeing and best interests of children and young people in Queensland. This includes advocating for the voices of children and young people to be heard by decision-makers on issues that interest and affect them. The QFCC's vision is that every Queensland child is loved, respected and has their rights upheld.

The QFCC facilitated youth consultation on the strategy in a joint workshop with the Office for Youth, held in October, in which 22 Youth Advocates from the QFCC Youth Advisory Council participated. The workshop explored the key issues impacting young people in Queensland and how government can better respond to their needs and priorities.

To further inform this submission, the QFCC also held independent consultation sessions with QFCC Youth Advocates and incorporated a range of research and consultation findings from our previous work with young people from across Queensland.

In this submission, young people are considered to be between 12 and 25 years of age, unless stated otherwise.

## Child and youth participation in government decision-making

### Summary

- The QFCC recommends the Queensland Youth Strategy include a commitment by the Queensland Government to embed child and youth participation in the development of policies, programs and services on issues that interest and affect young people.
- The QFCC recommends this commitment is supported by embedding the QFCC's Child and Youth Participation Framework and supporting materials as a practice guide.

The strategy's consultation discussion paper highlights the need for young people to have meaningful opportunities to have their voices, perspectives and opinions heard and adopted in government decision-making. It also highlights that not all young people across Queensland have the same capability or capacity and that opportunities for engagement and participation need to respond to the unique needs of all young people.

The QFCC and the QFCC Youth Advisory Council agree that governments and decision-makers need to provide meaningful opportunities for child and youth participation that enable all young people across Queensland to have their voices heard on issues and decisions that impact their lives.

Involving children and young people in community, societal and institutional decision-making builds a stronger and more inclusive society. Further, children and young people in Queensland, under Article 12 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, have a fundamental right to have their voices heard on what they

think should happen when decisions are being made that affect them.<sup>1</sup> Embedding youth participation as an expectation of Queensland Government agencies it gives practice effect to the Queensland's obligations as signatories to the *United Nations Conventions of the Rights of the Child*. This presents an opportunity for Queensland to become a leading jurisdiction in Australia on upholding child rights.

During consultation, QFCC Youth Advocates provided the following advice:

- All government agencies should make a public commitment to child and youth participation in decision-making, including accountability measures.
- The mechanisms for how government engages with young people should be public, consistent, and measurable.
- Young people have different skills and strengths, and engagement opportunities should be varied and tailored to enable all young people to participate.
- Young people should be involved from the start of a project or policy development.
- Young people should be compensated for their time and experience.
- Engagement and participation opportunities need to be transparent, valuable, and meaningful, with clearly articulated outcomes.

*"I think the most important issue for young people today is being heard and noticed by the world leaders and adults, as young people have a unique perspective." – male, 16 years, Growing Up in Queensland*

The QFCC [Child and Youth Participation Framework](#) (the framework) and supporting documents provide a best-practice, rights-led approach to child and youth participation in Queensland. The framework outlines how the QFCC gives children and young people genuine opportunities to participate in decision-making, giving full effect to the realisation of their rights. It has been co-designed with a core group of QFCC Youth Advocates who have been instrumental in establishing the new child and youth participation approach. The framework is available for all governments and organisations to embed child and youth participation and to practically apply strategies and processes to amplify the voices of children and young people.

## Working with youth networks

The discussion paper asked how the Queensland Government can better use youth networks to promote opportunities and encourage young people to engage with government to ensure their voices are heard.

During consultation, QFCC Youth Advocates provided the following advice:

- Young people should be embedded in government roles and positions to shift its sole reliance from youth networks or youth groups.
- Youth networks and groups are not accessible for all young people. Engagement needs to happen in accessible, inclusive, and practical ways that allow young people from across Queensland and those with diverse backgrounds to have their voices and opinions heard.
- The skillsets and lived experiences of young people within a network or group need to be directly relevant to the issue or topic that government is engaging on; for example, if the project or initiative centres around the care system, government needs to engage with a diverse range of young people across Queensland who have lived experience of the care system, not exclusively with a person who is merely interested in the topic.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations 1989, [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), Article 12 accessed 14 November 2022

- Government should proactively invite youth groups and networks to be involved in the design and development of policies, programs and services. Government should engage young people before any work is developed, rather than presenting completed work to them for comment on.
- Government representatives should engage and attend youth networks to provide updates and invite feedback on their work portfolios.
- Key government decision-makers should offer a combination of online, hybrid, in-person and informal engagement opportunities.

The QFCC welcomes the opportunity to work with government and organisations to embed child and youth participation across policies, programs and services.

## Determinates of success

*“Young people should be involved in decision-making because these decisions also impact us. We are the next generation, so we should be involved in this crucial process of decision-making to benefit our current society and our future, too. Additionally, young people can learn so much from being involved, such as how to work with others, what the decision-making process is, and thinking of the advantages and disadvantages.” – Jessy, Gubbi Gubbi, female, 20 years*

The discussion paper asked stakeholders and young people what difference a Queensland Youth Strategy could make for young people in Queensland and what did success of a strategy look like. Overwhelmingly, consultation with QFCC Youth Advocates demonstrated the single most determinative factor in the success of a youth strategy and its ability to address issues impacting young people was the inclusion of young people in decision-making by government.

During consultation, when asked what positive difference a Queensland Youth Strategy could make for young people in Queensland, responses included:

- The most positive difference the youth strategy could make is committing to working as a united government across departments to address complex social and systemic issues, rather than attempting to subdivide these and address them individually.
- Make young people feel heard, seen, understood, valued and part of the conversation and community.
- Provide accessible opportunities for youth participation and skill development.
- Take a collaborative, inter-departmental approach to addressing these issues and commit to change targets that are visible and accountable.

### Recommendation 1

The QFCC recommends the Queensland Youth Strategy include a commitment by the Queensland Government to embed child and youth participation in the development of policies, programs and services on issues that interest and affect young people.

The QFCC recommends this commitment is supported by embedding the QFCC's Child and Youth Participation Framework and supporting materials as a practice guide.

### Recommendation 2

The QFCC recommends young people, especially First Nations young people and young people with disabilities, are at the forefront of the development, implementation, evaluation and monitoring of the strategy and that it includes tangible, public commitments on how government will deliver on the issues and concerns raised by young people in Queensland.

## Issues impacting young people in Queensland

### Summary

- Embedding the voices, perspectives, and opinions of young people in Queensland should be the priority of the strategy.
- Young people's sense of safety and belonging in their communities is foundational to their ability to engage in social, economic, cultural, and educational opportunities.

The discussion paper summarises the current issues impacting young people and has requested consultation to address the priority issues faced by young people in Queensland. The issues and priorities of young people in Queensland are dynamic and constantly changing, which is why engaging young people in ongoing discussion about their views, opinions and perspectives is critically important now and into the future.

### Connection to culture

In August 2022 the Queensland Government, First Nations people and non-Indigenous Queenslanders participated in the singing of Queensland's Path to Treaty Commitment. Under this commitment the Queensland Government has pledged to be courageous and curious, to be open to hearing the truth of our state's history and to collaborate in readiness for negotiating treaties. This commitment extends the government's responsibility to enable the self-determination of First Nations young people to live the lives they want now and into the future.

As highlighted in the discussion paper, First Nations young people want to feel a sense of self and engage with systems and services that recognise and strengthen their cultural identity. The QFCC takes its commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families seriously. We recognise the rich resilient cultures that continue to sustain and strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and respect the right to self-determination and the critical importance of continuing connection to kin, Country and culture.

Through consultation with First Nations young people on the QFCC Youth Advisory Council and through research as part of QFCC's Rights, Voices, Stories<sup>2</sup> and Yarning for Change projects, young people expressed the need for government policies, programs and services to support First Nations young people to develop or maintain a continuing connection to culture.

QFCC Youth Advocates who identify as First Nations shared the importance of:

- having the capability and capacity to develop relationships with members of the community
- having First Nations history and culture taught in the education system
- increasing awareness and understanding of First Nations culture within the broader Queensland population.

Ensuring that children and young people are strong in their identity will ensure they are better able to have a voice and communicate confidently.

<sup>2</sup> Queensland Family and Child Commission, [Rights Voices Stories](#), accessed 20 November 2022

In the QFCC’s report, *Yarning for Change: Listen to My Voice*<sup>3</sup>, cultural connection and continuity of relationships were determinative factors in a young person’s wellbeing and a consistent theme heard from children and young people who participated in the project.

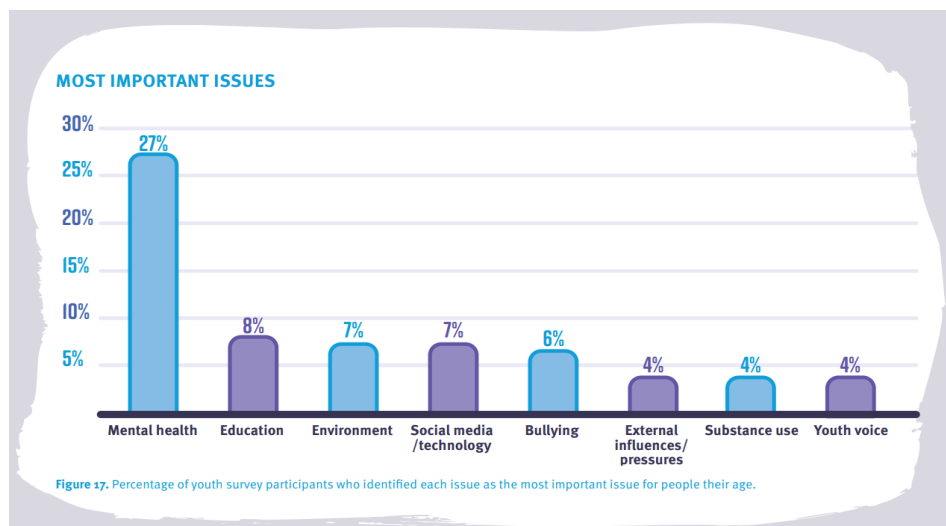
**Recommendation 3:**

The QFCC recommends the Queensland Youth Strategy reflect connection to culture as a critical element when engaging with First Nations children and young people and is embedded throughout all engagement practice and procedures.

The QFCC recommends the strategy reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s rights, including cultural rights in operational and engagement procedures across all government agencies.

**Voices of Young Queenslanders**

In 2020, the QFCC conducted the Voices of Hope: Growing Up in Queensland survey (GUIQ), in which more than 8,000 children and young people across Queensland, aged 4 to 18 years, were asked to rank the most important issues impacting their lives. Their responses are represented below<sup>4</sup>:



The QFCC supports government initiatives and actions that address the priority issues raised by young people, and it recommends young people be included in the design, development and delivery of any outcomes to address these issues.

The sections below summarise the key findings from priority issues raised with us as part of GUIQ 2020. These priority areas align with those raised in the strategy discussion paper. The full report is available on the [QFCC website](#).

<sup>3</sup> Queensland Family and Child Commission, *Yarning for Change: Listen to my Voice*, accessed 15 November,

<sup>4</sup> Queensland Family and Child Commission, *Voices of Hope Growing Up in Queensland*, 2020, p.42, accessed 15 November 2022, [GUIQ report 2020 Digital.pdf \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](#)



## Mental health

Mental health and access to mental health care was raised in the discussion paper as a priority issue for young people in Queensland.

Mental health emerged as a concern for many children and young people who participated in Growing Up in Queensland 2020. Nearly 30 per cent of these young people said mental health was the most important issue for people their age.<sup>5</sup> Most of the participants who identified mental health as an important issue described general mental health, anxiety or depression as their major concerns.<sup>6</sup> In the GUIQ survey, a common sub-theme within mental health was body image.

*“Mental health is a very important factor in everyone’s lives, whether its [sic] anxiety, depression or stress, etc., everyone will experience some sort of normal negative mental health in there [sic] lifetime, however this should not be something you suffer with every day.” – female, 14 years, North Queensland*

Through the GUIQ 2020 survey, children and young people also shared their concerns about mental health stigma and the need for greater awareness and education; their confidence to seek help; and the cost, wait times and remoteness that limit their access to services.<sup>7</sup>

*“Mental health. It’s not taken seriously, and no one cares to understand. The stigma around it needs to end.” – female, 18 years, North Coast*

*“Getting professional help for mental illnesses, like depression and anxiety etc, is not easy. There’s a lot of awareness about seeking help if you need it, but getting help is actually inaccessible and expensive. I know many people who want help and need help but are unable to get it.” – female, 16 years, Metropolitan*

The outcomes of the QFCC’s consultation support the prioritisation of mental health and access to mental health services as key issues impacting young Queenslanders. The QFCC supports actions to address young people’s mental health concerns, particularly the barriers to accessing mental health identified by young people, and it recommends the inclusion of young people’s voices in addressing these issues.

## Education

Although education was not referenced as a key issue in the discussion paper, the GUIQ 2020 survey found that 80 per cent of survey participants felt stressed about school or university results<sup>8</sup>, while just under 10 per cent said issues relating to education were the most important.<sup>9</sup> Young people identified factors that made them feel stressed about school or university, including:

- missing out on time to enjoy life
- having no time to participate in physical activity

<sup>5</sup> Queensland Family and Child Commission, *Voices of Hope Growing Up in Queensland*, 2020, p.42, accessed 15 November 2022, [GUIQ report 2020 Digital.pdf \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p.42

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 43

<sup>8</sup> Queensland Family and Child Commission, *Voices of Hope Growing Up in Queensland*, 2020, p.45, accessed 15 November 2022, [GUIQ report 2020 Digital.pdf \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p.45



- not receiving high enough marks
- lack of support within the school system
- subjects and information were not relevant or engaging
- concerns they weren't learning skills that would set them up for success in adulthood.<sup>10</sup>

*“The stresses that schooling is putting upon kids. The mental illness rate has no reason to be as high as it is, and the majority of people I know link it mainly back to school and other stress that minors have no reason to be under.” – male, 17 years, Metropolitan*

Mental health affected the likelihood of participants reporting academic stress. Of those who said they had an emotional or mental health condition, 86 per cent said they experienced academic stress, compared with 76 per cent of other participants.<sup>11</sup>

#### **Recommendation 4**

The QFCC recommends the Queensland Youth Strategy highlight the role educational institutions can play in better addressing mental health issues for young people in Queensland. Approaches to resolving young people's concerns about learning and education should be co-designed with them.

## **The environment**

Protecting the environment emerged as a key issue impacting young people across Queensland, as reflected in both the discussion paper and QFCC consultation with young people.

The GUIQ 2020 survey showed nearly 30 per cent of young people said that adults need to take environmental concerns, such as climate change, more seriously.<sup>12</sup>

*“Our planet's climate, although it's not all ours to do, the older generations helped create the problem, let's all help fix it.” – male, 18 years, North Coast*

*“Being worried that there won't be a future for us due to climate change and the over exhaustion of the planet's resources.” – gender-diverse participant, 18 years, North Coast*

*“Being a young person today means you have no choice but to be very aware and conscious of what we consume, how we consume, and how we act as a collective.” – Aboriginal female, 17 years, South East Queensland*

The QFCC supports the environment being identified as a priority in the strategy. Approaches to resolving young people's concerns about the environment should be co-designed with them.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p.45

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p.46

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p.47

## Community and sense of safety

The discussion paper notes that young people are passionate about, and connected to, their culture, communities and the environment. They want to feel accepted, respected and valued at home, in the community and online.

The QFCC's consultation through the GUIQ 2020 survey supports these findings. It also demonstrated that young people's feelings toward community members influenced the way they felt about their communities in general. Despite half of the youth survey participants believing adults are friendly to young people, only 23 per cent said adults in their communities listen to young people.<sup>13</sup> This is important because feeling heard affects young people's feelings about their communities.

Young people aged 13 to 18 years who participated in the GUIQ survey were asked about their feelings of safety in their community and online. Just over 60 per cent of participants said they feel safe in their communities.<sup>14</sup> Slightly fewer participants, 55 per cent, said there were enough safe places in their community for spending time with friends.<sup>15</sup>

In June 2022, the QFCC further consulted with young people across Queensland to better understand their perceptions of community and sense of safety. Focus groups were held in inner regional and outer regional areas of Queensland. This is because GUIQ 2020 found young people's perceptions of safe spaces in their communities differed according to the remoteness of their town. Of the participants in major cities, approximately 60 per cent said there were enough safe spaces where they can spend time with friends<sup>16</sup>; however, only 49 per cent of participants in inner regional Queensland and 44 per cent of young people in outer regional Queensland said there were enough safe spaces.<sup>17</sup> These findings were presented in the [Growing Up in Queensland 2022: Safe Spaces Report](#).

When participants told us what influenced their feelings of safety in public spaces, two broad themes emerged. One overarching theme relates to the people in public spaces. Participants felt unsafe in spaces where people were swearing, fighting, and being rude<sup>18</sup>; in contrast, they felt safe in the presence of friends, trusted adults, welcoming staff, police and security staff, and adults who provided supervision.<sup>19</sup>

Many young people said they wanted more police and security guards in public spaces. The other overarching theme relates to physical features of the spaces. Open spaces and spaces that were close to populated areas helped participants feel safe. Participants said these features would allow them to notice danger and be seen by others if they were in danger. Sufficient lighting and security cameras also helped young people feel safe. In addition, young people wanted simple changes that would remove physical hazards<sup>20</sup>; for example, participants wanted vegetation and footpaths to be better maintained.

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<sup>13</sup> Queensland Family and Child Commission, *Voices of Hope Growing Up in Queensland*, 2020, p.15, accessed 15 November 2022, [GUIQ report 2020 Digital.pdf \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p.21

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p.21

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p.21

<sup>17</sup> Queensland Family and Child Commission, *Growing Up in Queensland 2022: Safe Spaces Report*, 2022, p.2, accessed 15 November 2022, [QFCC GUIQ 2022 Safe Spaces Report](#)

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p.5

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p.5

<sup>20</sup> Queensland Family and Child Commission, *Growing Up in Queensland 2022: Safe Spaces Report*, 2022, p.5, accessed 15 November 2022, [QFCC GUIQ 2022 Safe Spaces Report](#)

**Recommendation 5**

The QFCC is supportive of future initiatives working directly with young people to increase their sense of safety in their communities. Young people's sense of safety was subjective and influenced by factors such as age, gender, and geographic location. The QFCC would welcome initiatives that are co-designed with young people from diverse backgrounds, especially First Nations young people and young people with a disability, to ensure their needs are met.

**Youth and recreational spaces**

The discussion paper identifies that young people are resilient and active with many wanting more information and knowledge to make positive life choices. Sport and physical activity and access to quality greenspace can improve confidence, self-esteem and body image and improve overall cognitive and mental health in young people.

The GUIQ 2020 survey also identified that in addition to the type of people that make up a community, the places within a community are important to young people; for example, children and young people told us they appreciate community centres, skate parks, and shopping centres.<sup>21</sup> These findings were supported by the focus groups held as part of consultation sessions for the GUIQ 2022 Safe Spaces report.

*“The thing that makes the community a great place for us is that there are many child-friendly meet up spaces and activities. Also, the people are nice.” – female, 12 years, Metropolitan*

The desire for more spaces and places for recreation and socialising was also emphasised by GUIQ survey respondents. Forty-four per cent of young people said their communities had enough fun places for young people.<sup>22</sup>

The QFCC would support initiatives that seek to increase the number of inclusive youth spaces and/or places within a community available to young people. Young people have shown that their sense of wellbeing and safety within a community is improved when there are dedicated youth spaces or places tailored to their needs.

## Issues impacting children and young people involved with the Queensland child protection system

### Summary

- The Queensland Youth Strategy is for all children and young people in Queensland, including the 12,000 Queenslanders who live in out-of-home care.
- In 2021, the QFCC consulted with 11 young people who had lived experience of the care system to identify the issues that matter most to a child in the Queensland child protection system. The QFCC refers to these

<sup>21</sup> Queensland Family and Child Commission, *Voices of Hope Growing Up in Queensland*, 2020, p.20, accessed 15 November 2022, [GUIQ report 2020 Digital.pdf \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p.20

young people as Youth Researchers. The [Rights, Voices, Stories](#) report was produced following this consultation.

- Through Rights, Voices, Stories, the overarching priority for young people involved in the care system was that their rights were upheld and they had the ability to have their voices heard when decisions were made that would impact them.
- While there is crossover between the issues raised by young people in care and those identified in the strategy, the Youth Researchers identified the areas that matter most to a child in care: their identity, stability, health and wellbeing, feeling safe and loved, and equity and fairness.

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The discussion paper seeks to identify priority issues impacting young people across Queensland to ensure they receive the support needed to contribute to social, economic, and cultural life in Queensland.

## Our Rights Matter – Rights, Voices, Stories

A consistent theme across the Rights, Voices, Stories discussions was that young people involved with the Queensland child protection system have rights, as do all children. They need help to understand what their rights are and what they can do when their rights are not being upheld. Regardless of their age or involvement with the child protection system, they should be listened to, and their concerns taken seriously.

Article 12 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* establishes the rights of children to be involved in decisions that affect them. It refers to this as participation, which is defined as an: ... *ongoing process of children's expression and active involvement in decision-making at different levels in matters that concern them. It requires information-sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect and requires that full consideration of their views be given, taking into account the child's age and maturity.*<sup>23</sup>

Consultation during Rights, Voices, Stories overwhelming demonstrated that young people in care sought to have their basic, fundamental rights upheld.<sup>24</sup> The following section provides greater detail about the areas identified by the Youth Researchers as being important to a child in care.

### Identity

Young people said identity means children and young people know who they are and where they are from and that they have a positive sense of self-identity and have self-esteem.

Practical examples of what identity looks like for a child or young person involved with the Queensland child protection system includes:

- having early access to their birth certificate and other identifying information
- having photos of them and their family throughout their life
- being helped to understand their involvement with the child protection system

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<sup>23</sup> Queensland Family and Child Commission, Rights Voices Stories, 2021, p.12, accessed 15 November 2022, [Queensland Family and Child Commission: Rights, Voices, Stories project report \(afcc.qld.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>24</sup> Queensland Family and Child Commission, Rights Voices Stories, 2021, p.12, accessed 15 November 2022, [Queensland Family and Child Commission: Rights, Voices, Stories project report \(afcc.qld.gov.au\)](#)

- being supported to understand and be involved in their culture if they choose to
- having full access to their files
- being respected as an individual
- being safe to explore gender identity, sexual orientation and spirituality.

The QFCC supports government's actions that prioritise the needs of young people to know who they are and have access to resources and supports that enable them to be and express their true selves.

## Stability

Young people prioritised the need for stability, meaning that even though their living arrangements might change, children and young people experience stability in other areas of their lives. They are supported in maintaining connections that are important to them.

Practical examples of what stability looks like to children and young people involved with the Queensland child protection system include:

- being helped to maintain desired aspects of routine—to provide feelings of comfort and a sense of control over their own situation
- being able to stay at the same school or early childhood education and care provider
- having consistency of health care provider and other support services
- being assisted to maintain desired social, sibling and family relationships—including being placed with siblings
- having consistent, trusted people available for advice and support.

Stability is more than just the number of placements and the duration of time children and young people have been in care. It also relates to their feelings of connectedness and belonging.<sup>25</sup> They want to have a stable network of friends and positive relationships with carers, doctors, teachers and others. These relationships provide a 'sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity throughout childhood and beyond'.<sup>26</sup> Having stable, consistent people in their lives helps children and young people to develop resilience, lower their stress, and reduce the likelihood of becoming homeless or involved with the youth justice system. It also provides positive health and employment outcomes.<sup>27</sup>

## Health and wellbeing

Health and wellbeing was a priority for young people. For young people in care, health and wellbeing means children and young people have their mental, physical, emotional and developmental health needs assessed, treated, supported and reviewed at appropriate intervals and at their request.

The health and wellbeing needs for children and young people in care are complex. If they enter the system with undiagnosed and untreated psychological, physical and developmental issues, these issues can impede their education and their ability to make lasting relationships and form stable attachments.<sup>28</sup> When left undiagnosed or untreated, these issues can affect their placement stability, their sense of safety, identity and overall health and

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p.14

<sup>26</sup> Queensland Family and Child Commission, Rights Voices Stories, 2021, p.14, accessed 15 November 2022, [Queensland Family and Child Commission: Rights, Voices, Stories project report \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/Reports-and-publications/Rights-Voices-Stories)

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p.14

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p.15

wellbeing.<sup>29</sup> When care is trauma-informed, it can support children and young people through safe care-giving and by understanding the adversity they have experienced.<sup>30</sup>

Practical examples of what health and wellbeing looks like to children and young people involved with the Queensland child protection system include:

- having comprehensive health checks and assessments to identify the root cause of any issues (at appropriate intervals, including at the child's request), with early intervention
- having mental health services provided to all children and young people upon entering care
- having appropriate treatments (including medications and hypoallergenic products) provided at no cost
- being supported in having fun, playing, and participating in sport, recreation and extra-curricular activities
- ensuring care is trauma-informed.

## Safe and Loved

Young people said that a young person who feels safe and loved lives in an environment that cultivates a feeling of home, where they feel security, know they are heard and understood, are supported, and are able to grow and learn.<sup>31</sup>

Practical examples of what safe and loved looks like to children and young people involved with the Queensland child protection system include:

- having a safe place that feels like 'home'
- feeling and being loved by a person or people they can trust
- having basic needs met (shelter, food and clothing)
- being listened to and taken seriously
- feeling safe to be a child and being allowed to make mistakes and learn from them
- being supported and provided with rules, boundaries and morals to support healthy development
- being supported in striving to reach goals and full potential
- having racial identity and experiences of associated stigma understood.

Being safe and loved is a basic condition for healthy development. A lack of love can have a significant impact on self-esteem and emotional wellbeing.<sup>32</sup> It also includes joining the social practices of home life. Other feelings of being safe and loved include that someone is there to support them emotionally, encourage them and provide practical support.<sup>33</sup>

## Equity and Fairness

For young people in care, equity and fairness means that children and young people are entitled to fair and equal treatment in the home, with the same rights, expectations, and enjoyment as all children, while being assisted to prepare for life as independent individuals.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p.15

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p.15

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p.16

<sup>32</sup> Queensland Family and Child Commission, Rights Voices Stories, 2021, p.16, accessed 15 November 2022, [Queensland Family and Child Commission: Rights, Voices, Stories project report \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/Reports/Queensland-Family-and-Child-Commission-Rights-Voices-Stories-2021)

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p.16

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p.17



Practical examples of what equity and fairness looks like to children and young people involved with the Queensland child protection system include:

- being treated the same way as other children and young people in the household (for family-based placements)
- having a reasonable process to support participation in school activities, camps and other extra-curricular activities
- being helped to access driving lessons and obtain a licence
- receiving timely and appropriate responses to requests for support—and timely actioning of these requests
- being provided with the same resources and equipment as peers (for example, personal hygiene items, clothing, school uniform, and books and sporting equipment)
- having no limits on access to services to support young people when they leave care
- being provided with education, support and information about life skills.

### **Recommendation 6**

The QFCC recommends the strategy provide an opportunity for the Queensland Government to be explicit in its commitment to young people living in care.

The QFCC recommends the perspectives, opinions and needs of young people with a lived experience of the care system be incorporated into the priority issues addressed in the discussion paper. Their views should determine the outcomes when developing policy and programs.

Further, the strategy could acknowledge the role the QFCC already plays in collecting and amplifying the views of children and young people in the care system.

### **Recommendation 7**

The QFCC recommends the strategy highlight the rights of all children and young people across Queensland, as outlined in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

## **Issues impacting young people in the youth detention system**

### **Summary**

- As part of a Queensland Government 2020 election commitment, the QFCC was asked to undertake culturally appropriate community conversations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people about their interactions with Queensland's justice system to gain a deeper understanding of how current youth justice responses affect their wellbeing.
- As a result of this consultation, the [\*Yarning for Change – Listen to my Voice\*](#) report was developed. The report captures children's and young people's uncensored insights about their lived experiences of the youth justice system.

The discussion paper acknowledges the unique needs of young people who have lived experience of the youth justice system.



In 2022, the QFCC started a research project to better understand how Queensland's youth justice system affects the children's and young people's wellbeing. The QFCC spoke with more than 100 children, young people and their families about their experiences of Queensland's youth justice system and its effectiveness in reducing offending. The vast majority of participants were First Nations people, which reflects the gross over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Queensland's youth justice system.

Young people emphasised the importance of relationships and what it means to have people who care and show up for them. They said it was the people in the system and their communities who make the greatest difference.

During the yarns, young people were asked what made them feel good about life. Being strong in community and culture was continuously mentioned as the highest contributing factor to wellbeing.<sup>35</sup> This means knowing their mob and country and having community connections. Other positive factors young people mentioned included:

- Young people acknowledged their family connections and community connections made them feel good about life. This ranged from relationships with community members to being involved in community sports or programs.
- Country connections or their communities of origin were important to young people. They may not have grown up or lived on their Country, but they knew their communities of origin.
- Mob connections and knowing who they were and having opportunities to actively express their culture was important.
- Young people identified that having local role models to look up to contributed to their wellbeing—not a celebrity, but a family member or friend who was accessible and available.
- Accessing programs in community was helpful, such as community sports and on-Country programs.
- Maintaining connection with their siblings in care was a factor that kept young people strong.

*“Yeah, sit down and talk to them more, you know? Get more experienced boys, you know, who have been in and out, they have done that.” – male, 18 years*

*“They should be more interested in getting, especially young mob, since they're separating them from their culture, anyway, they should be more invested in teaching them their culture.”  
– male, 19 years*

Young people were also asked about the negative influences they experienced while in community and how these contributed to their offending behaviour. Many young people identified that they struggled in community when their basic needs were not met and when they had no access to immediate family members, especially their siblings in care.<sup>36</sup> A lack of cultural connection and having opportunities to express their culture also had a negative impact on young people while in community.<sup>37</sup>

*“..just everyone making all of the decisions for me without like, letting me have a say as well. Like, I would like to know more about what's going on around me, so I'm not left stressing out and over thinking in myself.” – female, age not disclosed*

The Yarning for Change project focuses on ensuring the voices of children, young people, their families, communities, and those who support them are heard and considered when informing and evaluating changes to

<sup>35</sup> Queensland Family and Child Commission, Yarning for Change: Interim Report, 2022, p. 8, accessed 23 November 2022

<sup>36</sup> Queensland Family and Child Commission, Yarning for Change: Interim Report, 2022, p. 8, accessed 23 November 2022

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

the youth justice system in Queensland. Children and young people have a right to participate in decision-making around matters that directly affect them. It is evident from the yarns the QFCC held with children, young people and their families that they are willing and able to share their experiences when they feel seen and respected.

Active and positive engagement is the cornerstone of meaningful empowerment for children, young people and their families. When decisions are made about them but not with them, there is a low likelihood of a positive outcome. Young people want to be heard and be part of decision-making around their lives and futures.

### **Recommendation 8**

The QFCC supports and recommends government action that prioritises wellbeing and the rights of young people involved in the youth justice system, as identified by them in the *Yarning for Change: Listen to My Voice* report. We further recommend the voices of children and young people be used to inform future policy and legislative changes impacting children and young people in contact with the youth justice system, including detention.

### **Recommendation 9**

The QFCC recommends the strategy clearly demonstrate there is only a small proportion of young people engaged in offending and antisocial behaviour. The strategy should also highlight that each key government agency has a duty of care for supporting the safety, wellbeing and best interests of Queensland children and young people.

## **Summary of recommendations**

A summary of the recommendations put forward by the QFCC is listed below.

### **Recommendation 1**

The QFCC recommends the Queensland Youth Strategy include a commitment by the Queensland Government to embed child and youth participation in the development of policies, programs and services on issues that interest and affect young people.

The QFCC recommends this commitment is supported by embedding the QFCC's Child and Youth Participation Framework and supporting materials as a practice guide.

### **Recommendation 2**

The QFCC recommends young people, especially First Nations young people and young people with disabilities, are at the forefront of the development, implementation, evaluation and monitoring of the strategy and that it includes tangible, public commitments on how government will deliver on the issues and concerns raised by young people in Queensland.

### **Recommendation 3:**

The QFCC recommends the Queensland Youth Strategy reflect connection to culture as a critical element when engaging with First Nations children and young people and is embedded throughout all engagement practice and procedures.

The QFCC recommends the strategy reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's rights, including cultural rights in operational and engagement procedures across all government agencies.

**Recommendation 4**

The QFCC recommends the Queensland Youth Strategy highlight the role educational institutions can play in better addressing mental health issues for young people in Queensland. Approaches to resolving young people's concerns about learning and education should be co-designed with them.

**Recommendation 5**

The QFCC is supportive of future initiatives working directly with young people to increase their sense of safety in their communities. Young people's sense of safety was subjective and influenced by factors such as age, gender, and geographic location. The QFCC would welcome initiatives that are co-designed with young people from diverse backgrounds, especially First Nations young people and young people with a disability, to ensure their needs are met.

**Recommendation 6**

The QFCC recommends the strategy provide an opportunity for the Queensland Government to be explicit in its commitment to young people living in care.

The QFCC recommends the perspectives, opinions and needs of young people with a lived experience of the care system be incorporated into the priority issues addressed in the discussion paper. Their views should determine the outcomes when developing policy and programs.

Further, the strategy could acknowledge the role the QFCC already plays in collecting and amplifying the views of children and young people in the care system.

**Recommendation 7**

The QFCC recommends the strategy highlight the rights of all children and young people across Queensland, as outlined in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

**Recommendation 8**

The QFCC supports and recommends government action that prioritises wellbeing and the rights of young people involved in the youth justice system, as identified by them in the *Yarning for Change: Listen to My Voice* report. We further recommend the voices of children and young people be used to inform future policy and legislative changes impacting children and young people in contact with the youth justice system, including detention.

**Recommendation 9**

The QFCC recommends the strategy clearly demonstrate there is only a small proportion of young people engaged in offending and antisocial behaviour. The strategy should also highlight that each key government agency has a duty of care for supporting the safety, wellbeing and best interests of Queensland children and young people.