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.

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.⁶

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

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.

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 principle8 – 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.

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Focus group participants in Far North Queensland

Far North Queensland
- Number of focus groups: 15
- Number of participants: 225

South 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

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

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
806,555 children and young people were enrolled in school in 2017

58% were in primary school
42% were attending secondary school

Employment
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%

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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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South East QLD</td>
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<tr>
<td>South West QLD</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<tr>
<td>North QLD</td>
<td>11%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Far North QLD</td>
<td>7%</td>
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