MY COMMUNITY
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.

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.

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.

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

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15 Ibid. p. 3.
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.

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.

‘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 help and 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

‘These are the things in my community. I like to visit my doctor. They help people. There are parks to play on the slide and on the swings. School is close to me.’
Artwork submission, South East Queensland

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

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 travel a long way to participate in group activities, like Battle of the Bands. I can’t do music as a class in school either. It has to be done as an extracurricular activity and out of your own time and pocket. If I need equipment I have to order it online and sometimes it will be broken when it arrives.’
Secondary student, South West Queensland

‘For little kids and for older people this place is really good but for teenagers who don’t like sport, like me for instance, who doesn’t even like watching it, there is almost nothing to do except just sit in a room and forget everything of existence. I didn’t even have WiFi until recently.’
Secondary student, Central Queensland

“More riding bikes to help our environment and more safe places to ride.”
Artwork submission, South East Queensland

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.

‘Nature and playgrounds because that is what is important to me.’
Artwork submission, South East Queensland

‘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

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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{29}

\begin{figure}
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\begin{quote}
‘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
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{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

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

‘Pop up shops are good to increase choices but it means people don’t support local businesses.’

Secondary student, Central Queensland

‘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

‘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.
‘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

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


31 ibid.

32 ibid.
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

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

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).
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.

**ACTION PLAN: CRIME AND SAFETY**

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.

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

‘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

‘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
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.

‘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
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

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

- Physical appearance
- Personal relationships
- Cultural background
- Skin colour
- Religion
- Gender
- Age
- Sexual identity
- Disability
- Online activity
- Mental health
- Physical health
- Gender identity
- Body size/shape
- Personality
- Physical activity

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). 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.

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?