



VOICES OF HOPE

GROWING UP IN QUEENSLAND 2020

Queensland
Family & Child
Commission



After all, when did we decide that age was equal to wisdom? It is clear that a man can die having known nothing, and children younger than me have seen and known more pain than most of us ever shall. Young people have opinions, and we are the face of the future.

Female, 15 years, Metropolitan

FRONT COVER ARTWORK

Artist: Lila, female, 15 years Metropolitan,
Amplify - Through My Eyes Arts Opportunity Winner

COVID-19 had brought about change to our lives and future. So, I focused on how we were forced to turn from human interaction to loneliness and technology, which often had its disadvantages, including glitches in the system.

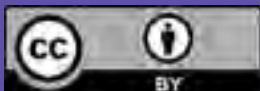
COPYRIGHT

Voices of hope: Growing up in Queensland 2020.
Copyright © The State of Queensland (Queensland Family and Child Commission) 2021

ISBN 978-0-6451352-2-0

LICENCE

This report is licensed by the State of Queensland (Queensland Family and Child Commission) under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) 4.0 International licence. You are free to copy, communicate, and adapt this report, as long as you attribute this work to the State of Queensland (Queensland Family and Child Commission). To view a copy of this licence visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>. Content from this report should be attributed to: The State of Queensland (Queensland Family and Child Commission) Voices of hope: Growing up in Queensland 2020.



April 2021

Queensland Family and Child Commission

PO Box 15217 Brisbane City East Queensland 4002
63 George Street, Brisbane, Qld 4000 (Australia)

Phone: 07 3900 6000
Fax: 07 3900 6050
Email: info@qfcc.qld.gov.au

www.qfcc.qld.gov.au

Voices of hope: Growing up in Queensland 2020

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES

The Queensland Family and Child Commission acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia, and their connection to land, sea and community. The Queensland Family and Child Commission recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as two unique peoples, with their own rich and distinct cultures, strengths and knowledge. The Queensland Family and Child Commission pays their respects to them and their cultures, and to Elders past, present and emerging.

The Queensland Family and Child Commission would like to thank the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities for supporting their children and young people to share their unique perspectives. In particular, we wish to acknowledge and thank Townsville Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation for Women, Injilinj Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation for Children and Youth Services (Mount Isa) and individuals for encouraging their children and young people to get involved.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO SHARED THEIR VIEWS

The Queensland Family and Child Commission thanks the children and young people who generously shared their views as part of the Growing Up in Queensland 2020 project. We were disappointed to be unable to meet you in person in 2020. However, we feel so privileged to have read your postcards and survey responses, and to view your wonderful artworks.

We acknowledge the unprecedented challenges you have all faced in 2020, and admire your strength, honesty and optimism for the future. We pledge to listen to your views and experiences, and to use these to advocate for children and young people across Queensland. Thank you for stepping up and speaking out to help us make Queensland an even better place for children and young people to grow up.

OTHER ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank parents, carers, teachers and families who supported their children to participate in Growing Up in Queensland 2020 during unprecedented circumstances. We thank them for sitting with their children as they completed their artworks, or for supporting them to navigate the surveys. Thank you for recognising the importance of supporting children and young people to have their thoughts and opinions heard.

We appreciate the valuable contribution of the Queensland Family and Child Commission's Youth Champions, who provided input into the design of the project and the data collection methods. They promoted the project on social media and participated in media activities.

We would also like to thank schools and their governing bodies for their support. In particular, we thank the Department of Education, Independent Schools Queensland, Brisbane Catholic Education, Diocese of Toowoomba Catholic Schools, Townsville Catholic Education Office, Rockhampton Catholic Education and Cairns Catholic Education.

Further, we would like to extend our gratitude to the Townsville Hospital and Health Service Human Research Ethics Committee and the Children's Health Queensland Human Research Ethics Committee for working with us to ensure children and young people's voices were collected and handled ethically.

We gratefully acknowledge our partnerships with the State Library of Queensland, Police Citizens Youth Club and Children's Health Queensland.

Last, but certainly not least, we would like to extend our appreciation to all the organisations and individuals who promoted the Growing Up in Queensland 2020 project in the community. With our move to online methods, we would not have been able to hear children's voices during the pandemic period without your commitment and support.



Cheryl Vardon

Chief Executive &
Principal Commissioner
Queensland **Family & Child** Commission

MESSAGE FROM THE PRINCIPAL COMMISSIONER

The Queensland Family and Child Commission aims to make Queensland the best place in the world for children and young people; a safe place where they are supported by communities to achieve their dreams, voice their opinions and influence the world in which they live.

The purpose of Growing Up in Queensland is to hear the voices of children and young people in Queensland. We want to know about their communities, their hopes and the issues that are important to them.

Growing Up in Queensland 2020 took place at a unique time. The project's commencement inadvertently coincided with the emergence of a global health pandemic. During 2020, a severe coronavirus, COVID-19, led to the deaths of millions of people around the world and significant restrictions on people's daily lives. At various times in 2020, in Australia, schools were student free, indoor and outdoor recreation facilities were closed and no more than two people could be together in public unless they were from the same household. The number of people who could attend a household was restricted, and travel was limited to certain distances from home. Consequently, the social, recreational and educational features of young people's lives were dramatically disrupted.

Nevertheless, children and young people throughout Queensland generously shared their views and experiences with us. Findings reveal the importance that young people place on mental health, education and the environment. Children and young people told us they appreciate the generosity and friendliness of people in their community, and the places that allow them to socialise with community members. We also heard about the very different experiences of different groups of children and young people.

We hope what we have heard from children and young people in Queensland will influence policy and decisions. We also hope the project will inspire other organisations to hear youth voices and encourage children and young people to share their views.

Children and young people can stay connected to the ongoing Growing Up in Queensland project by visiting www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/growingup



YOUTH CHAMPION FOREWORD

As a proud Torres Strait Islander who has experienced the colourfulness of being an at-risk young person and now, university graduate, young professional and Youth Champion for the Queensland Family and Child Commission, I know what it takes to have the courage to speak up and the importance of feeling and seeing how your voice has been heard. I, on behalf of the Queensland Family and Child Commission's Youth Advisory Council, would like to thank every child and young person who had the courage to stand up and have their voice heard as part of Growing Up in Queensland 2020.

The Growing Up in Queensland report is not just another “government report”. It is a telescope into the future of Queensland and the priorities of the world's greatest asset – children and young people. We would like to thank each of you, the 8,000 plus children and young people, for having the courage to share your views and priorities for the future. Even in the middle of a global pandemic you demonstrated a high level of engagement and resilience, and for that you should be proud.

We are excited and inspired by you all, and we stand with you and share your views. We hear and understand that you are seeking more spaces for recreation and socialising and that mental health and education are of critical importance. You are seeking more relevant curriculum and less pressure associated with academic results. Finally, we hear that you want leaders and decision makers to pay more attention to the environment and climate change. These priorities must be taken seriously. We look forward to seeing them on the agenda of our leaders, particularly those involved in youth affairs, education, mental health, sports and environment.

It is important for young people to have their say and for their perspectives to be heard and acted upon. In our roles as Queensland Family and Child Commission Youth Champions, we will personally remain committed to amplifying your views and will keep the conversation going.

Annika David, Kulkalgal Nation Central Torres Strait Islander, Queensland Family and Child Commission Youth Champion, on behalf of the Queensland Family and Child Commission Youth Advisory Council



TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	.....	06
INTRODUCTION	.....	07
COMMUNITY	.....	13
HOPES AND DREAMS	.....	25
BIG ISSUES	.....	41
CONCLUSION	.....	50



TERM DEFINITION

ATAR

Australian Tertiary Admission Rank

CHILDREN

For this project, people aged 4 - 12 years.

COVID-19

The coronavirus first detected in late 2019. The World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic on 11 March 2020

GENDER DIVERSE

Gender diverse generally refers to a range of genders expressed in different ways. A gender-diverse person identifies with a gender expression that does not conform to the binary male/female framework. A gender-diverse person may identify as being neither gender, a gender other than male or female, or both male and female genders.

HREC

Human Research Ethics Committee

LGBTQIA

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex and / or asexual.

YOUNG PEOPLE

For this project, people aged 13 – 18 years.



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The project taught us many things about Queensland's young people. A strong finding relates to the importance of recreation and interaction. Young people told us they enjoy and want more places for relaxation, fun and socialising. They appreciate outdoor areas, especially those involving water, for recreation.

The findings portray young Queenslanders as thoughtful and passionate. Many described hopes regarding education; they want to complete secondary schooling or pursue further education. They also told us their hopes for vulnerable people and for all people in general, and for protection of the natural environment.

The issues that young people identified as important demonstrate their awareness of complex social issues. They told us the important issues for people their age are mental health, environmental protection and quality of education. They want leaders to pay more attention to these issues. Participants also described how COVID-19 contributed to academic stress.

Overall, the young Queenslanders who took part in Growing Up in Queensland viewed their communities positively and were hopeful about their futures. However, different groups of young people had vastly different experiences of their communities. Participants who identified as experiencing emotional or mental health issues were particularly likely to have negative perceptions regarding the connectedness and safety of their communities. Gender, sexuality and age also had substantial effects on participants' views and experiences of their communities.

INTRODUCTION

GROWING UP IN QUEENSLAND

The Queensland Family and Child Commission aims to make sure children grow up in supportive communities that help them thrive. In order to thrive, children need to be safe. They should feel connected to their communities. They should be able to share their experiences, voice their opinions on important issues and influence the world in which they live.

In 2018, the Queensland Family and Child Commission conducted the first biennial Growing Up in Queensland project. We asked children and young people about their views and experiences of their communities; we invited them to share their hopes with us; and we asked about what is important to them. In 2020, children and young people aged 4 – 18 years were again invited to participate in Growing Up in Queensland.

OVERVIEW OF REPORT

This report begins with a brief description of the project's procedure and the children and young people who took part. Three chapters then address, respectively, children and young people's experiences of their communities, their hopes and issues important to people their age. We compare our findings with other findings from Australia and around the world.

Strong themes emerged in each topic of investigation. However, not all children and young people experienced their communities in the same way, shared the same hopes or identified the same issues as being important. Each chapter describes the notable differences in the perspectives of different groups of children and young people

PROCEDURE

OVERVIEW

Children and young people aged 4 – 18 years used online activities to share their views and experiences. Children aged 4 – 7 were invited to create artworks about their communities, hopes and / or worries. Surveys and a postcard activity invited participants aged 8 – 18 years to tell us about their communities, their hopes and the issues of importance to people their age.

INVITING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TO TAKE PART

All data collection activities were approved by a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). Initially, recruitment of participants was planned to be conducted through schools. However, due to changes to schooling that occurred as a result of COVID-19, schools focused on facilitating children's home-schooling, and were unable to recruit children and young people for the project.

Consequently, initial participant recruitment occurred through communication with other stakeholders, and through advertising on social media. When restrictions resulting from COVID-19 eased and many children had returned to school, schools assisted with recruitment by promoting the project.

MATERIALS FOR ENGAGING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Growing Up in Queensland 2020 explored the same issues that were addressed in the 2018 project. However, due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, our methods of engaging with young people in 2020 differed substantially from the methods used in 2018.

Like the 2018 project, Growing Up in Queensland 2020 used postcards, an art activity and a survey to gather the views of young Queenslanders. However, due to travel restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 project team did not travel throughout Queensland to engage directly with children and young people. For this reason, an additional survey, for children aged 8 – 12 years, was used to capture the views of children. In addition, unlike the 2018 project, Growing Up in Queensland 2020 relied exclusively on online methods to gather data.

The art activity invited children aged 4 – 7 years to create artworks responding to questions about their communities, their worries and their hopes. The junior survey, for children aged 8 – 12 years, the postcard activity for children and young people aged 8 – 18 years and the youth survey for young people aged 13 – 18 years asked participants about their communities, their hopes and the issues important to them.

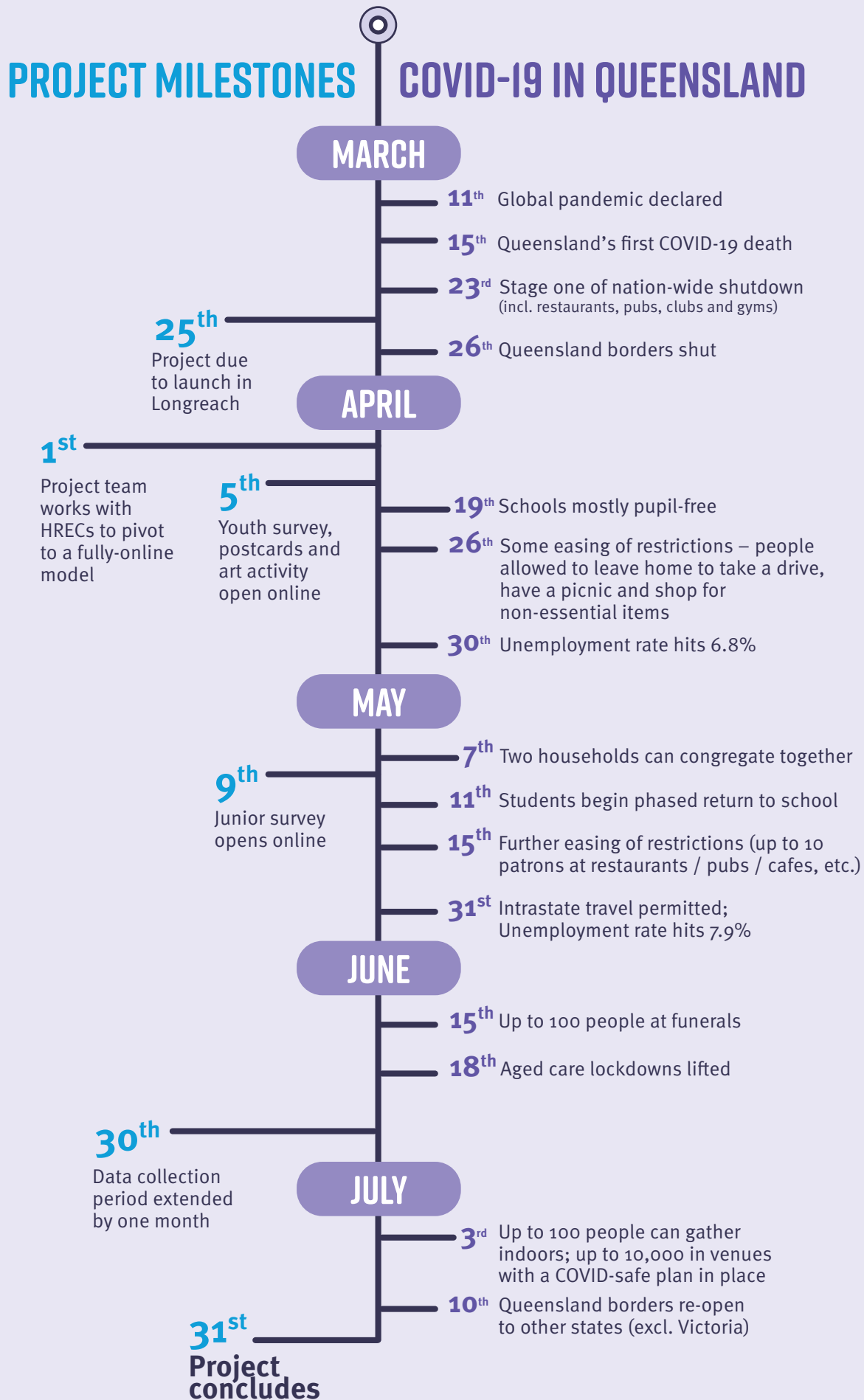


Figure 1. Project milestones, COVID-19 timeline and selected responses, March 2020 - July 2020

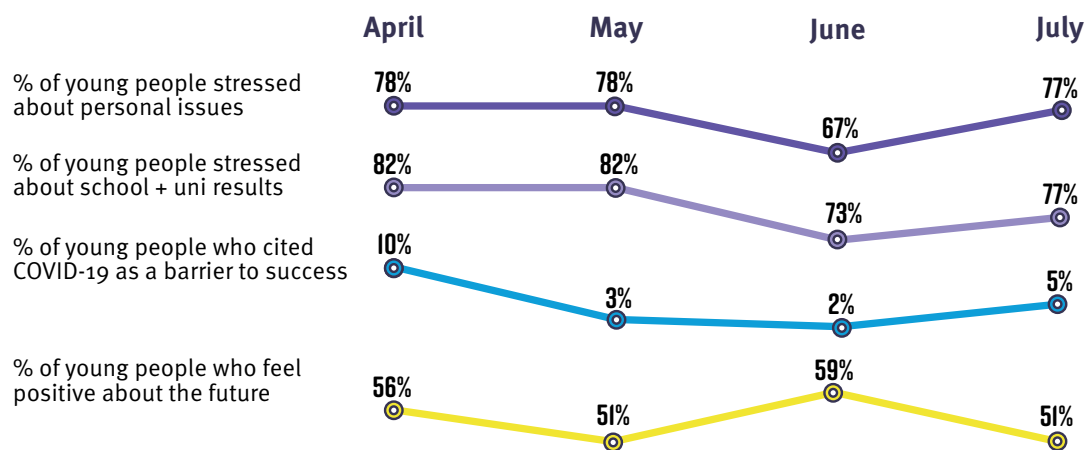


Figure 2. Responses to selected items, by month: April 2020 – July 2020.

DATA COLLECTION

Due to risks associated with handling physical materials during the COVID-19 pandemic, all data was collected online. The art activity instructions were posted online. Parents and educators facilitated children’s completion of the art activity. Parents then submitted photos of the artworks to the project’s online portal.

Most children and young people who took part in the postcard activity accessed online postcards and submitted their answers online. Printable files were also available for participants to print, complete, scan, and send electronically to the Queensland Family and Child Commission.

The junior survey, implemented to replace focus groups due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the youth survey were available online. Participants completed the surveys online and submitted them electronically.

DATA ANALYSIS

Artworks and postcard responses were analysed through identification of themes expressed by participants. Similarly, responses to open-ended survey questions were analysed by theme. Numerical responses to survey questions were analysed using Excel and Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Each analysis was checked by two members of the project team.

NOTES ABOUT DATA PRESENTATION

Many survey items gave participants the option of strongly disagreeing, disagreeing, giving a neutral response, agreeing or strongly agreeing in response to a statement. Throughout the report, we describe the combined number of participants who agreed and strongly agreed, respectively. Please note, not

all participants who did not agree with a statement disagreed with it. Some participants indicated neutral responses, and a very small percentage (usually fewer than 1%) of participants chose not to answer a question.

In response to open-ended questions, many participants described several themes. This report describes only the first theme that appeared in participants’ responses, or the theme that participants identified as being the theme of most importance. Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

WHO WE HEARD FROM

We received 54 artworks, 1,223 postcards, 893 junior survey responses and 5,924 youth survey responses.

AGE

All data activities invited participants to indicate their age (in years). Figure 3 shows the percentage of responses received from each age group.

RESPONSES BY AGE

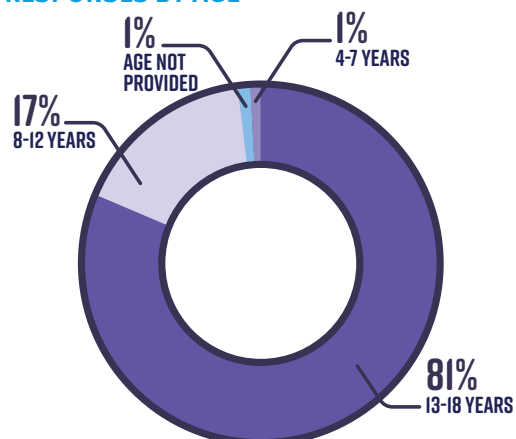


Figure 3. Percentage of responses from each age group.

GENDER

All activities invited participants to indicate their gender identity. Almost two thirds (64%) of responses were from females. **Figure 4** shows the percentage of responses from males, females and gender-diverse participants.

RESPONSES BY GENDER

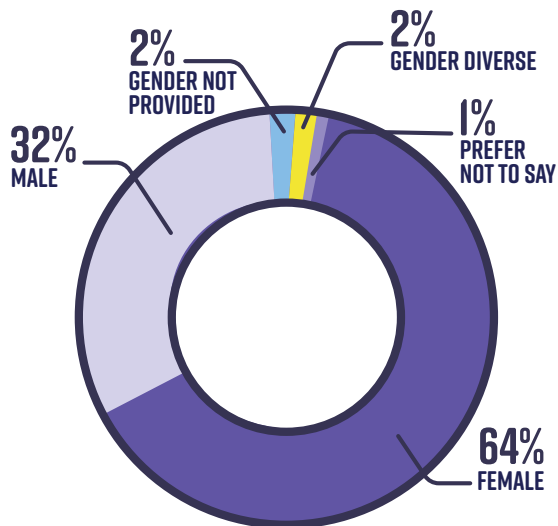


Figure 4. Percentage of responses from each gender group.

ABORIGINAL, TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AND / OR SOUTH SEA ISLANDER PARTICIPANTS

The junior survey and youth survey invited participants to indicate whether they identified as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and / or South Sea Islander. Seven percent of participants in these activities identified as being Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and / or South Sea Islander.

REGION

Information about where participants live was requested in each activity. Regional classification was based on that used by the Queensland Department of Education. **Table 1** shows the major towns in each region.

REGION	INCLUDES
Central Queensland	Rockhampton, Gladstone, Emerald, Mackay, Longreach
Darling Downs South West	Toowoomba, Cherbourg, Dalby, Gatton, Roma, St George, Stanthorpe, Goondiwindi, Kingaroy, Lockyer Valley
Metropolitan	Brisbane region, Ipswich
North Coast	Sunshine Coast, Bundaberg, Caboolture, Gympie, Hervey Bay, Maryborough, Moreton Bay
North Queensland	Charters Towers, Mount Isa, Townsville, Bowen, Doomadgee, Ayr, Ingham
Far North Queensland	Cairns, Innisfail, Torres Strait Islands, Cooktown, Mossman, Hope Vale, Weipa
South East	Gold Coast, Logan, Redland, Scenic Rim

Table 1. Sample of towns included in each region.

Figure 5 shows the distribution of responses across regions. Approximately one-third of responses were received from participants residing in the Metropolitan region.

Just under 60% of responses were received from major cities, 36% were from inner or outer regional areas, and 4% were from remote or very remote areas.

RESPONSES BY GEOGRAPHICAL REGION

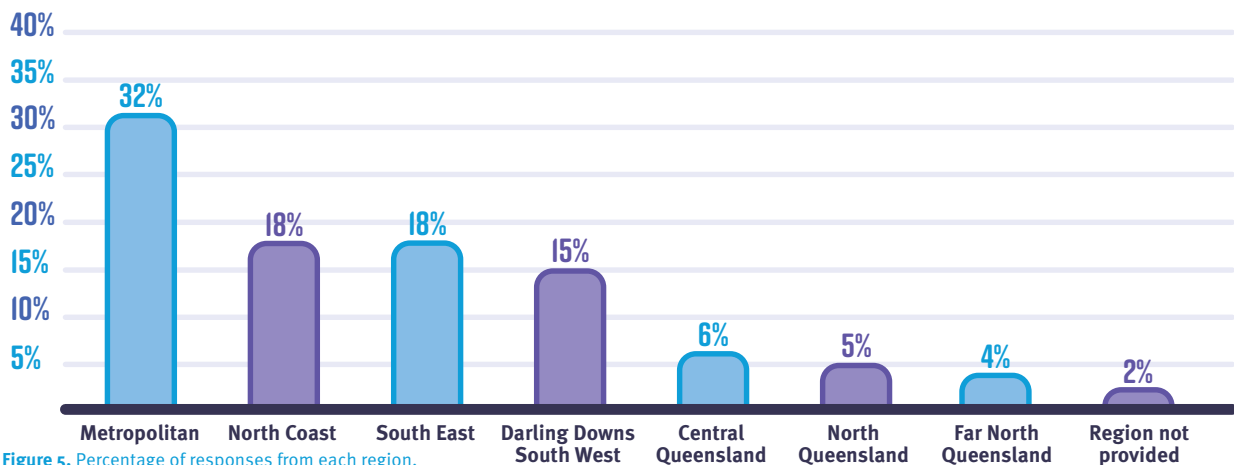


Figure 5. Percentage of responses from each region.

PRIMARY LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME

The junior survey and the youth survey asked participants to indicate whether English was the main language spoken at home. Of the 6,817 participants who were asked this question, 90% indicated English was their primary language.

DISABILITY AND HEALTH

Only the youth survey invited participants to provide information about disability, emotional and mental health and long-term physical health conditions. Of the 5,924 young people who completed the youth survey, 6% indicated they have a disability, 11% reported having a long-term physical health condition and 33% said they have an emotional or mental health condition.

LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, QUEER / QUESTIONING, INTERSEX OR ASEXUAL (LGBTQIA)

Of the 5,924 young people who completed the youth survey, almost one-quarter (24%) identified as LGBTQIA.

STUDY STATUS

Of the 5,924 young people who completed the youth survey, 91% were engaged in study. Most (84%) were studying full time. Of those who indicated they were not studying, 73% were aged 16 years or older.

EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Of the survey participants aged 15 – 18 years, 57% were employed. Most of these young people were employed on a casual basis.

FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND

NORTH QUEENSLAND

CENTRAL QUEENSLAND

NORTH COAST

DARLING DOWNS SOUTH WEST

METROPOLITAN

SOUTH EAST



My painting is a representation of my family and my ancestors, the Kalkadoon people. They have experienced many challenges that impacted their way of life shaping us. We are proud Qlders and feel connected both spiritually & culturally to our land

Jaeve, Kalkadoon Aboriginal female, 16 years, Metropolitan, Amplify – Through My Eyes Arts Opportunity Finalist

COMMUNITY

WHY EXPERIENCE OF COMMUNITY MATTERS

Community connectedness refers to a healthy, protective relationship between an individual and the environment in which they live (Whitlock, 2004). For young people, it refers to feelings of belonging and attachment to a community, positive feelings towards adults, policies and institutions in the community, and the belief that adults respect young people as valuable members of the community (Whitlock, 2004).

Community connectedness matters. Research from around the world shows young people who feel a sense of community connectedness are less likely to experience negative outcomes. Community connectedness is especially beneficial for young people whose circumstances and experiences (e.g., poverty, bullying) put them at increased risk of negative outcomes (e.g., anxiety, suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts).

For example, research from the United States has found that among youth with risk factors for negative outcomes (such as being bullied), a feeling of connectedness to the community was associated with reduced risk of suicidal thoughts (Aranga, et al., 2019). Another study found that, among low-income young people who experienced or perpetrated bullying or who lacked social connection, those who felt connected to their community experienced lower levels of social anxiety (Foster, et al., 2017).



HOW GROWING UP IN QUEENSLAND 2020 ASKED ABOUT COMMUNITY

Community connection was explored by asking children and young people about their feelings of belonging to their communities, their perceptions of community members and their feelings about the places within their communities. All activities invited participants to share their views about various features of their community. The artwork activity invited parents to support their children aged 4 – 7 years to draw what they like about their community. Children, with parents' support if necessary, were able to decide what "community" meant to them.

Two postcard questions invited participants to share their thoughts about, respectively, what makes their communities great places for people their age and what would make their communities even better for people their age.



The junior survey, for children aged 8 – 12 years, invited participants to share their thoughts and feelings about their towns and their schools.

The youth survey, for young people aged 13 – 18 years, asked participants to share their thoughts and feelings regarding sense of belonging to their communities, the helpfulness of people in their communities, the way adults in their communities treat young people, and the presence of youth-friendly places in their communities. The youth survey also asked about young people's feelings of safety online.

FINDINGS: YOUNG QUEENSLANDERS' EXPERIENCES OF THEIR COMMUNITIES

OVERVIEW

Growing Up in Queensland 2020 provides a snapshot of how children and young people experience their communities. Participants provided rich information regarding their feelings about the places and people in their communities, the features that make their communities great places for children and young people and what would make their communities even better for people their age.

Their responses reveal the importance of places for recreation and social interaction, and of the friendliness of community members. Responses also demonstrate the vastly different ways different groups of children and young people experience their communities.

COMMUNITY BELONGING AND LIKING

Most participants who were asked about their feelings regarding their community responded positively. **Figure 6** shows the percentage of people who agreed with each statement about their community.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Community members are an important part of young people's experiences of their communities. Research from around the world shows positive social relationships between young people and community members, including peers and adults, may be associated with lower likelihood of young

people engaging in high-risk behaviour (McPherson, et al., 2013). These behaviours include tobacco smoking and high-risk sexual behaviour. Positive relationships with peers also contribute to positive development, including life satisfaction, during emerging adulthood (O'Connor, et al., 2011).

Growing Up in Queensland 2020 results add to existing findings regarding the importance of community members. Our findings show young people's feelings toward community members influenced the way young people felt about their communities in general. One postcard asked children and young people what made their communities great places for people their age. The second-most common theme referred to community members. Just over one-quarter of the 233 children and young people who answered this question referred to community members. In particular, children and young people said they appreciate the kindness, helpfulness and friendliness of the people around them.

I like how the community is very diverse and that I can talk to multiple people who have similar similarities as me.

Male, 12 years, Metropolitan

PARTICIPANTS' FEELINGS ABOUT THEIR COMMUNITIES

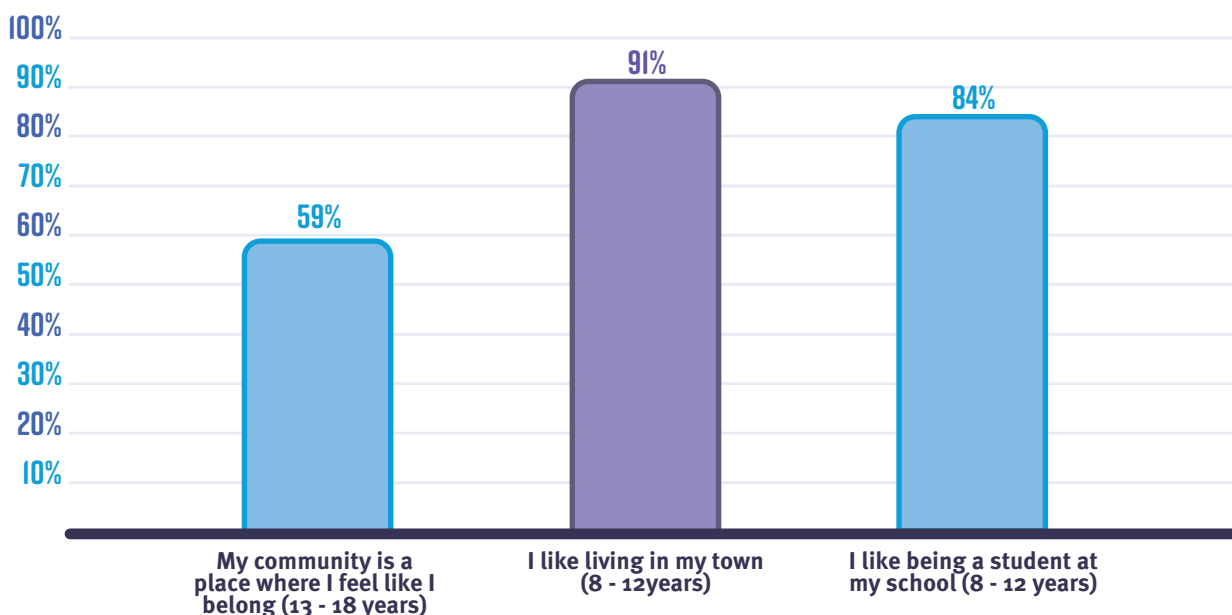


Figure 6. Percentage of participants who agreed with statements about their community.



All people coming together and supporting and helping where we can when help is needed.
Ebonie, female, 14 years, Darling Downs South West, Amplify – Through My Eyes Arts Opportunity Finalist

The community is a great place for people my age because everyone is close knit and feels like a family as everyone knows everyone.

Female, 16 years, Darling Downs South West

The nice and respectful people that are in this community.

Male, 16 years, Darling Downs South West

What makes my community a great place is that people understand each other and help as much as they can. You could easily make a new friend.

Female, 10 years, South East

What we heard from postcard respondents was supported by young people who took part in the youth survey. Nearly 60% of the survey participants said people in their community help each other. Slightly fewer participants (52%) said adults in the community are friendly to young people.

Results suggest young people distinguish friendliness from true listening. Despite half of the youth survey participants believing adults are friendly to young people, only 23% said adults in their communities listen to young people. This finding matters, because feeling heard affects young people's feelings about their communities. Previous research has found young people believe their communities would be better if adults listened to them, accepted their opinions and provided opportunities for them to have a voice in what happens in the community (Whitlock, 2004). In addition, young people are supported to develop confidence and knowledge when adults take account of their views (Kirby & Bryson, 2002).

GROUP DIFFERENCES

AGE

In general, lower age was associated with more positive feelings towards the community, compared to older age. A dramatic difference was found for the perception that adults listen to what young people have to say. Among participants aged 13 years, 31% said they believe adults in their community listen to young people. Of participants aged 18 years, only 16% shared this belief.

A potential explanation for this finding involves the different adults to whom teens of different ages are exposed. Adults in a younger teen's community may primarily include parents, other family members, family friends and teachers – adults who may tend to take an interest in the young person's views. In contrast, an older teen may be exposed to a greater range of adults who have less of an investment in the young person's view.

Younger teens were also more likely than older teens to feel a sense of belonging to their communities, to view adults in the community as friendly to people their age and to view people in their communities as helpful. The differences between age groups are consistent with a finding from research in the US. Whitlock (2004) found older youth were much less likely than younger children to feel connected to their community.

GENDER

Gender was also associated with differences in young people's perceptions of their communities. (Figure 7). Compared to males, females were less likely to feel a sense of belonging and to view community members as helpful, friendly to young people and willing to listen to young people.

Participants who identified as gender diverse were substantially less likely than both males and females to have positive perceptions of their belonging, helpfulness of the community, adults' friendliness and adults' willingness to listen. For example, two-thirds of males and nearly 60% of females said they felt like they belong to their communities. In contrast, approximately one-third of gender-diverse participants experienced this sense of belonging (see Figure 7).

Only 2% of the survey participants identified as gender diverse, so findings need to be interpreted with caution.

PARTICIPANTS' FEELINGS ABOUT THEIR COMMUNITIES, BY GENDER

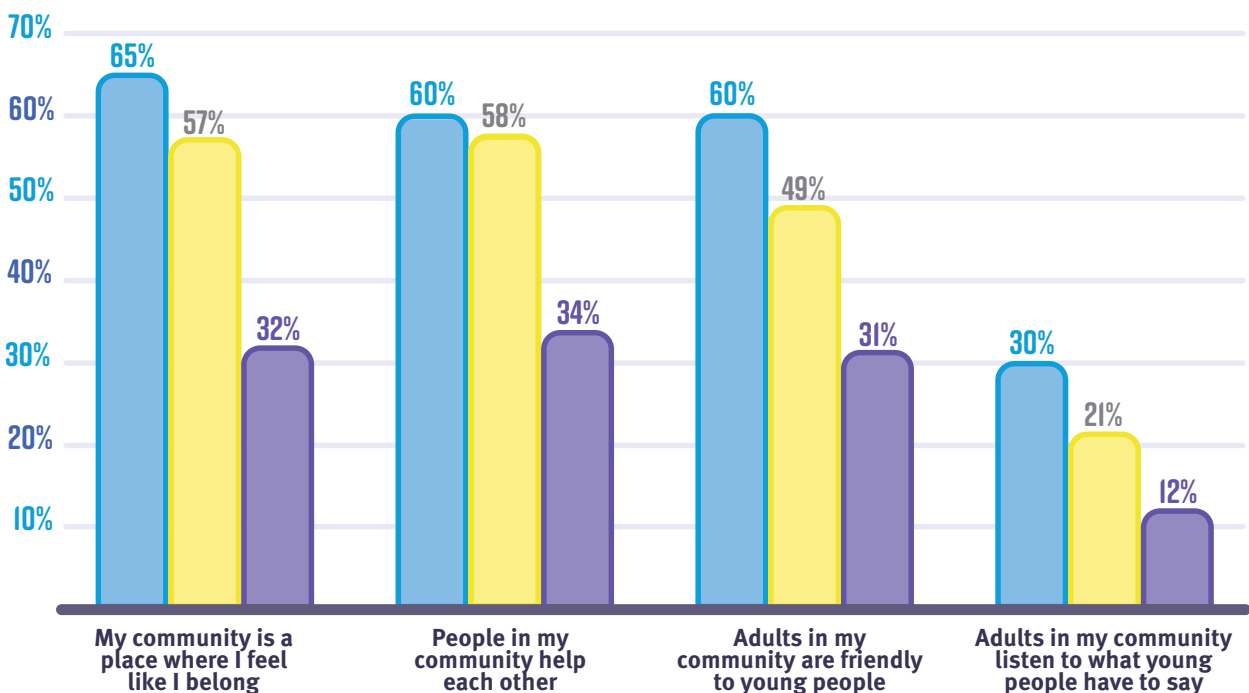


Figure 7. Percentage of youth survey participants who agreed with statements about their communities: Comparison across gender groups.

LGBTQIA

Perceptions of belonging and of community members differed vastly between people who identified as being LGBTQIA, and those who did not identify as such. The most dramatic differences involved feelings of belonging and the belief that adults in the community listen to young people. Of the participants who did not identify as LGBTQIA, 26% said they believed adults in the community listened to young people. In contrast, only 14% of LGBTQIA participants shared this belief.

The experience of feeling unheard may contribute to our finding that few LGBTQIA participants experienced a sense of belonging. Of the participants who did not identify as LGBTQIA, 64% said they felt like they belong to their communities. In contrast, only 42% of LGBTQIA participants experienced this sense of belonging.

The lack of a sense of belonging adds to other stressors experienced by LGBTQIA young people. Australians who identify as LGBTQIA are substantially more likely than other Australians to engage in self-harm and to have symptoms of mental health disorders (National LGBTI Health Alliance, 2020).

The negative experiences of participants who identify as gender diverse and participants who identify as LGBTQIA are not surprising, given the findings of other Australian studies. The *Private Lives 3* study found 78% of gender-diverse young people reported being discriminated against on the basis of their gender identity (Hill, Bourne, McNair, Carman, & Lyons, 2020). In addition, only 35% of

LGBTQIA participants reported feeling accepted at social or community events and only 30% felt accepted in public. The *Writing Themselves in 4* study found nearly two-thirds of LGBTQIA participants who were secondary school students had frequently heard negative comments regarding sexuality (Hill, et al., 2021).

REGION

In general, participants from the Metropolitan region were more likely than participants from other regions to have positive feelings about their community. **Table 2** shows the percentage of participants from each region who agreed with positive statements about their community. For each statement, highest likelihood of agreeing is shaded blue; lowest likelihood of agreeing is shaded yellow.

HEALTH AND DISABILITY

Participants who identified as having a long-term physical health condition were less likely to have positive experiences regarding community belonging, helpfulness of community members, and adults' friendliness towards young people and willingness to listen to young people. Similarly, young people with a disability were less likely to view their community positively compared to participants who did not identify as having a disability.

Vast differences were found between young people who identified as having an emotional or mental health condition, and those who did not. For example, 67% of young people without an emotional or mental health condition felt they belonged to their community. In contrast, only 42% of people

	My community is a place where I feel like I belong	Adults in my community are friendly to people my age	People in my community help each other	Adults in my community listen to what young people have to say
Central Queensland	56%	48%	57%	26%
Darling Downs South West	52%	49%	57%	20%
Far North Queensland	56%	48%	54%	17%
Metropolitan	63%	58%	62%	25%
North Coast	56%	49%	55%	22%
North Queensland	61%	49%	60%	24%
South East	57%	47%	54%	21%

Table 2. Percentage of youth survey participants who agreed with statements about their communities: Comparison across regions.

PARTICIPANTS' FEELINGS ABOUT THEIR COMMUNITIES, BY MENTAL HEALTH STATUS

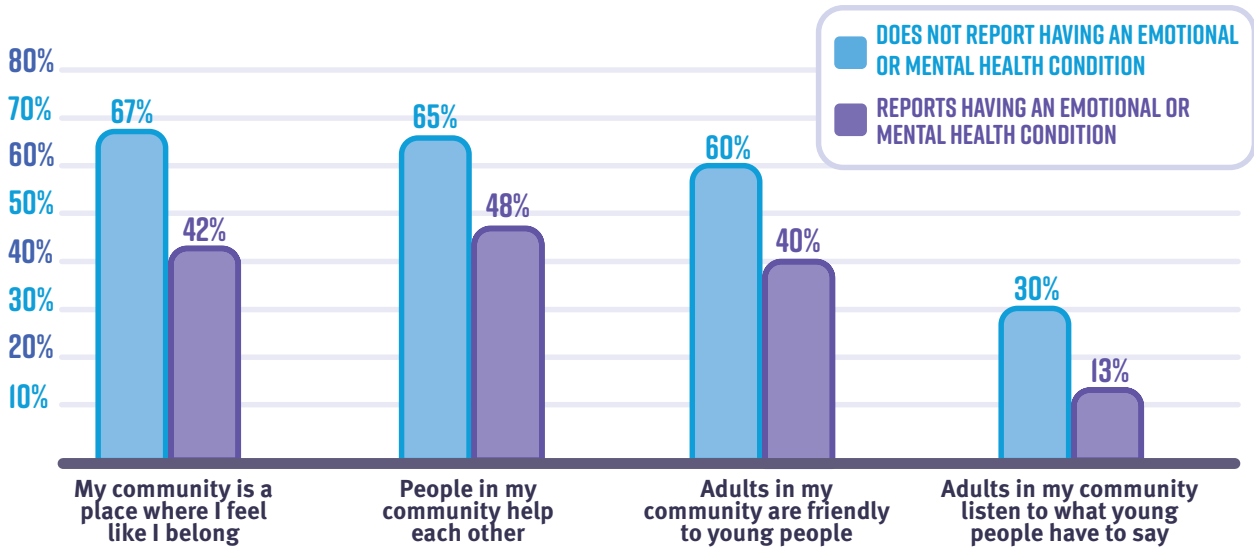


Figure 8. Percentage of youth survey participants who agreed with statements about their community: Comparison across mental health status.

with an emotional or mental health condition felt a sense of community belonging (see Figure 8).

ABORIGINAL, TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AND / OR SOUTH SEA ISLANDER STATUS

Of the youth survey participants who identified as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and / or South Sea Islander, 46% said adults in their community were friendly to young people, compared to 52% of participants who did not identify as such. This difference may reflect the presence of discrimination towards young people who are Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and / or South Sea Islander. In our study, just under 40% of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and / or South Sea Islander participants said they had been treated unfairly as a result of race. In a study by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, approximately one-third of Aboriginal and / or Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 – 24 said they had experienced discrimination as a result of race (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018).

YOUTH-FRIENDLY PLACES FOR RECREATION AND SOCIALISATION

In addition to the people that make up a community, the places within a community are important to young people. Even our youngest participants, aged 4 – 7 years, revealed the significance of places. These children were asked what they like about their communities.



Summer's artwork is a picture of her and mummy at her favourite park where there are ducks and swans in a pond and she feeds them. Summer and her family go on long walks to the ducky and swan pond, sometimes they also see turtles.

Summer, female, 4 years, Metropolitan



We have slides near a lagoon in our community.

Luke, male, 7 years, North Queensland

Older children's contributions also show their views of their communities are influenced by the places available to them. One postcard, for participants aged 8 – 18 years, asked participants what makes their communities great for young people. The most common theme in responses was places for recreation and socialising. Of the 233 participants who sent a postcard about this topic, approximately 40% said their community is great for young people due to the places and activities available to them.

WHAT MAKES YOUR COMMUNITY A GREAT PLACE FOR PEOPLE YOUR AGE?

Something that makes our community a great place for my age group is the large amount of eateries and restaurants. I enjoy this because it means we don't have to drive out of town to get to a restaurant.

Female, 12 years, Metropolitan

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

Social parks and restaurants mean that you can meet new people.

Female, 12 years, Metropolitan

There is plenty to do here where I live. There are lots of fun facilities for everyone. For kids there are many places to go such as the local pool or shops. It is very safe and I feel very protected.

Female, 12 years, South East

The community is a great place for people to live in as there are many venues for people to socialise and relax.

Male, 17 years, Darling Downs South West

For example, children and young people told us they appreciate community centres, skate parks, and shopping centres.

The importance of youth-friendly places was emphasised further by children and young people's views about what would improve their communities. Postcard respondents and junior survey participants said they want more parks, sporting facilities (e.g., basketball courts), pools, water parks and fast-food restaurants.

WHAT WOULD MAKE YOUR COMMUNITY A BETTER PLACE FOR PEOPLE YOUR AGE?

Roller-skating rink, more shops.

Gender-diverse participant, 12 years, North Coast

Bigger aqua park in my local area.

Male, 10 years, Metropolitan

A music venue with karaoke, dance floor and recording rooms for tweens and teens.

Female, 10 years, Metropolitan

Free kids-only (8-12) youth centre, hang out place to be [with] like minded kids. Arcade games, fun board games.

Male, 11 years, Metropolitan

An amusement park or water park.

Male, 10 years, Darling Downs South West

A club for under 20 with soda, music and a café.

Female, 9 years, Central Queensland

The desire for more spaces and places for recreation and socialising was also emphasised by youth survey respondents (13 – 18 years). Fewer than half (44%) of these young people said there were enough fun places for young people in their community.

Our findings about the value of youth-friendly places for having fun and socialising are consistent with findings from previous research. In a US study, young people said their communities would be better if they had “more places for kids to go and hang out”, “cheap places to go and have fun”, “more interesting things to do” and “more teen nights at local places” (Whitlock, 2004, p. 32). Similarly, an Australian study found children and young people want spaces and opportunities to engage in fun and activity. They want parks, play areas and recreational facilities (Commissioner for Children and Young People Western Australia, 2011).

GROUP DIFFERENCES

AGE

Overall, younger participants were more likely than older participants to believe there were enough interesting places in their communities. Just over half of the youth survey participants aged 13 years said there were enough interesting places in their communities, compared to 38% of young people aged 17 years and 41% of young people aged 18 years.

This difference may reflect the fact that younger teens are more likely than older teens to be subject to parental rules regarding where they socialise. For this reason, younger teens may spend most time with friends and family in people’s homes, and be less likely to be exposed to community

spaces for recreation and socialising. In contrast, the greater freedom given to older teens means their social environments may be expanding to include a greater number of peers and a greater number of places in the community. Freedom to explore the community may highlight to teens the number – sufficient or insufficient – of interesting places available to them.

GENDER

Half of the male participants in the youth survey agreed there were enough fun / interesting places for them to spend time with friends in the community. Only 41% of female participants and 37% of gender-diverse participants agreed.

HEALTH AND DISABILITY

Mental health, physical health and disability impacted the likelihood that participants believed there were enough interesting places in their community. The most substantial difference was between participants who reported having an emotional or mental health condition and those who did not. Of the participants who did not report having an emotional or mental health condition, 48% said there were enough interesting places. In contrast, only 35% of participants with an emotional or mental health condition said there were enough interesting places.

REGION

Between regions, there were substantial differences in young people’s perceptions of the places available to them (see Figure 9). The largest difference was between the Metropolitan region and the Darling Downs South West region.

PERCEPTIONS OF INTERESTING PLACES, BY REGION

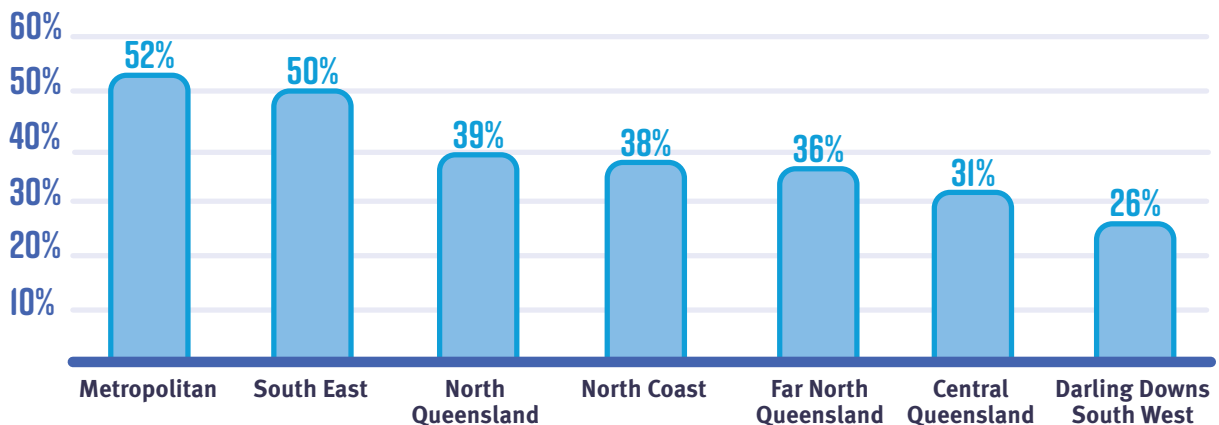


Figure 9. Percentage of youth survey participants who agreed with the statement “There are enough interesting places in my community for me to spend time with friends”: Comparison across regions.

LGBTQIA

Participants who identified as LGBTQIA were less likely than other participants to believe there were enough interesting places in their communities for them to spend time with friends. Of the participants who identified as LGBTQIA, 38% said there were enough interesting places. Of the participants who did not identify as LGBTQIA, 46% said there were enough interesting places.

SAFETY

Young people (13 – 18 years) who participated in the youth survey were asked about their feelings of safety in their community, and feelings of safety online. Just over 60% of participants said they feel safe in their communities. For comparison, 69% of young people in a Western Australian study felt safe all or most of the time in their communities (Commissioner for Children and Young People Western Australia, 2019).

Slightly fewer participants (55%) said there were enough safe places in their community for spending time with friends. Just over two-thirds of participants said they feel safe being online, and a similar amount said they feel safe on social media.

GROUP DIFFERENCES

AGE

Only 59% of participants aged 13 years reported feeling safe on social media, compared to approximately 70% of other age groups. This wariness among younger teens may translate into greater protection from cyberbullying. Among young survey participants (13 – 18 years), those aged 13 were least likely to have experienced

cyberbullying. Twenty percent of these participants had experienced cyberbullying, compared to 28% of participants aged 15 years, and 27% of participants aged 16 years.

GENDER

Substantial differences were also found between genders (see Figure 10). Females were less likely than males to perceive the physical community as safe and to feel safe online and on social media. These findings support those of previous research. Mission Australia (Hall, Fildes, Perdriau, & Plummer, 2019a) found females were less likely than males to feel safe using public spaces, and were more likely than males to say social media was a personal concern.

In our study, gender-diverse participants were less likely than both males and females to experience the physical environment as safe. Our findings support findings of other research. Hill et al. (2021) found between 66% and 74% of gender-diverse young people had felt unsafe or uncomfortable at their educational institution due to their sexuality or gender identity.

However, findings suggest the online environment may offer feelings of security for youth who identify as gender diverse. The gap between male participants and gender-diverse participants was smaller for online safety than for safety in the physical environment. Further, gender-diverse young people were more likely than females to experience the online environment as safe, in contrast to findings regarding feelings of safety in the physical environment.

FEELINGS OF SAFETY, BY GENDER

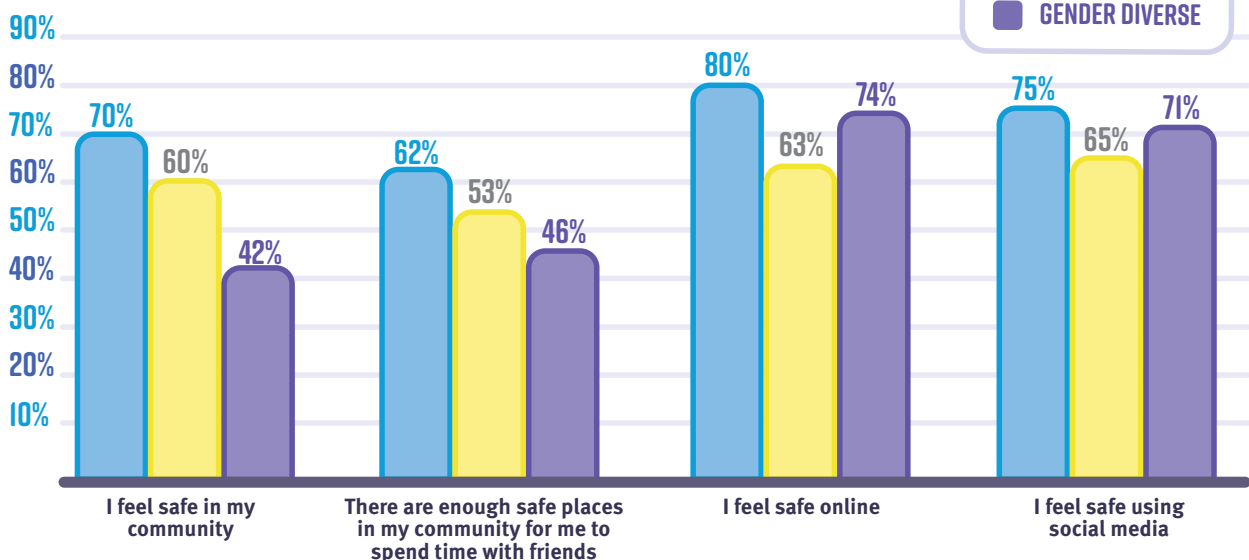


Figure 10. Percentage of youth survey participants who agreed with statements about safety in their community: Comparison across gender groups.

HEALTH AND DISABILITY

The likelihood of believing there were enough safe spaces in the community differed dramatically according to whether participants identified as having a disability. Of participants who did not identify as having a disability, 56% believed there were enough safe places in their community. Only 44% of people with a disability felt the same.

Similarly, feelings of safety in the community varied substantially according to mental health (see Figure 11). However, there were only small difference relating to feelings of safety online and on social media. Like the findings regarding gender-diverse young people, this finding suggests the online environment may offer security for minority groups of young people.

LGBTQIA

Feelings of safety in the community differed substantially between participants who identified as LGBTQIA, and those who did not identify as such. Of the LGBTQIA youth survey participants, only half said they feel safe in their community. In contrast, two-thirds of participants who did not identify as LGBTQIA said they felt safe in their community. This finding is not surprising, given other research findings regarding the experiences of LGBTQIA young people. For example, Hill et al. (2021) found more than half of the lesbian and gay participants in their study had felt unsafe or uncomfortable at their educational institution due to their sexuality or gender identity.

FEELINGS OF SAFETY, BY MENTAL HEALTH STATUS

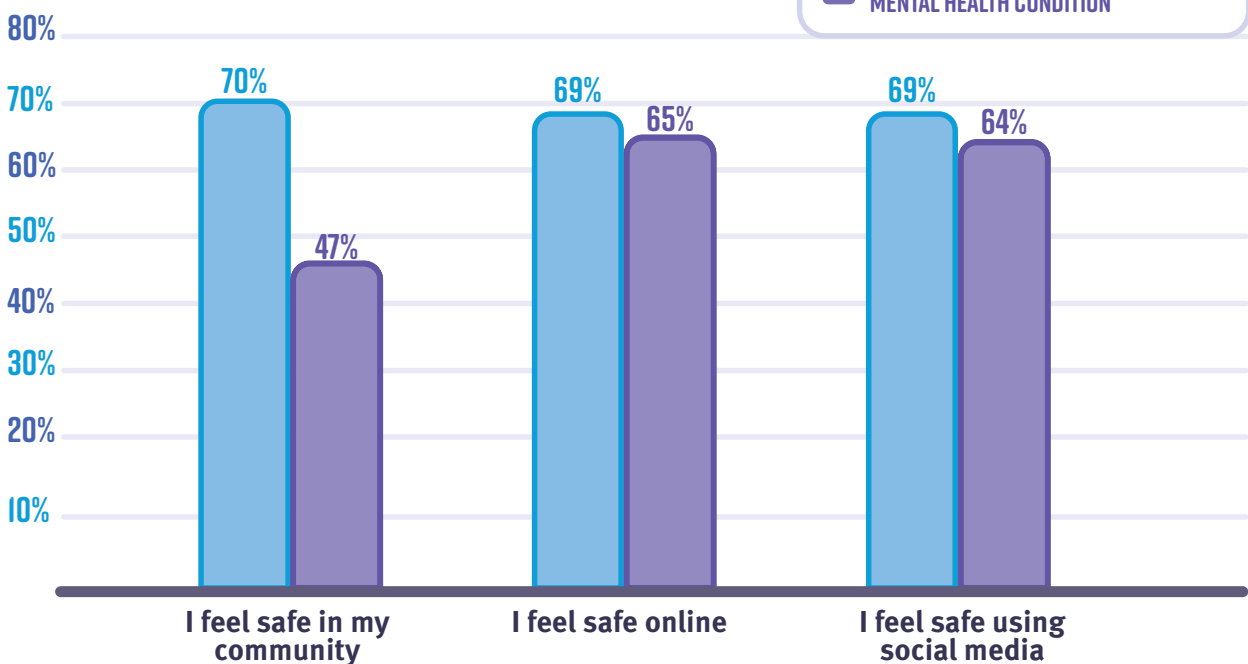


Figure 11. Percentage of youth survey participants who agreed with statements about safety: Comparison across mental health status.

However, there were only small differences between these groups regarding feelings of safety online and on social media. This finding mirrors other findings from Growing Up in Queensland 2020. For young people who feel relatively unsafe in their physical environment, the online environment appears to offer a safe space.

ABORIGINAL, TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AND / OR SOUTH SEA ISLANDER PARTICIPANTS

Compared to other participants, those who identified as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and / or South Sea Islander were less likely to believe there were enough safe spaces in their communities, less likely to feel safe online, and less likely to feel safe on social media.

The finding about safe spaces is similar to findings for other minority groups in our study. Participants who identified as belonging to minority groups in terms of gender, sexuality and health status were less likely to believe there were enough safe spaces for spending time with friends. The tendency for minority groups to perceive fewer safe spaces in the community could reflect unique safety needs (e.g., for young people who live with physical disability), or experiences of discrimination.



SUMMARY

Young people told us they value human connection. They appreciate the kindness of people around them and enjoy spending time with family and friends. They value the facilities that allow them to socialise with peers and community members.

Most young people reported positive perceptions of their communities. However, different groups of young people described very different experiences of their communities. Health and disability status substantially affected the likelihood that participants reported positive experiences of their communities. For example, participants with emotional or mental health conditions were substantially less likely than other participants to feel a sense of belonging to the community and to experience community members as helpful and kind.

Similarly, the likelihood of reporting positive community experiences varied dramatically according to gender and LGBTQIA status. For example, females, gender-diverse participants and people who identified as LGBTQIA were less likely than other participants to believe there were enough interesting and safe places in their communities.

Queensland is home to a diverse range of young people. Although our state's communities provide positive experiences and environments for many young Queenslanders, some children and young people do not experience the same benefits of their communities.

To better serve all young Queenslanders, we must understand their experiences and listen to their views.



My piece reflects my hopes and dreams for the world to care for creation and create a world of harmony and balance. Not only do I believe that we must treat each other with love and respect, but we urgently need to protect and sustain the environment.

Emilie, female, 15 years, Metropolitan,
Amplify – Through My Eyes Arts Opportunity Finalist

HOPES AND DREAMS

WHY HOPES AND DREAMS MATTER

Hope is “the ability to perceive positive futures” (Bishop & Willis, 2014, p. 781). It relates to goals, plans and ambitions (Bishop & Willis, 2014). Having hope is important for children and young people because it carries them into the future with enthusiasm and optimism (Australian Childhood Foundation, 2020). In addition, children and young people who hold hope for the future are likely to have effective coping strategies, be more goal directed and perform better on tasks (Shek, Wu, & Leung, 2016).

HOW GROWING UP IN QUEENSLAND 2020 ASKED ABOUT HOPES AND DREAMS

Each activity in Growing Up in Queensland 2020 invited participants to share their hopes. Parents were asked to support the youngest participants (4 – 7 years) to use visual arts to respond to the question “What do you want your life to be like when you grow up?”. The general nature of the question allowed parents to explore with their child their ideal future life, allowing them to reflect either on their own place in the world, or on the world at large.

The postcard that explored hopes was similarly general in nature. It asked participants aged 8 – 18 years to describe their hopes for the future.

Junior survey participants (8 – 12 years) were asked what they would like to be when they grow up, and to identify things that would help them become what they want to be.

Youth survey participants (13 – 18 years) were asked to rate their feelings of positivity about their futures and to identify things that might stop them achieving their goals.

Considering research about the relationship between current happiness and optimism about the future (Saricam, 2015), we also asked children and young people what makes them happy. This question was asked in the junior survey and the youth survey.

FINDINGS: YOUNG QUEENSLANDERS’ HOPES AND DREAMS

OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

Participants generously shared their hopes for themselves, including career aspirations, safety and security, and travel. They also shared their hopes and dreams for others, including hopes for support for vulnerable people in their communities and care for the environment. Participants also described the hopes, people, places, animals and activities that bring them joy.

Their responses reveal optimism for themselves, as well as concern for others. This finding is consistent with previous research. Bishop and Willis (2014) found young people demonstrate concern about social issues and advocate for the need for collective action to find meaningful solutions. Responses also reveal the manner in which hopes and dreams develop and change during childhood and adolescence.

HOPES FOR THE FUTURE

Twelve children aged 4 – 7 years submitted artworks depicting hopes for the future. Nine of these participants were male. The artworks depicted hopes of security in the form of a house, wishes for common play areas where neighbourhood children can congregate and aspirations to become fashion designers and firefighters.



Reilly talked about his hopes of becoming a fireman when he grows up.

Reilly, male, 5 years, Metropolitan



When I grow up I hope I have a nice warm house with a door and a horse.

Jude, male, 5 years, North Queensland



Lucy wants nice grass where all of the kids in the street can play together.

Lucy, female, 5 years, North Queensland

Participants aged 8 – 18 years submitted 235 postcards describing their hopes for the future. The three most frequently mentioned hopes related to employment (described by 31% of participants), education (14%) and care for the environment (7%).

In the future I want to be an architect and design homes.

Female, 11 years, South East

To be able to go to high school and to have a job in my local community.

Male, 8 years, North Queensland

My hopes for the future are that the rainforests in tropical Queensland will not be cut down to make room for more houses... If the rainforests are cut down many different species of animals will have nowhere to go. We all need to help save the rainforests.

Female, 9 years, Central Queensland

Among junior survey participants, the most commonly desired occupations were sportsperson (10%), scientist (10%) and teacher (8%).

Football player when I retire I wanna be a coach or commentator.

Male, 8 years, North Coast

Inventor or doctor to help diabetics.

Male, 9 years, Central Queensland

Teacher and teach students.

Aboriginal female, 11 years, Central Queensland

These results are similar to those found internationally. A study of children in the United Kingdom found sportsperson and teacher were the two most commonly desired occupations (Chambers, Kashefpakdel, Rehill, & Percy, 2018).

GROUP DIFFERENCES

GENDER

Males who participated in the postcard activity were more likely than females to describe hopes for employment (36% of responses from males; 27% of responses from females). In contrast, hopes relating to education were more often shared by females (21% of responses from females, compared to 13% of responses from males).

Career aspirations for junior survey participants varied greatly depending on gender. This is not surprising. Views regarding careers are generally formed at a young age (Chambers, et al., 2018). By the time children turn eight, it is likely they hold gendered beliefs regarding careers (Chambers, et al., 2018).

In our study, the most commonly mentioned career aspiration for females was to be a teacher. For males, the most common career goal was to be a sportsperson. Our findings are consistent with those described by Chambers et al. (2018). Among Australian students aged seven to 11, females most commonly wanted to be teachers, and males most commonly aspired to be sportspeople.

AGE

Compared to older participants, younger children were more likely to hold hopes for others (including specific people, society in general, and wildlife and the environment). Half of the postcard responses from participants aged 8 – 12 years described hopes for others, compared to only 35% of responses from participants aged 13 – 18 years. This may reflect the fact that younger children generally have most of their needs addressed by carer givers. Children aged 8 – 12 years are supported financially by parents. They do not need to devote significant thought to employment, housing or finance. As a result, they may have relatively more capacity to consider the wellbeing of others.

In contrast, older teens are approaching independence. Consequently, they may be more likely to be developing aspirations regarding their own future, including further education, employment, housing and finance.



Important issues like Black Lives Matter, LGBT+ Pride and Racial diversity, is what I'm trying to represent in my drawing, to show that teenagers see the important stuff that's happening. We want a world where these aren't a problem.

Jazmin, female, 13 years, Darling Downs South West, Amplify – Through My Eyes Arts Opportunity Finalist



The wattle symbolises Queensland's strength and resilience. The hands represent the diversity of culture. I dream that multiculturalism will thrive and we will learn from each other. Queensland can grow out of these cracks and revive beautifully.

Amaya, female, 14 years, Metropolitan,
Amplify – Through My Eyes Arts
 Opportunity Finalist

Racism towards the traditional owners of our land, their people suffered for hundreds of years and they don't even get a day to commemorate the hundreds of thousands of people who lost their lives because of the European settlers. Us kids have to think about how they are judged everyday just because of their race.

Female, 14 years, Far North Queensland



My picture depicts the loss of culture and the suffering for indigenous communities in the past from the elderly lady's facial expression and the proteas provide a background of hope and strength for the communities trying to rebuild their culture.

Georgie, female, 15 years, North Coast,
Amplify - Through My Eyes Arts
 Opportunity Finalist

I hope that everything like fires, robbers and everything bad in this world will go away and no one will have to hurt anyone else. I also hope that when i am older i will get a good job and school. I do also really want the homeless people and people who cannot afford stuff get what they deserve.

Female, 10 years, South East

My hope for the future is that there is no wars and corona virus is dead for ever and we dont get a 2nd wave of it so then less people get dead.

Male, 12 years, North Coast

I hope to finish university without any debt and to successfully get and hold and job. I hope to become a more prominent force in my community and to become more at home.

Female, 18 years, Metropolitan

Finish high school and attend university to study education (primary).

Female, 16 years, North Queensland

To leave school, and enter a full-time job. Maybe go to Tafe at some point.

Male, 17 years, Darling Downs South West

FINISHING YEAR 12

Almost 90% of youth survey participants aged 13 – 16 years indicated they planned to finish high school. Fewer than 2% intended to leave prior to receiving their Year 12 certificate. The remaining 9% were unsure about whether they would finish Year 12.

GROUP DIFFERENCES

Figure 12 shows the percentage of participants in various groups who said they plan to finish Year 12.

POST-SCHOOL PLANS

Just over half of the young people who participated in the youth survey said they plan to attend university. Forty-one percent said they would like to gain employment, 33% wished to travel, 11% hoped to attend TAFE and 10% wanted to pursue an apprenticeship and/or traineeship.

PLANS TO FINISH YEAR 12, BY GROUP (13 - 16 YEARS)

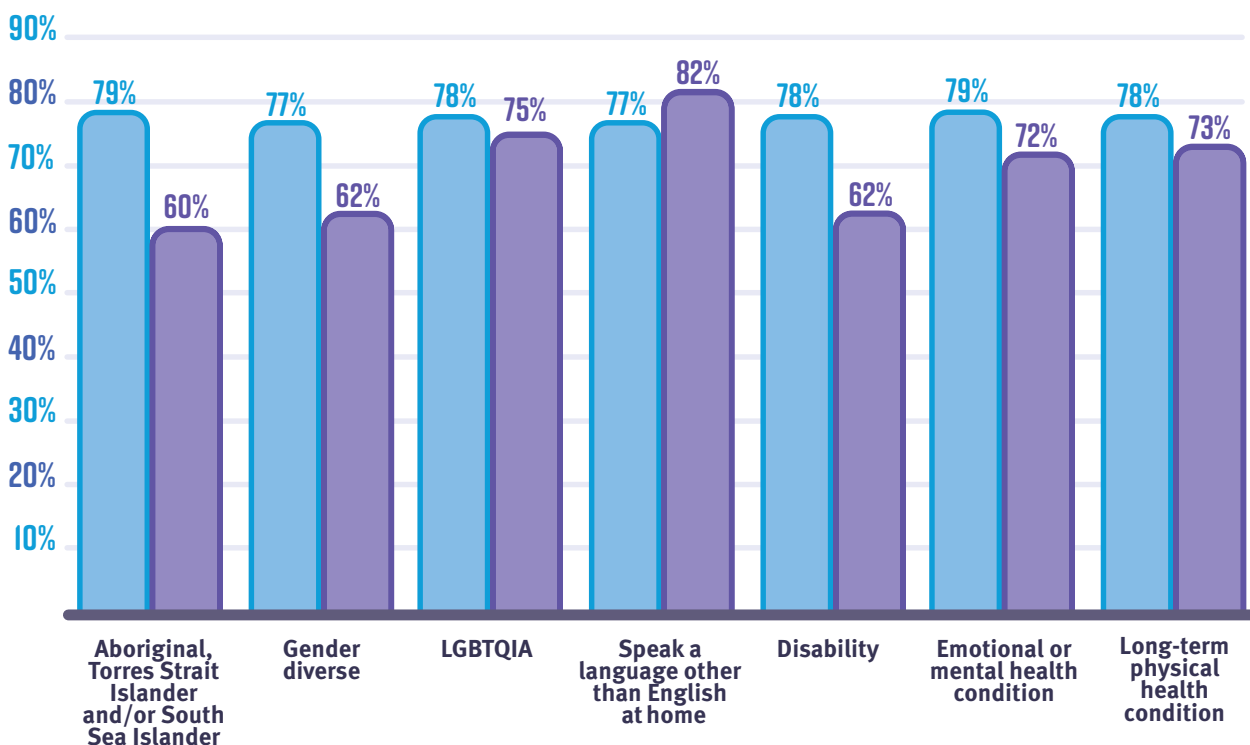


Figure 12. Percentage of participants who reported planning to finish Year 12: Comparison across groups.

GROUP DIFFERENCES

Figure 13 shows the post-school plans of different groups of participants.

POST-SCHOOL PLANS, BY GROUP

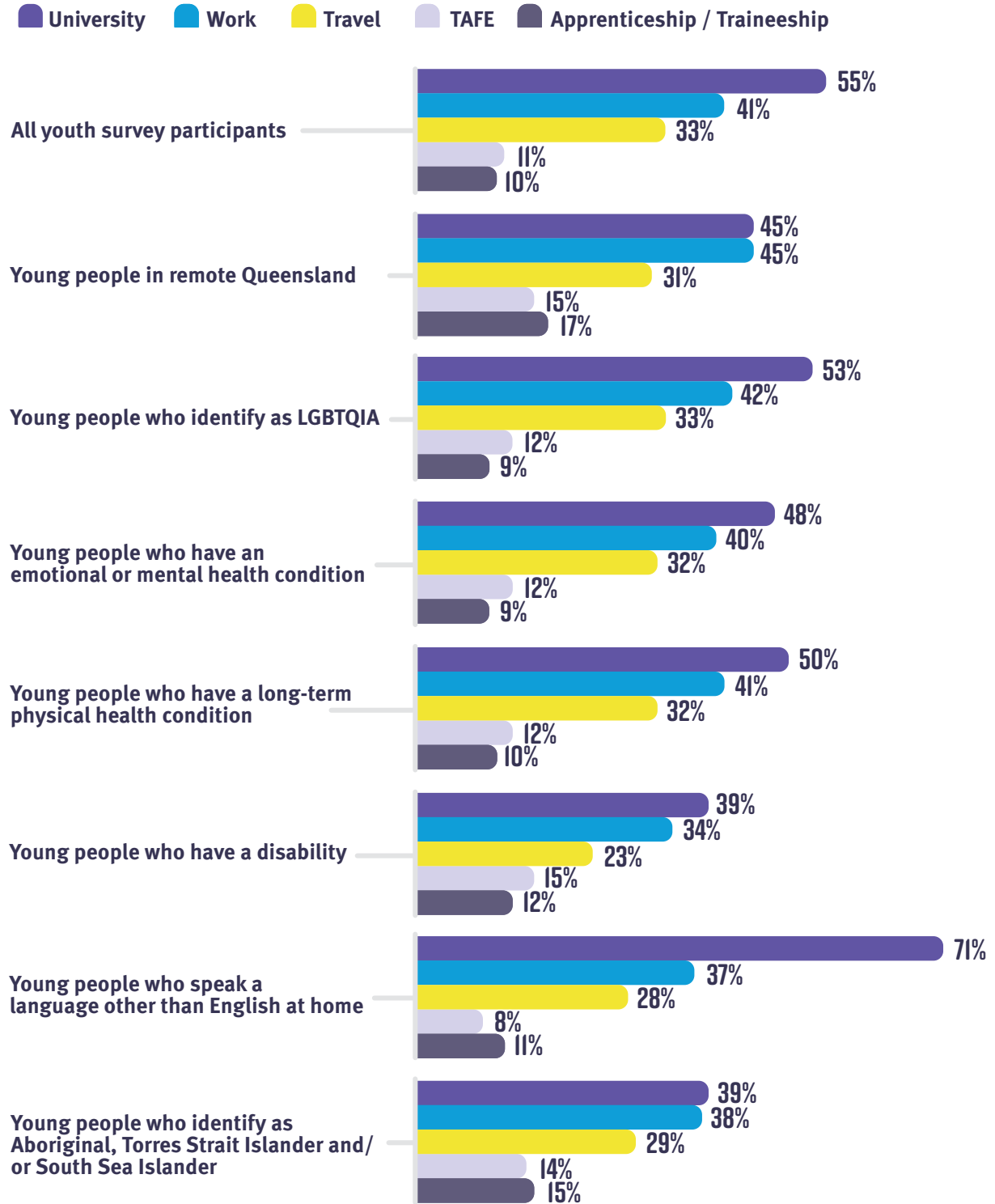


Figure 13. Percentage of youth survey participants who reported each category of post-school plan: Comparison across groups.



Living in the bush with high aspirations

Laine, female, 13 years, Darling Downs South West, Amplify – Through My Eyes Arts Opportunity Finalist

My grades, mental health (my headspace) and finance.

South Sea Islander female, 16 years, Darling Downs South West

Financial issues are a big problem, and I'm still not sure where I want to go with my life so I need some careers help/advice, but don't understand how to get it.

Gender-diverse participant, 15 years, Metropolitan

Lack of exposure and confidence, as well as being overwhelmed by so much information that I don't know what I truly want.

Male, 17 years, Metropolitan

FACILITATORS AND BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

FACILITATORS

Junior survey participants were asked to share with us the things they thought would help them become what they wanted to be. The most commonly mentioned facilitators were education (48% of participants), experience / practise (19%) and a support network (7%).

BARRIERS

The youth survey asked teens to identify barriers to achieving their hopes. The most commonly mentioned barriers were financial barriers (mentioned by 16% of participants). These barriers included high costs of education, travel and living; family financial situations and economic issues. Personal barriers were the second-most frequently mentioned barriers, described by 14% of participants. These barriers included concerns related to confidence and lack of skills, experience and knowledge. The third-most frequently cited barrier was education (12%) and included worries and frustrations about the new ATAR system, not receiving grades required for admission into tertiary education and the impacts of COVID-19 on education.



My inspiration behind this piece was the modern-day such that people follow what is popular or the bad influences of their lives or want to follow their own dreams as human beings can be influenced by the people they see.

Kiara, Kurinji Aboriginal female, 16 years, Darling Downs South West, Amplify – Through My Eyes Arts Opportunity Finalist

GROUP DIFFERENCES

Table 3 compares the barriers identified by different groups of participants.

GROUP	#1 BARRIER	#2 BARRIER	#3 BARRIER
All youth survey participants (n=5,924)	Financial (16%)	Personal (14%)	Education (12%)
17-year-olds (n=1,144)	Financial (17%)	COVID-19 (16%)	Education (11%)
18-year-olds (n=583)	Financial (20%)	Personal (12%)	Mental health (12%)
Young people who identify as gender diverse (n=126)	Mental health (22%)	Financial (17%)	Personal (11%)
Young people who identify as LGBTQIA (n=1,399)	Financial (17%)	Mental health (16%)	Personal (12%)
Young people with a disability (n=345)	Mental health (11%)	Personal (11%)	Financial (10%)
Young people with an emotional or mental health condition (n=1,982)	Mental health (18%)	Financial (15%)	Personal (12%)
Young people with a long-term physical health condition (n=657)	Financial (17%)	Mental health (11%)	Education (11%)

Table 3. Percentage of youth survey participants who identified barriers to achieving their hopes: Comparison across groups.

HEALTH AND DISABILITY

Young people living with a disability, mental health condition or long-term physical health condition were far more likely to cite mental health as a barrier to success than young people not living with these conditions.

My mental health. I don't really have a strong mental mind and it brings my confidence down and it prevents me from doing things to succeed in life.

Female, 13 years, Metropolitan

AGE

Financial concerns were more pronounced for those aged 18 years than for younger participants. Twenty percent of participants aged 18 years said finance was a barrier for them, compared to just 10% of participants aged 13 years. This is not surprising given young adults are transitioning to independence and have new financial responsibilities.

Not being able to pay my student fees that aren't covered by HECS, losing confidence in my abilities, not having my family and friends support my decisions.

Female, 18 years, South East

The three most commonly identified important issues were the same across ages 13 to 16 years (financial, personal, education). However, among participants aged 17 years, COVID-19 was the second-most commonly identified concern (identified by 16%). Among participants aged 18 years, mental health featured as the third-most commonly mentioned concern (identified by 12%).

Coronavirus, and the uncertainty and inconsistencies that have come with it regarding my senior year.

Aboriginal female, 17 years, Darling Downs South West

GENDER

Although the top three barriers were consistent between males and females, females were more likely to be concerned about finances (18% of female participants) compared to males (12%).

Just over 20% of young people who identified as being gender diverse cited mental health as barrier, making it the most commonly identified barrier for this cohort. In contrast, only 8% of participants who did not identify as gender diverse said mental health was a barrier to their goals.

When interpreting these statistics, it is important to note the small number of young people who identified as gender diverse.

LGBTQIA

Of the participants who identified as LGBTQIA, 16% said mental health was a barrier to their goals, compared to only 6% of participants who did not identify as LGBTQIA.

PRIMARY LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME

Young people who spoke a language other than English at home were more likely to see finances as a barrier to their hopes (17%) than those who spoke English at home (11%).

ABORIGINAL, TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AND / OR SOUTH SEA ISLANDER

The three most commonly identified concerns did not differ between participants who identified as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and / or South Sea Islander and those who did not identify as such. However, young people who identified as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and / or South Sea Islander were more likely to cite family as a barrier (7%) than those who did not identify as such (4%).

OPTIMISM FOR THE FUTURE

Youth survey respondents were asked to rate their feelings of positivity for the future. Just over half (56%) of the participants said they feel positive or very positive about their future. This is not substantially different from the proportion (60%) of young people in Growing Up in Queensland 2018 who said they feel positive about their future.

Similarly, the proportion of participants (17%) who reported feeling negative about their future in 2020 was close to the proportion of participants (20%) who indicated negative feelings in the 2018 study. The similarity in responses between 2018 and 2020 may indicate COVID-19 has not had a substantial impact on young people's feelings of hope.

Our findings are similar to those of Mission Australia. Fifty-seven percent of the young Queenslanders in their youth survey indicated feeling positive about the future (Tiller, et al., 2020). However, there was a difference in the findings regarding negative feelings for the future. Twelve percent of Queensland respondents in the Mission Australia survey felt negative about their future, compared to 17% of participants in Growing Up in Queensland 2020.

GROUP DIFFERENCES

AGE

The likelihood of reporting positive feelings about the future was highest among participants aged 13 years, and lowest among participants aged 18 years. In accordance with this finding, the likelihood of negative feelings about the future increased substantially with age (see Figure 14).

OPTIMISM, BY AGE

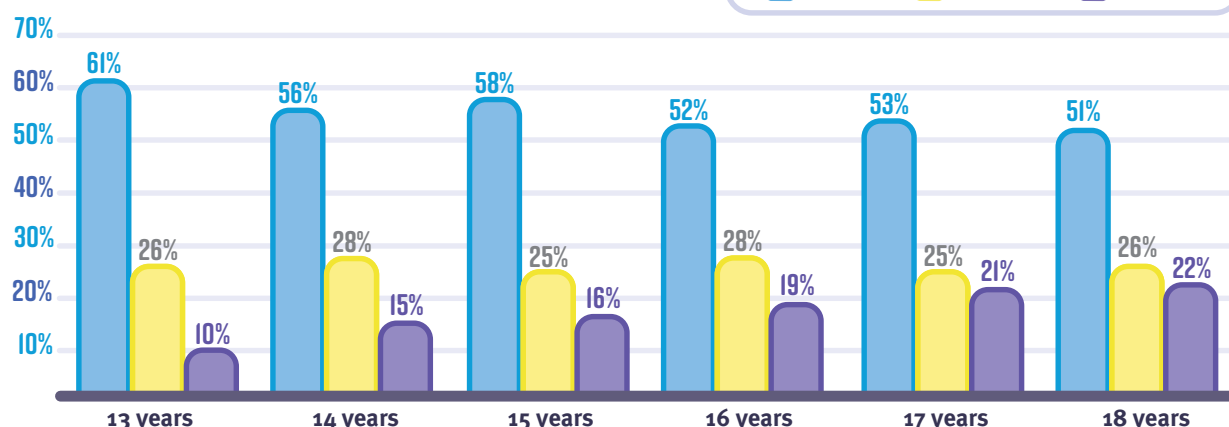


Figure 14. Percentage of youth survey participants who reported feeling positive, negative or neutral, respectively, about their future: Comparison across age groups.

As shown in **Figure 15**, other group differences were evident.

OPTIMISM, BY GROUP

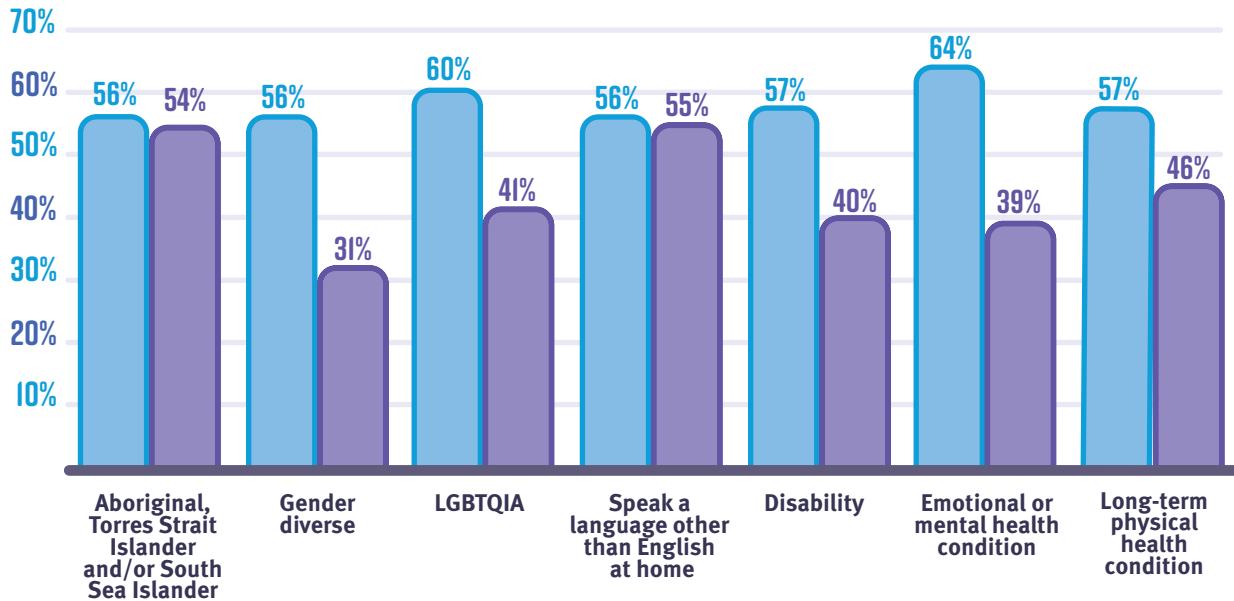


Figure 15. Percentage of youth survey participants who reported feeling positive about their future: Comparison across groups.

HEALTH AND DISABILITY

Young people who reported living with a mental health condition were less likely to feel positive about their futures (39%) compared to their peers who did not report living with a mental health condition (64%). They were also far more likely to express negative feelings about their futures (30% compared to 11%; see **Figure 15**).

Young people who identified as having a disability were less likely to feel positive about their future (40%) compared to young people who did not report having a disability (57%). Young people who said they have a disability were also far more likely than other participants to express negative feelings about their futures (28% compared to 16%).

This discrepancy may be related to the high rate of emotional and mental health issues among participants who identified as having a disability. Among participants who identified as having a disability, 69% said they had an emotional or mental health condition. In contrast, only 31% of other participants reported having an emotional or mental health condition.

Young people living with a long-term physical health condition were less likely to express optimism about their futures, compared to participants who did not identify as having a long-term physical health condition. Of participants with a long-term

physical health condition, 46% felt positive about their futures. In contrast, nearly 60% of other participants reported feeling optimistic. Participants who identified as having a long-term physical health condition were also far more likely to express negative feelings about their futures (23%) than other participants (16%). Again, the lower rate of optimism among participants with a long-term physical health condition may relate to the higher rate of emotional or mental health conditions among these participants (59%) compared to other participants (30%).

GENDER

Of participants who identified as being gender diverse, nearly 40% reported feeling negative about their futures, compared with 17% of females and 14% of males (see **Figure 16**). Accordingly, gender-diverse participants were much less likely than males and females to report positive feelings about their futures. Just over 30% of gender-diverse participants indicated having positive feelings about their futures, compared to 55% of females and 61% of males. The lower rate of optimism among gender-diverse participants may relate to the relatively high rate (71%) of emotional and mental health conditions among this group.

OPTIMISM, BY GENDER

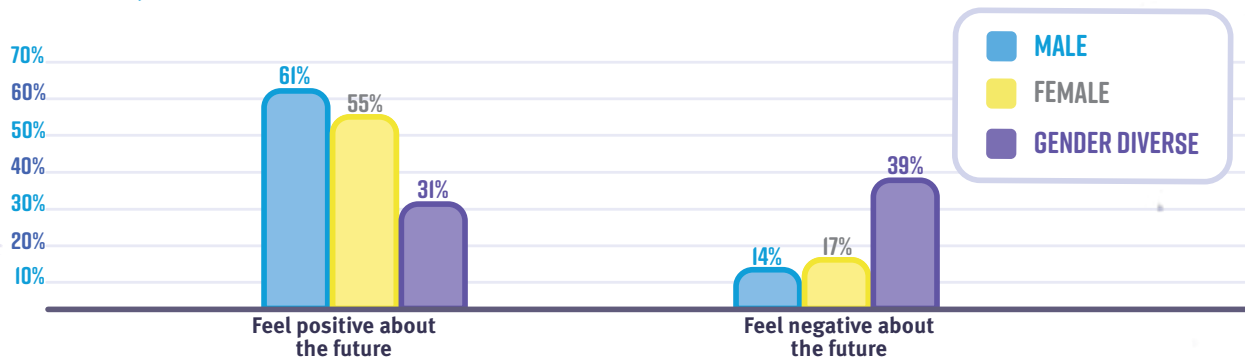


Figure 16. Percentage of youth survey participants who felt positive and negative, respectively, about their future: Comparison across gender groups.

LGBTQIA

Young people who identified as LGBTQIA were much less likely to report feeling optimistic about their future (41%) compared to other participants (61%). They were also far more likely to express negative feelings about their futures (30%) than other participants (13%). This discrepancy may relate to differences in the rates of emotional and mental health issues between LGBTQIA participants (59%) and other participants (25%).

SOURCES OF HAPPINESS

The junior survey and youth survey asked children and young people to tell us about what makes them happy. We heard the importance of connection with others, including family and friends. Hobbies and passions, including sport, also featured in participants' descriptions of what makes them happy.

GROUP DIFFERENCES

AGE

Our youngest participants described feeling happy when they are spending time with their families and friends.



This is a picture of my family. I spend time with my family at home. I've been playing games. I've been taking pictures on my Mum's phone. My family helps to look after me and my brother. I feel like I enjoy my family because they're fun!

Charlotte, female, 6 years, Metropolitan



I like my community because I can go to my wonderful school and play with my beautiful friends. We play at the basketball court, or in the prep area and sometimes we play tiger game on the rocks. My friends sometimes get tuckshop and the lady prepares the food and helps the children.

Aura, female, Far North Queensland (age not indicated)

Family and friends were also indicated as a source of happiness for children aged 8 – 12 years. The most commonly described source of happiness for children aged 8 – 12 years was family and friends, cited by 45% of participants in this age group. The next most commonly mentioned sources of happiness were animals (10%) and sport (7%).

Teens were less likely than younger participants to say family and friends were a source of happiness. Of the teens who took part in the youth survey, approximately 40% cited activities, interests, hobbies and passions as sources of happiness. Thirty-five percent felt happiness when they felt socially connected to others, including friends and family, and approximately 10% felt happiness when thinking about their future.

The differences between age groups may suggest that as teens become independent, they develop interests and hobbies outside the family. In addition, thoughts about the future may be more prominent among teens than among younger children, as teens are moving towards adulthood and developing plans regarding education, employment, travel and family.

GENDER

Among children aged 8 – 12 years, family and friends were the most common sources of happiness listed for both males and females, but gender differences were evident. Females were more likely than males to list sources of happiness that involve others, including family, friends and animals. Males were more likely than females to list gaming, both online and in terms of sports, as a source of happiness.

Only four junior survey participants identified as being gender diverse. Consequently, we are unable to report data for this cohort.

For the older cohort (13 – 18 years), the top three main sources of happiness were consistent across all groups of young people (activities, interests, hobbies and passions; sense of connection; thoughts about the future). However, males were more likely than females to say they find joy in sports and physical activity (11%) and gaming / spending time online (11%).

When I get to see my brothers after a long day at school.
South Sea Islander female, 14 years, Metropolitan

Among junior survey participants, the top five sources of happiness, by gender, were:



40%
 FAMILY / FRIENDS



12%
 VIDEO /
 COMPUTER GAMES



10%
 SPORT



9%
 OUTDOOR
 ACTIVITIES



6%
 ANIMALS

MALES

Gender-diverse young people aged 13 – 18 years were much less likely to report finding happiness in time spent with their families. Two percent of gender-diverse participants reported feeling happy when they spent time with their families, compared to an average of 8% for males and females. This may reflect issues regarding family acceptance. Research shows some families struggle to accept their children who identify with a non-typical gender identity or sexuality (Katz-Wise, Rosario, & Tsappis, 2016). For young people who do not feel accepted by their families, spending time with peers or being involved in activities outside the family may be more likely sources of happiness.

LGBTQIA

Similarly, some families may have difficulty accepting their LGBTQIA children (Katz-Wise, Rosario, & Tsappis, 2016). A lack of acceptance may contribute to our finding regarding differences between LGBTQIA young people and other participants. Of the participants who did not identify as LGBTQIA, 9% said family was a source of happiness. Fewer participants (4%) who identified as LGBTQIA indicated family as a source of happiness.

ABORIGINAL, TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AND / OR SOUTH SEA ISLANDER

Family plays an important role in Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and South Sea Islander cultures. Family life contributes to happiness, strength and positive mental health among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Holland, Dudgeon, & Milroy, 2013). Similarly, family plays a substantial role in the lives of South Sea Islander people (Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs).

This supports what we were told by participants who identified as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and / or South Sea Islander. These participants were almost twice as likely as other participants to identify their family as a source of happiness (15%, compared to 8% of those who did not identify).

Being around my family, seeing everyone with a smile on their faces.

Aboriginal female, 16 years, Darling Downs South West

FEMALES



50%

FAMILY / FRIENDS



13%

ANIMALS



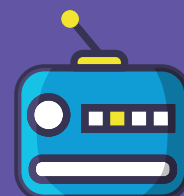
4%

PEOPLE



4%

SPORT



4%

MUSIC / DANCE



The inspiration behind this artwork comes from wanting to grow into a person who doesn't confine to society's stereotypes and be able to escape from the bounds a stereotypical city can create.

Kate, female, 14 years, Metropolitan,
Amplify – Through My Eyes Arts Opportunity Finalist

SUMMARY

Children and young people shared with us their optimism for the future. They expressed hopes not only for themselves, in terms of career aspirations and personal goals, but also for others, including equality and acceptance.

Most young people said they intend to complete Year 12, but this was substantially lower for Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and/or South Sea Islander young people, gender diverse young people and those with a disability. University was the most frequently nominated post school aspiration, followed by employment, travel, TAFE and pursuing an apprenticeship and/or traineeship.

Education, experience / practice and a good support network were viewed by children as the key facilitators to achieving their goals. Finances, education and personal barriers were cited as the greatest challenges. High costs of tertiary education, travel and living were frequently mentioned, along with concerns over ATAR scores, impacts of COVID-19 on education and a general lack of knowledge, skills and abilities. Mental health was most frequently cited as a barrier for those young people who identified as gender diverse or LGBTQIA, as well as those who reported living with a physical, emotional or mental health condition or disability.

Despite the challenges faced by children and young people during 2020, there was only a slight drop between 2018 and 2020 in the likelihood of feeling optimistic. Young people who identified as gender diverse or LGBTQIA, as well as those living with a disability or a physical, emotional or mental health condition were less likely to feel positive about their futures compared to other participants. This is not surprising given that there is a substantially higher prevalence of emotional or mental health conditions in these populations.



With my art I strive to educate people on the dangers of microplastics, ghost nets and how they can affect marine animals like jellyfish. Using acrylic pours and Zen tangles I tried to capture the details of the small dangerous plastics.

Faith, female, 13 years, Far North Queensland,
Amplify – Through My Eyes Arts Opportunity Finalist



BIG ISSUES

WHY YOUNG QUEENSLANDERS' "BIG ISSUES" MATTER

The Queensland Family and Child Commission works to promote the wellbeing of young Queenslanders. We want children to live in communities that support them to thrive. This requires us to listen to children and young people. Listening to young people's views and including young people in decisions supports the development of young people's confidence, knowledge and understanding (Kirby & Bryson, 2002).

In addition, information about what concerns young Queenslanders can inform decisions about services and types of support required by children and young people. We want to know what is important to children and young people, so we can advocate for decisions that make Queensland a better place for them. "If adults are to fulfil their obligations to promote the best interests of children, they need to listen to children themselves" (UNICEF, 2011, p. 5).

HOW GROWING UP IN QUEENSLAND 2020 ASKED ABOUT BIG ISSUES

Growing Up in Queensland 2020 used surveys and a postcard activity to ask children and young people about the issues that are important to them. The junior survey asked children aged 8 to 12 years to select from a list of options or write a response to the statement "I think the most important issue for kids my age is".

The youth survey asked young people aged 13 to 18 years to write a response to the statement "I think the most important issue or issues for young people today is/are". Many participants described several themes. This report describes only the first theme that appeared in participants' responses, or the theme that participants explicitly identified as being the theme of most importance. Secondary themes are not described.

Postcards asked children and young people aged 8 to 18 years to write a short response to the question "What is one issue/problem that you think adults are not taking seriously enough?".

FINDINGS: BIG ISSUES FOR YOUNG QUEENSLANDERS

OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

A large number of young people said mental health is the most important issue for people their age (see [Figure 17](#)). They described wanting more education about mental health, less stigma surrounding mental health issues and easier access to services. They also called for change to the education system. Participants told us they want less focus on academic grades and more curriculum that will prepare them for adult life. Environmental concerns also appeared in participants' descriptions of important issues. Young people want leaders to address climate change and habitat destruction.

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES

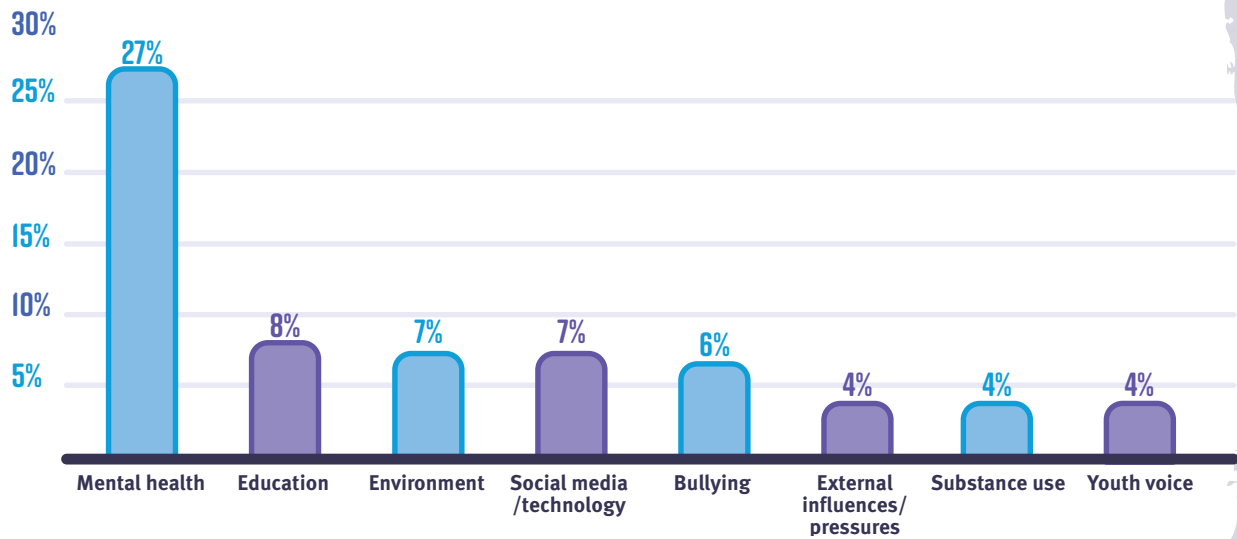


Figure 17. Percentage of youth survey participants who identified each issue as the most important issue for people their age.

MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health emerged as a concern for many of the young Queenslanders who participated in Growing Up in Queensland 2020. It was the most commonly mentioned issue in responses to the postcard asking about issues that require more attention from adults.

Mental health was also the most important issue most commonly described by youth survey participants. Nearly 30% of these young people said mental health was the most important issue for people their age. Most of the participants who identified mental health as an important issue described general mental health, anxiety or depression as concerns.

Postcard participants and youth survey participants painted a clear picture of their concerns about mental health.

In the youth survey, a common sub-theme within mental health was body image. Similarly, body image was revealed as significant concern for one-third of young people in Mission Australia's 2020 Youth Survey (Tiller, et al., 2020). Participants in our study described concerns about body dysmorphia, pressure regarding appearance, eating disorders and the influence of social media and other media on body image.

The pressure that social media places on teenagers to look, act and feel a certain way or they aren't good enough.

Female, 14 years, region not reported

Mental Health for kids my age children knowing how to cope with their feelings.

Male, 11 years, North Queensland

Mental health is a very important factor in everyone's lives, whether its anxiety, depression or stress etc. everyone will experience some sort of normal negative mental health in there lifetime, however this should not be something you suffer with everyday.

Female, 14 years, North Queensland

Personal image/body image, how we see ourselves in comparison to others, both physically and emotionally.

Female, 16 years, Metropolitan

Mental health. Body image.

Male, 13 years, Metropolitan

Young people in Growing Up in Queensland 2020 also shared their concerns about mental health stigma and the need for greater awareness and education, confidence to seek help, and the cost, wait times and remoteness that limit their access to services.

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 most important issue for young people is a lot of them not having the confidence to speak out about their mental health.

Male, 15 years, South East

GROUP DIFFERENCES

GENDER

Females (30%) and gender-diverse young people (29%) were more likely to be concerned about mental health than males (21%). This is consistent with results from a Mission Australia study, which found young females were substantially more likely than young males to be concerned about mental health (Hall, et al., 2019b).

AGE

A more substantial difference emerged between ages. The likelihood of being concerned about mental health steadily increased with age. Only 17% of survey participants aged 13 years were concerned about mental health, compared to 33% of participants aged 18 years. This finding may reflect a tendency for older teens to have larger social circles and consequently be more likely to know people with mental health difficulties. In addition, older teens are more likely than younger teens to experience mental health issues (Hall, et al., 2019b).

ABORIGINAL, TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AND / OR SOUTH SEA ISLANDER STATUS

The likelihood of being concerned about mental health differed according to whether participants identified as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and / or South Sea Islander. In the youth survey, 21% of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and / or South Sea Islander participants said mental health was one of the most important issues for people their age, compared to 28% of participants who did not identify as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and / or South Sea Islander.

BULLYING

The most commonly mentioned important issue for children aged 8 – 12 years was bullying (either in person or online). Just under 30% of children in this age group said it was the most important issue for children their age.

I believe the most important issue for kids my age is bullying. I believe this because I see it at my own school. Both me and my friends have experienced bullying.

Male, 11 years, Darling Downs South West

Teenage participants in the youth survey also described bullying as an important issue for young people.

Many young people in this country are affected by cyberbullying and bullying in general.

Male, 14 years, South East

GROUP DIFFERENCES

AGE

Among participants aged 8 – 12 years, the likelihood of identifying bullying as the most important issue varied by age. Of the participants aged 12 years, 36% said bullying was the most important issue for children their age. For other age groups, the likelihood ranged from 26% to 28%. The difference between participants aged 12 and participants of other ages was accounted for mainly by concerns about online bullying. Participants aged 12 years were dramatically more likely than other participants to identify online bullying as the most important issue.

Teens were less likely than younger children to describe bullying as one of the most important issues for people their age. Only 12% of participants aged 13 years and 3% of participants aged 18 years said bullying was the most important issue for people their age. This finding may be partly accounted for by the percentage of participants of each group that had been verbally bullied. Only 38% of participants aged 18 years said they had been verbally bullied, compared to between 67% and 78% of other age groups. Differences between age groups for other types of bullying (social, physical and cyberbullying) were much less dramatic.

The differences between age groups may also be accounted for by education about bullying. It is possible that younger children may be exposed to more education at school and at home about bullying, and therefore be more aware of the issue. Another possibility is that younger teens feel vulnerable to bullying due to their relatively smaller size and less-developed confidence.

HEALTH AND DISABILITY

Health status had a dramatic impact on the likelihood of having experienced bullying. Youth survey participants with a long-term physical health condition were substantially more likely than other participants to have experienced verbal bullying, physical bullying, social bullying (e.g., exclusion) and cyberbullying. For example, half of the participants with a long-term physical health condition had experienced verbal bullying,

compared to 34% of other participants. Similarly, people with a disability were more likely to have experienced bullying than other participants, especially cyberbullying.

Participants with an emotional or mental health condition were especially likely to have experienced all four types of bullying – verbal, physical, social and cyberbullying. For each type of bullying, young people with an emotional or mental health difficulty were at least twice as likely as other participants to have experienced bullying.

For participants with a disability, participants with a physical health condition and participants with an emotional or mental health condition, the type of bullying most likely to have been experienced was verbal bullying.

LGBTQIA

Participants who identified as LGBTQIA were more likely than other participants to have experienced verbal bullying, physical bullying, social bullying and online bullying. The largest difference was for online bullying. Of the LGBTQIA participants, 34% had experienced online bullying, compared to only 21% of other participants. The type of bullying LGBTQIA participants were most likely to have experienced was verbal bullying.

GENDER

Females were more likely than males to have been bullied, and gender-diverse participants were more likely than both males and females to have been bullied. This pattern existed for all types of bullying – verbal, physical, social and cyberbullying. The most dramatic difference between male participants and gender-diverse participants related to cyberbullying. Of the gender-diverse participants, 36% reported having experienced cyberbullying. In contrast, only 18% of male participants said they had been cyberbullied.

REGION

For all four types of bullying, participants from the Metropolitan region (Brisbane and surrounds, Ipswich) were least likely to report having experienced bullying, and participants from Central Queensland were most likely. For example, of participants in Central Queensland, 30% had experienced physical bullying, compared to 18% from the Metropolitan region.



ABORIGINAL, TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AND / OR SOUTH SEA ISLANDER STATUS

For all four types of bullying, Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and / or South Sea Islander participants were more likely than other participants to have experienced bullying. For example, 21% of participants who did not identify as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and / or South Sea Islander reported being physically bullied, compared to 31% of participants who did identify as such.

PRIMARY LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME

For all types of bullying, participants who primarily spoke English at home were more likely than participants who spoke another language at home to have experienced bullying. The most substantial difference was for cyberbullying. Of the participants who spoke English at home, 25% had experienced cyberbullying. In contrast, only 13% of participants who spoke a language other than English had experienced cyberbullying.

EDUCATION

Education was an important issue for many young people. Eighty percent of youth survey participants (aged 13 – 18 years) said they felt stressed about school or university results.

Just under 10% said issues relating to education were the most important issues for young people. Participants described missing out on time to enjoy life and participate in physical activity, stress regarding academic results, perceived lack of support in school, a need for more relevant and engaging curriculum and a desire to learn more life-skills that will prepare them for adulthood.

I think the most important issue or issues for young people today is/are...

Meeting set standards at school. Everyone is at their own level when receiving education and it is crucial the that curriculum sets each and every individual up for success at their own level.

Female, 13 years, Metropolitan

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

Struggling with school work and studying.

Female, 15 years, North Queensland

GROUP DIFFERENCES

GENDER

The likelihood of reporting academic stress varied substantially according to gender. Eighty-five percent of females, 77% of gender-diverse participants and 68% of males who took part in the youth survey reported feeling stressed about their school or university results. Other research has also found a difference between males and females in terms of stress. Not only are females more likely to experience stress (as demonstrated in our participants' responses), but the stress they experience is of a greater level (Misra & McKean, 2000).

AGE

Age also had an impact on the likelihood of reporting academic stress. Just over 70% of participants aged 13 years said they experienced stress about their academic results, compared to 87% of participants aged 16 years old. This result is not surprising. As teens near school-leaving age, they will be considering employment and further education opportunities, both of which are often influenced by academic results.

ABORIGINAL, TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AND / OR SOUTH SEA ISLANDER STATUS

Of the participants who identified as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and or South Sea Islander, 72% said they experienced academic stress, compared to 81% of other participants. A potential explanation is that participants who identified as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and / or South Sea Islander were more likely than other participants to plan to attend TAFE or obtain an apprenticeship after school. These post-school plans may require less focus on academic grades compared to plans to attend university.

MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health affected the likelihood of participants reporting academic stress. Of those who said they had an emotional or mental health condition, 86% said they experienced academic stress, compared to 76% of other participants.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON EDUCATION

Young people said the school-related stress they experienced was intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic. The implications of COVID-19 for education were described as an important issue for young people and as a barrier for achieving their goals.

In particular, COVID-19 was stressful for Year 12 students. These students described being the “year of the firsts”. Students who attended Year 12 in 2020 were the first Year 12 students to experience COVID-19, to experience ATAR, to attend “prep” and to begin secondary school in Year 7 (rather than Year 8).

Young people described their COVID-related struggles with online education, fears about their academic results and entry into further study, limited employment opportunities and travel restrictions.

I know I personally will get lower grades because I do better on exams which covid 19 has stopped me from getting which will bring down my average grades.

Male, 17 years, Darling Downs South West

People specifically my age have been through a variety of changes (i.e. first year go into high school in grade 7, first year to do the new ATAR exiting year 12 system and currently trying to navigate the most important year of our schooling with a global pandemic.

Female, 17 years, Metropolitan

Covid-19 I do a vocational pathway at school so I can't do my work online as it majority practical

Male, 18 years, Darling Downs South West

COVID-19 also emerged as an issue that approximately 10% of children and young people want adults to pay more attention to.

PERSONAL STRESS

Stress about personal issues was another common concern for young people who took part in the youth survey. Of the young people who participated, 76% said they feel stressed about personal issues.

Just under 30% of participants said they could speak to their school teachers or school counsellors about their stress. Approximately half of the participants said they know about services in their community and online that can support them when they feel stressed. However, only 13% of participants said they had used a support service when they needed help, and 15% had used an online service.

As described previously, youth survey participants told us of difficulty accessing mental health services due to cost, stigma, location and lack of confidence to talk about mental health difficulties. These findings may help explain why only 13% had used a mental health service, despite approximately 50% of participants knowing about services in their community.

GROUP DIFFERENCES

GENDER

The likelihood of feeling stressed varied dramatically according to gender. Just over 80% of females said they feel stressed about their personal lives, and 76% of gender-diverse participants said they felt stressed. In contrast, only 64% of males said they felt stressed about issues in their personal lives.

AGE

Younger participants were much less likely to feel stressed about their personal lives than were older participants. Of the youth survey participants aged 13 years, 64% described feeling stress about issues in their personal lives. In contrast, 83% of participants aged 18 years indicated they felt stressed about their personal lives. This age difference may reflect a greater complexity of personal relationships among older teens, and increasing responsibilities associated with a transition to independence.

MENTAL HEALTH

Of participants with an emotional or mental health issue, 92% said they felt stressed about issues in their personal lives, compared to only 67% of other participants.

PRIMARY LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME

Of the participants who said they speak mainly a language other than English at home, 69% said they experienced stress about issues in their personal lives. Of other participants, 77% said they experienced stress about their personal lives. This finding suggests belonging to a different cultural and / or linguistic group may offer a buffer from personal stressors. A possible explanation is that individuals who reported speaking a language other than English belong to collectivistic cultures, which emphasise cohesiveness and supporting others (Queensland Health, 2010). The support associated with being part of a collectivistic culture may provide a buffer against stress.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Participants in Growing Up in Queensland 2020 told us they were concerned about the natural environment. Participants indicated these concerns when they responded to a postcard question about what adults need to take more seriously, and to survey questions about what the most important issues for young people are. For example, nearly 30% of postcard respondents said adults need to take the environment more seriously.

Concern about environmental issues, particularly among older participants, may reflect events that occurred in early 2020. The year began with horrific bushfires in south east Australia. Much public debate about environmental management followed. Throughout the rest of 2020, Brisbane, among cities throughout the world, was the site of protests regarding protection of habitat and wildlife.

Being worried that there won't be a future for us due to climate change and the over exhaustion of the planets 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

Our planets 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



That the world looks after the environment so all the fish, octopus and crabs can live happily in the ocean without any rubbish.

Rupert, 6 years, Metropolitan

GROUP DIFFERENCES

AGE

The likelihood of identifying the environment as an issue of concern varied by age. Among youth survey participants, 4% of those aged 13 years were concerned about the environment. Of participants aged 18 years, 13% said they were concerned about the environment. This age difference may reflect older teens' greater level of awareness of global issues.

The low incidence of concern about the environment across ages may reflect the data reporting process used in this report. This report describes the themes that appeared first in participants' responses, or the themes that participants described as their primary concerns. In some responses, environmental issues were described as a secondary concern. These responses have not contributed to the reported percentage of participants who described environment as an issue of concern.

ABORIGINAL, TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AND / OR SOUTH SEA ISLANDER STATUS

Rates of concern for the environment also differed according to Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and / or South Sea Islander status. Of the participants who did not identify as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and / or South Sea Islander, 8% said they were concerned about the environment. Of the participants who did identify as such, 3% identified environment as a concern.

GENDER

Female junior survey participants were more likely than males to be concerned about the environment. Of the female participants, 15% were concerned about the environment, compared to 11% of male participants. Similarly, females in the youth survey were more likely than males to say that environment was an important issue. Gender-diverse young people were equally likely as females to describe the environment as an important issue.



Many Animals died and bush fire burned the so many trees. I felt sad when I heard about bush fires. We have to prevent bush fires and raise money.

Serena, female, 6 years, Metropolitan



SUMMARY

Children and young people are engaged with the world around them. They told us they are concerned about the mental health and wellbeing of themselves and those around them. Some also reported being victims of bullying. They feel pressure to preserve the environment around them for future generations. They understand the importance of education, but feel stressed about their grades, are concerned about leaving school ill-equipped for adult life and worry about the impact of ATAR on their futures.

Mental health and wellbeing was the concern most frequently shared by young people. They spoke about general concerns around mental wellbeing, depression and anxiety, touched on the confronting issues of self-harm and suicide, and revealed the significant impact of social media on body image. They shared insights about the stigma of mental health in the community and the importance of accessible services, and spoke of their lack of confidence to access services. Younger children's attention was on bullying.

Young people who identified as LGBTQIA, gender diverse or living with a long-term physical condition or disability were much more likely than other participants to report having an emotional or mental health condition. They were also much more likely to have experienced verbal bullying, physical bullying, social bullying and cyberbullying. Those living with a mental or emotional health condition were twice as likely to experience bullying. We need to listen to the voices and experiences of these young people to better understand what can be done to wrap around and support young people in these minority groups to seek support to improve their mental health and wellbeing.

CONCLUSION

Children and young people growing up in Queensland in 2020 revealed themselves to be individuals with social awareness, a desire to have their say and clear hopes and goals based on compassion and foresight. Their views of their communities reveal the people and places that make their communities great places for people their age. They also indicated components of communities that could make them even better for the children and young people living in them.

Children and young people described hopes that reveal compassion, foresight and awareness of social issues. Younger children wanted everyone to be safe and happy and to have access to play areas. Older children hoped for world peace, support for vulnerable people and the protection of the natural environment and wildlife. They also had started thinking about careers, and many described aspirations for particular jobs. In contrast, teens described more general educational and employment goals. They also expressed desires for changes to the education system, environmental management practises and the mental health system.

The issues that children and young people identified as important reveal participants' understanding of the world around them. Their concerns about other people and the environment indicate consideration of the world beyond themselves. Children and young people care about global issues and offer insightful ideas about action that can be taken to address social and environmental issues.

Overall, children and young people experienced their communities positively. They said they value the kindness of community members and the friendliness of adults towards young people. They appreciated youth-friendly places and, in smaller towns in particular, the ease with which they could access these places.

Not all children and young people experienced their communities as overwhelmingly positive. Many children and young people said there are not enough safe and interesting places to spend time with friends. They told us the addition of youth-friendly spaces such as parks, fast-food restaurants and hubs for socialising would make their communities even better for people their age. In addition, most young people did not believe adults truly listen to them. They said they want their voices to be heard by adults, including community leaders and decision makers.

Unfortunately, some groups of young people were likely to have particularly negative experiences of their communities. Young people who identified as LGBTQIA, gender diverse or living with an emotional or mental health condition appeared particularly unlikely to have experienced the benefits of their communities. In general, compared to other participants, these groups of young people were less likely to feel a sense of belonging to their communities, to view the community as helpful and to perceive adults as friendly and willing to listen. They were less likely to feel there are enough safe and interesting places to spend time with friends.

Well-functioning communities have much to offer. They foster supportive relationships between community members, including between young people and adults. They allow young people the freedom to enjoy safe and interesting places for socialising, relaxing and developing their independence. The ideal community for young people allows young people to have a voice, and truly listens.



My hopes for the future are to see those my age now, stress less but learn more, play more, earn more and enjoy full freedom of expression. I hope our voices are louder, that our opinions are heard more, influence more and are considered, regardless of our age. We are the future, so please listen.

Female, 16 years, Central Queensland

REFERENCES

- Aranga, A., Cole Lewis, Y., Lindsay, R., Yeguez, C., Clark, M., & King, C. (2019). The protective role of connectedness on depression and suicidal ideation among bully victimized youth. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology, 48*, 728 - 739.
- Australian Childhood Foundation. (2020). *Children's Voices*. Retrieved January 19, 2021, from Australian Childhood Foundation: <https://www.childhood.org.au/the-impact/childrens-voices/>
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2018). *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adolescent and youth health and wellbeing 2018*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.
- Bishop, E. C., & Willis, K. (2014, January 20). 'Without hope everything would be doom and gloom': young people talk about the important of hope in their lives. *Journal of Youth Studies, 17*(6), 778-793. doi:10.1080/13676261.2013.878788
- Chambers, N., Kashefpapkel, E., Rehill, J., & Percy, C. (2018). *Drawing the future: Exploring the career aspirations of primary school children from around the world*. London: Education and Employers. Retrieved January 18, 2021, from <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/media/30958578/drawingthefuture-report-education-and-employers-jan-2018.pdf>
- Commissioner for Children and Young People Western Australia. (2011). *Caring for the future growing up today: Building spaces and places for children and young people*. Commissioner for Children and Young People WA.
- Commissioner for Children and Young People Western Australia. (2019). *Speaking out survey 2019 data insights: Students' views on their safety*. Commissioner for Children and Young People Western Australia.
- Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs. (n.d.). *Australian South Sea Islander community history*.
- Foster, C. E., Horwitz, A., Thomas, A., Opperman, K., Gipson, P., Burnside, A., . . . King, C. A. (2017). Connectedness to family, school, peers, and community in socially vulnerable adolescents. *Children and Youth Services Review, 81*, 321 - 331.
- Hall, S., Fildes, J., Perdriau, A., & Plummer, J. (2019a). *Gender gaps: Findings from the Youth Survey 2018*. Sydney: Mission Australia.
- Hall, S., Fildes, J., Perrens, B., Plummer, J., Carlisle, E., Cockayne, N., & Werner-Seidler, A. (2019b). *Can we talk? Seven year youth mental health report - 2012 - 2018*. Sydney: Mission Australia.
- Hill, A. O., Bourne, A., McNair, R., Carman, M., & Lyons, A. (2020). *Private lives 3: The health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ people in Australia. ARCSHS Monograph Series No. 122*. Melbourne: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University.
- Hill, A. O., Lyons, A., Jones, J., McGowan, I., Carman, M., Parsons, M., . . . Bourne, A. (2021). *Writing themselves in 4: The health and wellbeing of LGBTQA+ young people in Australia. National report, monograph series number 124*. Melbourne: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University.
- Holland, C., Dudgeon, P., & Milroy, H. (2013). *The mental health and social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, families and communities*. Sydney: National Mental Health Commission.
- Katz-Wise, S. L., Rosario, M., & Tsappis, M. (2016). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth and family acceptance. *Pediatric Clinics of North America, 63*(6), 1011 - 1025.
- Kirby, P., & Bryson, S. (2002). *Measuring the magic? Evaluating and researching young people's participation in public decision making*. London: Carnegie Young People Initiative.

McPherson, K. E., Kerr, S., Morgan, A., McGee, E., Cheater, M., McLean, J., & Egan, J. (2013). The association between family and community social capital and health risk behaviours in young people: An integrative review. *BMC Public Health*, 13.

Misra, R., & McKean, M. (2000). College students' academic stress and its relation to their anxiety, time management, and leisure satisfaction. *American Journal of Health Studies*, 16(1), 41-51.

National LGBTI Health Alliance. (2020). *Snapshot of mental health and suicide prevention statistics for LGBTI people*. National LGBTI Health Alliance.

O'Connor, M., Sanson, A., Hawkins, M. T., Letcher, P., Toumbourou, J. W., Smart, D., . . . Olsson, C. A. (2011). Predictors of positive development in emerging adulthood. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 40(7).

Queensland Health. (2010). *Five cross cultural capabilities for clinical staff*. Brisbane: Division of the Chief Health Officer, Queensland Health.

Saricam, H. (2015). Subjective happiness and hope. *Universitas Psychologica*, 14(2), 685-694.

Shek, D., Wu, F., & Leung, H. (2016). Dreams, aspirations and related constructs in children and adolescents: A literature review. *International Journal on Disability and Human Development*, 359-366. doi:10.1515/ijdhhd-2017-7004

Strauss, P., Cook, A. W., Watson, V., Wright Toussaint, D., & Lin, A. (2017). *Trans pathways: The mental health experiences and care pathways of trans young people. Summary of results*. Perth: Telethon Kids Institute.

Tiller, E., Fildes, J., Hall, S., Hicking, V., Greenland, N., Liyanarachchi, D., & Di Nicola, K. (2020). *Youth Survey Report 2020*. Sydney: Mission Australia.

UNICEF. (2011). *Every child's right to be heard: A resource guide on the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child general comment 12*. London: Save the Children UK.

Whitlock, J. (2004). *Places to be and places to belong: Youth connectedness in school and community*. New York: Cornell University.





Queensland Family and Child Commission

PO Box 15217 Brisbane City East Queensland 4002
63 George Street, Brisbane, Qld 4000 (Australia)

Phone: 07 3900 6000

Fax: 07 3900 6050

Email: info@qfcc.qld.gov.au

www.qfcc.qld.gov.au

Queensland
Family & Child
Commission

