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Office of the Advocate for
Children & Young People

The Voices of Children & Young People with Disability.

Executive summary

*A consultation undertaken by the Office of the
NSW Advocate for Children and Young People.*

The Office of the Advocate for Children Young People (ACYP) has been privileged to have heard feedback from over 32,000 children and young people in NSW since 2015. During this time, we have led consultations with some of the most vulnerable and social excluded young people in NSW¹, which has included children and young people with disabilities. However, this project was the first time we specifically sought to speak to children and young people with disabilities as an exclusive group. ACYP acknowledges the importance of deepening and strengthening the opportunities of children and young people with disabilities to have their voices heard and used a variety of techniques to adapt our usual consultation methods to suit the needs and abilities of each young person we spoke to.

To help further facilitate the voices of children and young people with disability, and with the support of a number of agencies, schools and disability organisations, ACYP led face-to-face consultations with over 370 children and young people with disabilities throughout metro and regional NSW over 6 months spanning 2019 and 2020. The aim of the consultations was to ensure that children and young people with disabilities in NSW had the opportunity to express their voices, opinion and experiences in line with the principle of participation

emphasised in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and ACYP's own legislative mandate.

We hope that their voices and experiences inspire other organisations to view the experience of young people as a valuable tool that can be used to inform and improve services, supports and programs for children and young people.

¹ For example, projects have included Socially Excluded Children and Young People 2018; Mental Health and wellbeing needs of children and young people 2019; What Aboriginal Children and Young People have to say 2019; What Children and Young People in Juvenile Justice centres have to say (2019); What Children and Young People experiencing homelessness have to say (2017)

What did children and young people with disabilities tell us?

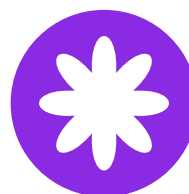
Forty-five groups of children and young people were asked the following questions²:



What is working well for you and other children and young people in NSW?



What is not working well for you and other children and young people in NSW?



What would you like to change to make NSW a better place for children and young people?

These three questions are purposefully phrased as open questions to encourage the sharing of information, opinions and experiences as well as to initiate impromptu group discussions. Where necessary, the language used to ask these questions was adapted to ensure that the communication needs of the participants were taken into account.

² ACYP asks the same three questions in each of their general consultations. Other consultations that ACYP have conducted can be found <https://www.acyp.nsw.gov.au/dod/map>

Analysis of the consultations with children and young people with disabilities revealed seven major themes as determined by the frequency with which these topics were raised. These have been categorised as:



Education

The importance of access to learning, support and development opportunities.



Health and the National Disability Insurance Scheme

Advantages and challenges associated with accessing health services.



Access and Inclusion

The value of being supported to access public buildings, recreation spaces and public transport as well as the importance of having the opportunity to be part of their community and participate in public life.



Voice and Participation

The importance of having their opinions valued and respected in decisions affecting them.



Employment and Training

The importance of access to vocational training, career pathways, work readiness and income support.



Discrimination and Bullying

The impact bullying and discrimination has on the wellbeing of children and young people with disabilities.



Mental health

The significance of increasing awareness of the importance of mental health supports, particularly for children and young people with complex needs.

Other topics that were raised during discussions are featured in the full report and include issues such as transport, climate change, cost of living, personal relationships and housing.

Summary

Notably, many of the themes nominated by children and young people with disabilities are consistent with those that have come from other ACYP consultations with children and young people across NSW. This suggests that whilst children and young people with disabilities have unique support needs that may require focused attention, their priorities and concerns are common to children and young people throughout the NSW community.

ACYP hopes that this report will encourage decision makers to realise that it is both possible – and essential – that children and young people with disabilities have a voice in matters impacting them. Throughout this report, children and young people with disabilities have demonstrated that, with appropriate support, they can provide unique and valuable insight about the effectiveness of government and community services. By listening and responding to their lived experiences, our State will be better able to ensure that children and young people with disabilities can realise their right to live a full and contributory life in the NSW community.

Acknowledgements

ACYP would like to thank the 372 children and young people that took the time to speak to us about the things most important to them. We would also like to thank the 24 organisations and educational institutions that were willing to help facilitate these 45 group consultations and prioritised the right of children and young people in their care to use their own voice to express how they experience life as a young person in NSW.

Please visit www.acyp.nsw.gov.au for more information about this and other ACYP projects with NSW children and young people.



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