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Office of the Advocate for
Children & Young People

The Voices of Children & Young People with Disability.

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

We would also like to acknowledge the important role of Aboriginal people and culture within the NSW community.

ACYP advises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers this report may contain images of people who have passed away.

It is important to acknowledge, the purpose of this report is to reflect the views, experiences and needs of children and young people as they were expressed to ACYP.

This is not to say that Government and non-government organisations did not take nor continue to undertake significant work in the disability sector. It is how children and young people perceive and experience actions; it is the truth according to them.

It is an overarching principle governing the Advocate's work to reflect that truth. Now it is our collective responsibility as a society to explore how these truths manifest themselves practically.

Content warning:

This report discusses topics such as mental health and suicide which some readers might find distressing.

If you have been affected by the contents of this report and you are in an emergency situation or need immediate assistance, contact mental health services or emergency services on 000.

If you need to speak to someone urgently, call Lifeline 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467.

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About the Office of the NSW Advocate for Children and Young People

The NSW Advocate for Children and Young People (ACYP) is an independent statutory appointment overseen by the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Children and Young People. ACYP advocates for and promotes the safety, welfare, well-being and voice of all children and young people aged 0-24 years, with a focus on the needs of those who are vulnerable or disadvantaged.

Under the *Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014*, the functions of ACYP include:

- 1** Making recommendations to Parliament, government and non-government agencies on legislation, policies, practices and services that affect children and young people
- 2** Promoting children and young people's participation in activities and decision-making about issues that affect their lives
- 3** Conducting research into children's issues and monitoring children's wellbeing
- 4** Holding inquiries into important issues relating to children and young people
- 5** Providing information to help children and young people.

Glossary

ABS: Australian Bureau of Statistics

ACYP: Advocate for Children and Young People

Auslan: Australian Sign Language

CALD: Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

Children: The *Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014* (NSW) defines children as those aged 0 to 11 years

Children and young people: phrase is a collective reference to all those who participated in these consultations

CRC: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989

CRPD: United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006

CYDA: Children and Young people with Disability Australia

DES: Disability Employment Services

FACS: Family and Community Services (known as Department of Communities and Justice since 1 July 2019)

FASD: Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder

LAC: Local Area Coordinator

MDS: Macarthur Disability Services

NDIA: The National Disability Insurance Agency

NDIS: National Disability Insurance Scheme

NSW: New South Wales

PCYC: Police and Citizens Youth Club

SLSO: School Support Learning Officer

SRC: Student Representative Council

SSG: Student Support Group

SSP: Schools for Specific Purposes

TAFE: Technical and Further Education

TBI: Traumatic brain injury

Trending topics: used to refer to issues particularly current, topical or important to children and young people

UN: United Nations

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

VET: Vocational Education and Training

YAC: Youth Advisory Council

Young People: The *Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014* (NSW) defines young people as those aged 12 to 24 years.

YP: Young people

Foreword

Since its creation in 2015¹, the Office of the NSW Advocate for Children and Young People (ACYP) has sought to promote the safety, welfare and wellbeing of NSW children and young people². ACYP has done this by approaching children and young people directly, listening to what they say affects them and communicating that message to NSW Parliament and NSW Government organisations.

Over the years, ACYP has developed a consultation methodology that seeks to facilitate the voices of children and young people. Through qualitative data analysis, our aim is to understand what is important to children and young people and identify opportunities to improve current practice. For a consultation dedicated to the voices of children and young people with disabilities, however, we immediately recognised that our usual practice may not achieve this critical objective.

For some of these consultations many adaptations and changes were made. It was critical that we sought the guidance of those that work in this area and who provide services and support to children and young people with disability. Accordingly, we liaised with schools, disability organisations, parents, carers and children and young people with disabilities to better understand what they thought needed to be considered before the consultation could take place.

This guidance ensured that during our preparation we considered the needs of each individual or group that was participating and tailored each consultation accordingly. Changes included the creation of easy read consent forms, holding consultations in wheelchair accessible buildings, organising furniture in a way that allowed space for support equipment, ensuring the needs of carers during the consultations were considered and pre booking Auslan interpreters for groups that had participants who were hearing impaired.

As facilitators, the ACYP Participation Team worked hard to ensure that we stayed true to the foundations of the ACYP consultation methodology whilst also ensuring that we made any necessary changes to our typical techniques.

These consultations were an incredibly valuable learning experience for us and we thank all of those individuals and organisations that guided and supported our efforts.

¹ Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014 (NSW)

² The **Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014** (NSW) defines children as those under the age of 12 and young people as those aged 12 to 24. The general term “children and young people” will be used to refer to consultation participants as a general group unless the feedback of a specific age group (either children or young people) is being referenced. As fewer children than young people participated in this consultation than young people, the majority of the quotes we feature are from young people.

This consultations would not have been possible without the enthusiasm and willingness of the children and young people who agreed to meet with us and chat about the things that were most important to them. We want to extend our sincere thanks to each of the 372 children and young people that volunteered their time to this project.

We also want to thank the 24 organisations and 45 groups that agreed to work with us to facilitate these consultations. For some, it was the first time hearing directly from students and clients and we hope the experience will inspire ongoing opportunities to ensure the voices of children and young people with disabilities are heard by those around them.

We know children and young people with disabilities are experts in their own lives and have the right to be given the opportunity to participate in decisions that impact them. Throughout this process, the children and young people with disabilities that we spoke to demonstrated both insight and resilience and showed us that they have a lot to teach the adults in their lives. It is now a matter for us, together with government and other agencies to work together to ensure that all children and young people with disabilities are heard.



Zoë Robinson

A/Advocate for Children and Young People



IMAGE DESCRIPTION - NSW Acting Advocate for Children and Young People Zoë Robinson is in foreground. She has short brown hair and is smiling with her arms crossed wearing a white top and black blazer. There is a leafy background behind her.

Key Findings

Introduction

For this consultation, ACYP was privileged to speak to 372 children and young people³ with disabilities across NSW. When we asked them what was working well and not working well, they told us that the issues that most preoccupied them were related to education, health, employment, training, participation and access to services. Other topics spoken about included their experience navigating bullying, discrimination and mental health challenges.

Children and young people with disabilities who participated in these consultations shared both positive and negative experiences as well as what they thought could improve things for them, their families and their peers.

Based on the number of times the topic was raised throughout the consultation process, and the passion with which the topics were discussed by children and young people, ACYP identified seven themes that will be discussed in detail in this report.



IMAGE DESCRIPTION - NSW Acting Advocate Zoë Robinson sits at a table with a group of students in a classroom conducting a consultation. There are 9 students sitting around the table and she is taking notes.

3 The **Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014** (NSW) defines children as those under the age of 12 and young people as those aged 12 to 24. The general term “children and young people” will be used to refer to consultation participants as a general group unless the feedback of a specific age group (either children or young people) is being referenced. As fewer children participated in this consultation than young people, the majority of the quotes we feature are from young people.

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



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 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.

Primary Themes



Education



**Health and the
National Disability
Insurance Scheme**



**Access and
Inclusion**



**Voice and
Participation**



**Employment
and Training**



**Bullying and
Discrimination**



Mental Health



Education

Children and young people spoke most often about education, with responses referencing topics including access to learning, support and development. The topic of education featured in responses to all three questions, suggesting the majority of children and young people regard education as a significant factor in their lives.

Many children and young people spoke about how education was a positive experience for them and told us they valued:



Schools', teachers and an environment that was dedicated to addressing challenges associated with learning with a disability that offered personal care and one-on-one support when necessary (i.e. Schools for Specific Purposes (SSP's));



The opportunity to access mainstream schools and classes (Support Units in mainstream schools) and schools that encouraged acceptance of diversity within the student group;



The opportunity to learn life skills and skills that could be directly transferred to the "real world" such as shopping, road safety and travel;



Access to work experience opportunities; and



Access to extra-curricular activities such as music, art, sport and community programs.



Children and young people told us that they confront the following challenges in the education space:



Some students felt their education had been negatively impacted by discrimination, and their schools lack of inclusivity and adaptability to their needs;



Students spoke about their needs not being met and that schools needed to be better supported to, in turn, support students with disabilities. They specifically mentioned that school buildings and classrooms needed to be adjusted to allow for easier access for children and young people with a physical disability and that more School Learning Support Officers (SLSO's) were needed in the classroom, particularly in circumstances where multiple children required intensive support at once;



Students spoke about the lack of direct consultation with them when decisions were being made about their education, emphasising the importance of speaking to them directly, and not solely to their parents or carers; and



Students spoke about health and safety issues such as excessive heat and lack of soap and other sanitary facilities at schools.



Children and young people suggested:

An increase in resourcing, disability awareness training for both school staff and students, and buildings that provide for people with physical disabilities should be considered essential.

They also emphasised the importance of ensuring that children and young people, regardless of disability type, have the opportunity to directly participate in decision making in matters impacting them.



Health and the National Disability Insurance Scheme

Children and young people with disabilities face unique and sometimes complex barriers to accessing appropriate services and supports. Many participants spoke about the impact of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) on their lives⁴.

Children and young people spoke about the experience they had with the NDIS and how it had improved their lives:



Children and young people valued the NDIS for supporting them to access and participate in community activities such as group events, excursions, sports and other activities;



Children and young people with positive experiences of the NDIS often referred to the dedication and skill of their support, respite and case workers and the relationships they built with them; and



Children and young people appreciated being able to be able to direct what kind of support and guidance they needed, feeling it gave them a voice and provided relevant services.

⁴ The NDIS is designed to provide direct funding to individuals with disabilities to source supports and services specific to their needs , for further information see National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) 'Understanding the NDIS, How the NDIS Works', (Web page, accessed 18 August 2020) <<https://www.ndis.gov.au/understanding/how-ndis-works>>



Children and young people also spoke about difficulties they and their families had accessing appropriate services and supports, including:



Needing to rely on their parents and families to “fight” for them to get support, even if those supports were featured in their NDIS plan;



The complexity of the NDIS system and that it could be repetitive and difficult to navigate;



They said their level of funding and access to supports was often dependent on how well their parents could research and navigate the NDIS, and how effectively they could advocate for their child;



Their frustration with the disparity between services, delays, availability and quality subject to their location, the capacity of their family to advocate for them and their relationships with key individuals such as the Local Area Coordinator (LAC) or their school support officers; and



The particular vulnerability of children and young people who have a dual diagnosis of mental illness and disability was also raised in light of there being a lack of services that would accept these young people as clients.



Children and young people suggested:

All professionals working within the disability sector be trained in methods of best practice for working with children and young people with disabilities.

They called for more equitable access to services for people in rural and regional areas of NSW and systems that enabled more efficient plan approval that did not repeatedly require them to provide evidence of permanent disabilities.

Children and young people also advocated for more youth dedicated health services such as Headspace and increased services for young people with complex vulnerabilities such as comorbid disabilities and mental health concerns.



Access and Inclusion

Children and young people spoke about access and inclusion in many different contexts including services and events, buildings and facilities, information, quality of service, consultation processes and employment.

When speaking about the things that worked well in facilitating access and inclusion, children and young people referred to:



Infrastructure that was designed to accommodate wheelchairs, such as purpose built board walks and paths in National Parks and the recently installed elevator on the Sydney Harbour Bridge;



Schools that provided Community Access Courses aimed at helping children and young people with disabilities feel confident and comfortable in accessing and navigating their community;



Professionals and services who made the effort to speak with children and young people directly and listened to their responses; and



Support from friends, family and school to participate in mainstream social and community activities.



Children and young people emphasised how difficult it was to access services and participate in the community making them feel ignored, isolated and excluded. Contributing factors included:



Physical barriers and limited accessibility to educational and public spaces such as schools, TAFE's, cinemas, recreation centres, shopping centres and parks for those with physical impairments;



Challenges navigating public transport due to the lack of accessible information regarding schedules as well as assistance or support to board buses, trains, trams and other modes of transport. This was particularly important as children and young people spoke about inadequate disability parking, particularly in and around hospitals, and the costs associated with parking; and



Difficulty accessing Auslan interpreters which left some children and young people unable to communicate and participate in activities.



Children and young people suggested:

Training and education be made available to raise awareness about both the needs and capacity of people with disabilities.

It was also discussed that mobile ramps be made available in NDIS plans to allow people with wheelchairs to access private residences, many shared their frustrations about not being able to visit friends and family homes as they were not accessible.

Other groups discussed services such as Auslan be mainstreamed to enable children and young people with hearing impairments to more easily participate in the community.



Voice and Participation

Children and young people gave examples of a range of different opportunities they participate in where they are able to express their views. Children and young people believed these opportunities were extremely beneficial and offered platforms to share their views and opinions with decision makers.

Children and young people described the positive experiences and personal benefits from feeling their voices were being heard:



Children and young people talked about how having opportunities to take part in decision making made them feel empowered, and improved their confidence and self-esteem and that having friends and family that listened to and respected them was critical to their wellbeing;



Children and young people valued workers that built a positive relationship with them through their willingness to listen to the young person and get to know them;



Children and young people wanted adults to know that they are able to directly advocate for themselves and that they enjoyed the unique opportunity to participate in the ACYP consultations;



Children and young people emphasised the value of listening to people with lived experience of disability; and



A range of good practice examples used to amplify the voices of children and young people were mentioned and included youth councils, student representative councils, youth advisory councils and youth reference groups.



Children and young people also reflected on their experience of not being heard and the impact that feeling overlooked had on them and said that:



Decisions being made on their behalf without being consulted or asked for their consent made them feel powerless and frustrated. Examples included support meetings or interviews with teachers where the parent or adult was addressed rather than the young person;



Government processes, such as accessing NDIS and Centrelink, were examples of services that made them feel disempowered especially in circumstances where they were asked to provide formal evidence of their need for assistance; and



Having to rely on parents, family members or carers to successfully navigate the process of accessing services that were otherwise inaccessible was also problematic and put stress on relationships.



Children and young people emphasised:

The importance of having opportunities to be heard and to have their opinions valued.

They also suggested that more be done to facilitate their independence, promote awareness of disability and make access to support services more straightforward.



Employment & Training

Access to employment was seen by children and young people as a crucial factor in their quality of life, their capacity to become financially independent and their ability to participate in their community. Additionally, on a personal level, they spoke about how important securing employment was to build their confidence and support themselves financially. Most children and young people said getting a job is their number one aspiration for the future.

Children and young people told us that many positives came from opportunities to access jobs and training support:



Participation in school career development, work experience, accredited training and hands on learning in a work environment were among the most important and valuable things children and young people said they learnt at school.



Work experience and ongoing work placements in areas such as hospitality, farming, national parks, retail outlets, horticulture and cleaning were valued for helping inspire confidence and build employment skills;



Training and support programs such as vocational skills courses designed specifically for people with disabilities and similar work and vocational education programs run by organisations such as Northcott, Key Employment, Youth Connection and Macarthur Disability Services (MDS), were highly valued for providing an opportunity to learn new skills, develop self-confidence and self-esteem and prepare participants for future employment; and



Disability Employment Services (DES) were mentioned as a useful services that assisted young people with a disability to seek a job and maintain their employment, although participants spoke about their different experiences with some left feeling confused and unsupported.



Many children and young people struggled to access these same opportunities or had found some employers reluctant to engage a young person with disability. They told us:



There was a lack of opportunity to access training and support programs in their area, leaving them feeling they did not have the skills or qualifications to participate in a workplace;



It was difficult for any young person, but especially a young person with disability, to find employment due to lack of job opportunities, particularly in rural and regional areas, even where job providers or supports are available;



That they were sometimes only given the opportunity to participate in volunteer work, rather than paid work, or they were placed with unsuitable employers. Some mentioned that they had to repeat the same training or skills courses because nothing else was available to them; and



They sometimes felt confused about what was expected of them in a workplace once they commenced a role and some referred to experiences of bullying in the workplace that caused them to leave the job.



Children and young people suggested:

Employers should be encouraged to undertake awareness training to assist them adapt to the needs of employees with disabilities and learn how to provide ongoing support in the workplace.

They recommended that Centrelink be made easier to navigate and be more client friendly and training be given to Centrelink staff to better assist people with disabilities.



Bullying and Discrimination

Children and young people spoke to us about their experience with bullying and discrimination and the impact it had on them. When they reflected on their experiences with discrimination, children and young people spoke about experiencing difficulties relating to their disability. When they reflected on their experience with bullying, children and young people seemed to regard some of those incidences as relating to their disability but also considered it a common experience of all children and young people.

There were few positive examples associated with this topic, however children and young people recognised:



The importance of education and awareness raising efforts around the impact that discrimination and bullying can have on children and young people with disability;



The importance of having a trusted adult that would believe them when they needed help and;



The value of having online assistance as well as places to go to in person when they were seeking help.



Children and young people spoke about the environments where they experience bullying and discrimination and the negative impact that it had on their wellbeing:



Children and young people talked about experiencing discrimination in many aspects of their lives including when seeking to access education, training, employment, accessing services and navigating systems, and when trying to participate in events and general community activities.



Bullying was a major concerns for children and young people and they spoke about experiencing bullying at school, on public transport, in the community and online.



Children and young people emphasised:

The importance of increasing knowledge and awareness in the general community about the negative impact that ignorance, fear and discrimination based on disability can have on individuals.

They suggested widespread promotion of the idea that diversity and difference is something to be valued and that people with disabilities have the same rights and needs as everyone else.

Children and young people also spoke about the importance of services that could help them respond to bullying and discrimination.



Mental Health

The children and young people we spoke to during consultations told us that it was important to recognise the significance of mental health issues affecting them and their peers. They discussed the importance of awareness, of youth specific services and services that were equipped to assist children and young people that had complex or co-morbid conditions such as mental health and disability concerns.

Though the focus of the feedback on this topic was on what needed to be improved, children and young people recognised that:



The increasing recognition of good mental health was a positive step forward;



Services specifically catering for children and young people that were easy to access and were supported by non-judgemental and friendly staff were of significant value; and



Increasing awareness of mental health at schools, and the training of teachers in how to respond to young people with mental health concerns, was acknowledged and appreciated.



Children and young people also spoke about the stigma that still surrounds issues of mental health and what more needed to be done to provide greater mental health support to them and their peers. They told us that:



It means a lot when adults take the mental health concerns of children and young people with disabilities seriously and help them access services that deal with chronic and complex issues;



Services needed to ensure they are “youth friendly”, that they listen and take young people seriously, that they understand that children and young people with disabilities could have co-morbid mental health concerns, and that they are available extended hours;



More effort should be put towards making children and young people aware of local services they can access;



Schools should play a more active role in mental health education and building positive mental health strategies and;



Peer to peer education was particularly valuable, as was hearing real life experiences and advice from people their own age.



Children and young people acknowledged:

Efforts to address mental health concerns are increasing but that more needs to be done.

Children and young people that participated in these consultations said further awareness raising was needed to ensure that teachers and mental health professionals better understood the potential interaction between mental health concerns and disabilities and ensure services were equipped to assist them.

Secondary Themes

This section touches on other areas that children and young people spoke about during the consultations in less detail than those previously mentioned.

Topics included :



*Accommodation
& housing*



Animals



*Beaches, parks &
outdoor spaces*



*Climate change
& environmental
issues*



*Community
festivals & events*



Cost of living



*Drought &
Bushfires*



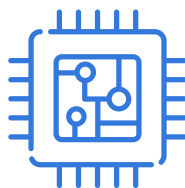
Family & Friends



*Hospitals & physical
healthcare*



LGBTQIA+



Technology

Section 1



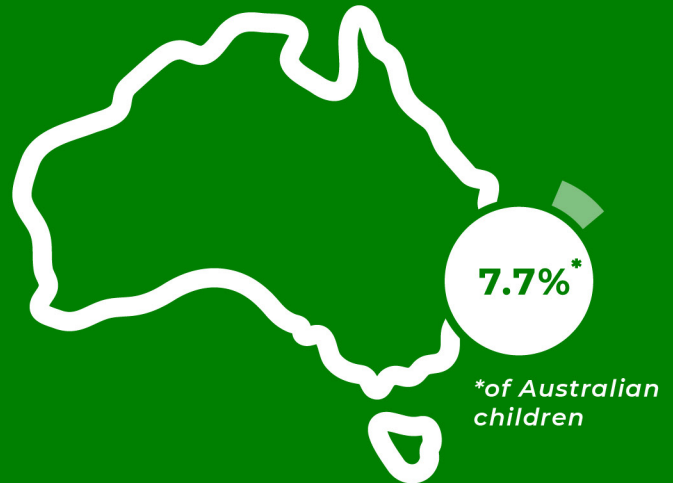
Contextualising Disability

What do we know about children with disabilities in Australia?

In 2018:

**357,500 children
> 15 years⁵ old**

were reported as having a
mild, moderate, severe or
profound disability⁶



In NSW 2018:⁷



**110,100 children
> 15 years⁸ old**

were reported to have a disability



**87,300 children
15-24 years old**

were reported to have a disability

**of the population group*



Intellectual disability

Was the most common form of
disability experienced by children

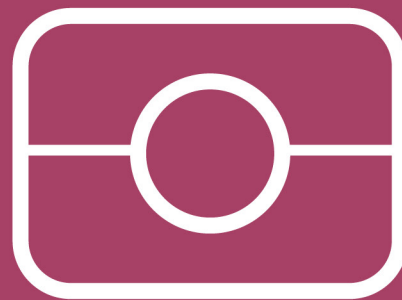


**followed by:
sensory and speech,
psychosocial and
then physical disability⁹**



Boys are more likely than girls to have a disability¹⁰

Aboriginal children and young people



are more than twice as likely to have a disability as their non-Indigenous peers¹¹



In 2015, the proportion of children aged 0–14 with severe disability was highest in inner regional areas (5.4%)¹²

In 2015, the proportion of children aged 0–14 with severe disability was;



highest among low-income households (5.2%)



lowest among high-income households (3.1%)

(ABS 2015) (Figure 4).

The higher representation of children with severe disability among low-income households may be a result of decreased household earnings due to parental caring responsibilities.¹³

Infographic references

5 As per the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2018, Children with Disability* (Catalogue of findings 4430.0, 10 December 2019)- accessed 18 August 2020, a child is defined as a person aged between 0-14 years. There is no specific analysis of disability prevalence rates impacting young people aged between 15 – 18 years.

6 Ibid

7 Ibid, data cube: Excel spreadsheet, cat. No. 4430DO001_2018, worksheets 1.1 and 1.3, accessed 18 August 2020, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4430.02018?OpenDocument>>

8 The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020. *Australia's children*. Cat. no. CWS 69. Canberra: AIHW, p94 notes the 0-4yr old cohort has a significantly lower rate of reported disability, possibility in part due to delay in diagnosis prior to attending organised education.

9 Ibid, p93

10 Ibid, 94

11 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People with a Disability', *Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)*, 2012; (Catalogue of Findings 4433.0.55.005, 18 April 2017), Summary, (Web page, accessed 18 August 2020) <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4433.0.55.005>.

12 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020. *Australia's children*. Cat. no. CWS 69. Canberra: AIHW, p96

13 Ibid

Contextualising Disability

Research suggests ***“children and young people living with disability are more likely to be deprived across multiple wellbeing domains, most commonly health, education and participation”***¹⁴ as well as suffer from a lack of resources to meet educational needs¹⁵.

It is critical to note that any available data can only account for reported disability, and therefore does not reflect the actual number of children with disabilities that remain unrecognised. Accurate and complete diagnosis of a child's disability can be complicated by, for example, a lack of opportunity to access appropriate medical specialists as well as mental and behavioural disorders¹⁶

that can distract professionals from uncovering hidden neurodevelopmental impairments and/or pursuing more complex assessments such as those required to positively diagnose fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) or traumatic brain injury (TBI). In 2018, almost three quarters of children under 15 with a disability reported living with at least one co-occurring mental and behavioural disorder¹⁷.



IMAGE DESCRIPTION - There is a young child sitting down looking into the distance. He has short brown hair and is wearing a blue t-shirt with a yellow backpack. There is a leafy park in the background.

¹⁴ Australian Government, Department of Health, *National Action Plan for the Health of Children and Young People 2020-2030*, p9.

¹⁵ Ibid, citing Australian Education Union (AEU), *State of our Schools Survey, 2015*. AEU, Melbourne.

¹⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2018*, Children with Disability (Catalogue of findings 4430.0, 10 December 2019)

¹⁷ Ibid

Definitions of disability

A child or young person's disability is "a dynamic interaction between a person's health condition(s) and environmental and/or personal factors"¹⁸ and can exist in varying degrees and combinations. A child or young person with a disability may experience mild, moderate, severe or profound limitations¹⁹. Disability can be the result of a number of factors including genetic or prenatal disorders, illness, accident or a combination of these and cause diverse mobility, medical, communication and cognitive impairments.

Legally, the definition of 'disability' is broad and can include physical, intellectual, psychiatric, sensory, neurological and learning disabilities²⁰. Disabilities include conditions regarded as temporary, permanent, total, partial, visible and/or invisible²¹. ACYP chose not to adopt a definition of disability prior to conducting consultations to ensure children and young people who identified as having a disability were free/eligible to participate.

Instead, ACYP relied on participants and/or their organisations to identify broad categories of applicable disabilities and provide information about their disability to the extent to which they felt comfortable. The following disabilities were identified as conditions experienced by consultation participants (one or more conditions may be experienced/identified by a single participant):

¹⁸ 'People with disability in Australia', *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare*, Web Report, Cat. No. DIS 72, 3 September 2019, (Web page, accessed 18 August 2020), <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/disability/people-with-disability-in-australia/about-this-report/defining-disability>>, referencing the World Health Organisation's International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health tool.

¹⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2018, Children with Disability* (Catalogue of findings 4430.0, 10 December 2019)-, accessed 18 August 2020 defines these terms as follows: *Profound limitation* - greatest need for help, that is, always needs help with at least one core activity; *Severe limitation* - needs help sometimes or has difficulty with a core activity; *Moderate limitation* - no need for help but has difficulty; *Mild limitation* - no need for help and no difficulty, but uses aids or has limitations.

²⁰ Australian Human Rights Commission, *Know your rights: Disability Discrimination*, 2012, pg 4

²¹ *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth), s4

Category of Disability	Basic explanation of disability category ²²
<i>Intellectual disabilities:</i>	Can affect a person's ability to learn, communicate, retain information and independently manage necessary life skills
<i>Learning disabilities:</i>	Create persistent difficulties in specific area of learning, such as reading, spelling, math and writing, but does not impact their intellectual ability in other areas of life
<i>Neurological conditions:</i>	Are caused by dysfunction in part of the brain, spinal column and/or nerves resulting in physical or psychological symptoms
<i>Physical disabilities:</i>	Limit a person's physical functioning, mobility, dexterity or stamina
<i>Sensory disabilities:</i>	Impact a person's sight, hearing, smell, touch and/ or taste
<i>Mental Health conditions:</i>	May alternatively be referred to as a psychiatric or psycho-social disability, referring to persistent mental health conditions impacting normal social functioning

²² Please note, no actual descriptions of these terms were provided to or by participants. These descriptions seek to give simplistic explanations of complex conditions and are not intended to be complete. For detailed information about categories of disabilities, please visit organisations such as the Australian Network on Disability <www.and.org.au> or Aruma <<https://www.aruma.com.au/about-us/about-disability/types-of-disabilities/>>

Section 2



Primary Themes



Secondary Themes



Recommendations

Primary Themes



Education



Health and the
National Disability
Insurance Scheme



Access and
Inclusion



Voice and
Participation



Employment
and Training



Bullying and
Discrimination



Mental Health

Education

In this section, we reflect on what children and young people told us about their educational experiences. Education in general, and schools or vocational centres in particular, were the focus of much of the consultation discussions. Children and young people reflected on both their successes and their challenges in what was a key part of their everyday experience.





What is working well?



The value of choice



The importance of teachers and support staff



Social connection



Facilitating participation



The value of choice

Children and young people spoke about their experiences in Schools for Specific Purposes (SSP's) and mainstream schools. Where children and young people felt their needs were met, both options were spoken of favourably.

One participant explained:

“I went to a school with a support unit so we had lots of people with different disabilities and teachers aids and support teachers to help us, without that in high school it would have been very hard.”

A number of young people said they enjoyed being offered the same opportunities to access mainstream school and classes as their peers. A student told us:

“I was able to go to a normal school which was able to give me the other side and I was able to learn about people who did not have a disability and mix I felt like I wasn't disabled as I was the same as another person.”

The availability of vocational education opportunities through specialist services such as Northcott, Key Employment and Macarthur Disability were highly valued, with students appreciating having access to life skills education as well as retail, business, landscaping, administration and hospitality training. One young person spoke about the skills they were learning:

“We do personal development, anger management, cover letters, job applications and this helps us.”

Another young person spoke about the breadth of opportunities they were able to access through the service they were engaged with:

“We are doing Cert 3 in retail, we can do our Year 12, Record of Educational Achievement certificate, go to TAFE and work experience from here.”

The importance of teachers and support staff



Consultation participants talked about how important it was to have supportive, experienced and well trained teachers and support staff help them meet their education and personal care needs as well as provide general school life support.

One young person reflected on the importance of feeling that they were active participants in their education:

“Teachers in this school are great, they listen to students.”

Teachers who helped children feel safe, connected and supported were memorable. One young person reflected on the positive impact educators had on him in a previous school:

“My deputy principal and teacher in my old school was awesome he just made learning fun and helped us with all of our problems.”

Another reflected on how much they appreciated having teachers that could communicate with them in Auslan:

“Having teachers in my school who can sign and communicate with us is great.”



Social Connection

Children and young people spoke about school as a conduit to friendships and connection with their local community. Meeting people and spending time with friends was associated with feeling safe, connected and supported and was repeatedly mentioned as one of the most important things about school. A number of young people connected their school's acceptance and promotion of general diversity in the student group to a feeling of belonging to both their school and community.

One student observed:

“My school is very multicultural and you learn lots about other people and cultures.”

Activities organised by or through the school that connected student to their community via programs such as camps, excursions, volunteering, life skills and community access supports were spoken about positively for helping children and young people develop appropriate social behaviours, understand safety and feel more independent. One student told us:

“We go out in the community catch the bus and train to different places. We learn how to buy things and use public transport.”

Schools that also facilitated opportunities for children and young people with disabilities to undertake sports (especially swimming), music, drama, woodwork, IT and activities off campus such as work experience, camps and excursions were also highly valued. One young person was excited by the opportunity they had to try different sports:

“We play all sports here football, basketball, soccer and games.”



Facilitating participation

Children and young people said that being involved in school decision making was very important to them. They appreciated the opportunity to be included in meetings where their parents or guardians were speaking to their teachers or support worker about their needs.

Other positive examples of participation included being asked their opinion in class and having the opportunity to participate in student council type events. One student told us:

“We have a school SRC (Student Representative Council) group here and they listen to us.”



IMAGE DESCRIPTION - There are 4 young people sitting on a tartan couch together. They are in a classroom and are all wearing school uniforms. They are all smiling and laughing together.



What is not working well?



The importance of schools and education professionals being inclusive, aware and adaptable



The need for more targeted supports and specialist assistance



Accessibility of school buildings

The importance of schools and education professionals being inclusive, aware and adaptable



Students described experiencing a broad range of discrimination because of their disabilities. Children and young people described situations where they felt their individual needs were overlooked or unable to be catered for.

One student explained:

“The school system in general does not cater well for people with disability. It is a one size fits all solution and does not really work.”

One young person expressed frustration that they often felt disempowered, ignored and left out of decision making regarding their own education because the school did not give them a voice or know how to communicate with them appropriately:

“Schools are not inclusive and don’t understand young people with disability”

“Education is a one size fits all solution and does not really work.”

One student was severely affected by their difficult school experience and described how it impacted their general wellbeing:

“School was terrible for me. I went to both private and public school... they were absolutely terrible, both students and teachers. It was pretty traumatic.”

Children and young people strongly supported the introduction of disability awareness training for staff and students to improve communication, inclusivity and understanding of different life experiences. One young person suggested that staff and students could be required to undertake a:

“Disability awareness project ... trying to navigate your way around in a wheelchair or in a blindfold so that others can see what it’s like for children and young people with disabilities.”



The need for more targeted supports and specialist assistance

Children and young people described situations where they felt they would have benefited from receiving more support, equipment, or facilities to help them learn and thrive in an educational environment. This was particularly apparent for young people who attended mainstream schools. Many said that they felt there were limited additional classroom supports available to them.

Young people mentioned that regularly they would have just one School Support Learning Officer (SLSO) in a class where there were several children and young people who needed intense support. One young person in a support unit reflected:

“We do not have enough support teachers in this class.”

Participants spoke about having limited input into decisions regarding their education. Some young people spoke about having limited vocational education or TAFE options and wanting to be able to access a broader range of options. One student felt that their opportunity to access higher education was restricted:

“I never had the chance to do HSC and go to University because I was in a support Unit.”

Children and young people, particularly those enrolled in mainstream schools, spoke about the impact that having limited classroom learning supports had on their ability to reach their potential. They recommended that there be more teachers aids so that students can feel comfortable and confident being in mainstream classes. One young person felt they were overlooked because their special needs weren't understood:

“Teachers never really understood me, so they ignored me.”



Accessibility of school buildings

Concern about the impact of unsuitable school buildings and facilities were raised on a number of occasions. Children and young people recounted instances where classrooms and toilets had limited or no wheelchair access or where their class was held on the third floor, making it difficult for students with physical disabilities to access.

One student with complex health conditions told us:

“The stairs are really hard for me and I have to go up and down several times every day.”

Concerns about the health and safety conditions of school building facilities such as toilets (no toilet paper or soap) and hot classrooms making it harder to learn (no air conditioning) were consistently raised in these consultation, which is reflective of feedback we have received from previous consultations with children and young people.



IMAGE DESCRIPTION - There is a person sitting in a wheelchair at the bottom of a set of stairs. They have their back to the camera and are wearing a blue shirt.



What could be done to make NSW a better place for children and young people?



Specialist assistance for schools



More resources



Increase disability awareness and access

When asked what they would like to change to make NSW a better place for children and young people, participants spoke about the value that increased support, participation opportunities and resources in the education space would provide.

Specialist assistance for schools



Children and young people suggested that schools could utilise the support, advice and resources of specialist community and disability services, and work with them to improve the educational experience of students with a disability. Children and young people hoped that by doing this, schools could facilitate access to a wider variety of higher educational, vocational and life skills educational opportunities. Creating this kind of partnership could also assist schools to better understand how to involve children and young people with disabilities in decision making and increase their participation in the wider school community.

One young person said they thought there was a need for:

“More support for students with disability in school.”

More resources

Children and young people also suggested increasing the resources available in schools to support students with a disability. They particularly suggested increasing the presence of permanent teachers and support staff with qualifications and experience working with children and young people with disabilities, especially in classes with several children who needed intensive support.

One student told us they thought there was a need for more staff to support children and young people with disabilities at their school:

“We need more teachers here.”

Increase disability awareness and access



Students also suggested they would benefit from school buildings being more accessible and wheelchair friendly, as well as strongly advocating for disability training and awareness raising to be made available to both teachers and students.

A young person who attended a mainstream school said:

“Not having lifts and ramps is hard for me.”



IMAGE DESCRIPTION - There is close-up of an elevator. The focus is on the international symbol of access, consisting of a blue square over-layed with a stylised image of a person in a wheelchair. Below it is a tile with the number 16 in Braille.

Health and the National Disability Insurance Scheme

Many of the consultation groups talked about the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), in particular those aged from 15 – 25 years. NDIS supports people with a permanent and significant disability which affects their ability to take part in everyday activities. Children and young people spoke about how access to the NDIS had improved their lives, but they also reflected on the unique and sometimes complex barriers they faced in accessing appropriate services and supports.





What is working well?



Resources



Voice



**The importance of teachers
and support staff**



Community participation



Resources

Some young people believed that the assistance they had received through NDIS had been very helpful and was able to provide them with the required support and guidance they needed.

One young person told us:

“I have been with NDIS for 3 years, it is going really good as we get the support and guidance that people with disability sometimes need more than people without disability.”

Voice

Children and young people told us they appreciated being able to direct the kind of support and guidance they needed, feeling it gave them a voice and more control over the services they received.

One young person reflected on the NDIS saying:

“NDIS is very good, its gives people with disability opportunity and be able to voice what they wanted what we need. NDIS is very helpful.”



The importance of teachers and support staff

Several children and young people talked about having access to excellent services and supports including, case workers, respite carers and therapeutic services. Consistent relationships with workers was the number one thing that children and young people identified as being important when they spoke about the NDIS working well.

One young person reflected on the difference their worker made to their sense of wellbeing:

“My worker and me, we chat and talk about things and it makes me feel good.”

Another young person valued having access to experienced disability support workers:

“Workers understand what I mean, understand what I am going through and are supportive and very understanding.”

Young people at one school described a particularly positive experience with their NDIS Local Area Coordinator (LAC). This Coordinator was also a School Support Learning Officer (SLSO) at the school which meant they could allocate time to help the children and young people with their NDIS application and plan. These students felt that because the teacher had a good relationship with them, and understood their support needs, interests, and abilities, the teacher was able to assist them get access to the funding necessary for them to achieve their goals.



Community participation

Other young people talked about the positive impact of having help to participate in the community and to access activities such as events, groups, excursions, going to the movies, going to the beach and sports.

One child we spoke to was really happy with the opportunities they had to participate in their community:

“I go to nippers and play tennis, there is lots to do around here.”

Another participant told us:

“I play footy, go to the gym, hang out with my friends at the park.”



IMAGE DESCRIPTION - There is young person wearing a long sleeve red top at a park holding a yellow football. They have short hair and are smiling.



What is not working well?



**Equity and quality of
service provision**



Systematic complexity



**Service provision dependent
on external factors**

Children and young people also reflected on the difficulties they and their families had accessing appropriate supports under the NDIS. Consultation participants talked about the standard of services they had received, the dependence on parents to advocate for the realisation of their entitlements and the difficulty the system had in managing young people with complex or co-morbid impairments.



Equity and quality of service provision

Some children and young people thought the provision of support through NDIS was inequitable and spoke about feeling like they missed out on services that their peers with disabilities were receiving.

One young person felt that:

“Some people get everything, and others get nothing it’s so unfair.”

Another young person observed that the services their peers received from NDIS was highly dependent on the capacity of others to navigate the system on their behalf:

“His mum is good at NDIS, so he gets loads of things and even goes to the gym.”

During consultations, some young people also expressed frustration with the standard of services they were getting from professional support workers. One young person with disability expressed disappointment with their experience:

“Carers and NDIS workers are not good and don’t care.”

Another spoke about the difficulty having multiple community service workers over a short period:

“FACS workers can’t deal with Residential kids. I have had four workers in the last year, I miss my workers.”



Systematic complexity

Children and young people spoke about their difficulty navigating what they thought was a complex and unfriendly system and about having to repeat the application process every 12 months when their plan was reviewed. They expressed frustration about having to provide evidence to a person who they felt did not necessarily understand their ability or difficulties and also reported long waiting times to have their plan approved and implemented.

One young person was exasperated when discussing the interpretation of what constituted “reasonable and necessary supports” and fitting in to predefined categories:

“Young people are either too disabled or not disabled enough.”

Children and young people told us that access to appropriate services was particularly difficult for those with a dual mental health and disability diagnosis. Young people with disability who were also tackling mental health issues said they did not always feel their mental health issues were acknowledged. Young people reported feeling extremely frustrated with family, teachers and professionals as they did not recognise their mental health issues and they felt ignored. Rather than talk and try to understand their thoughts, feelings and mood their mental health struggles were seen as being part of their disability. One young person observed:

“It is appalling to see the amount of young people with disability who have a dual diagnosis of a mental illness and a disability and they fall through every community service gap and are not getting the support that they need to live let alone be well.”

Service provision dependent on external factors



Children and young people talked about the need for reliance on parents to support them with their NDIS. Some thought it was only “the lucky few” who have parents that understand and navigate the NDIS in a way that allowed them to fully utilise it. They thought that it was a parent’s capacity to research, navigate, advocate, and understand the NDIS that ultimately results in the level of NDIS funding and support received.

One young person spoke about the efforts her family went to ensure her plan was fulfilled:

“In my plan for this year I was supposed to get a wheelchair, but they didn’t put the money in there, but I had to fight for the money to be put in my plan. You usually need to fight for the things that you need, luckily my mum great fighter with this kind of stuff, so luckily, I got my wheelchair. You basically have to push them to get stuff for you.”

Another young person reflected on the effort their mum had to put in to help them satisfy their NDIS plan:

“My mum sort of understands NDIS I think but is still very hard even for her.”

Children and young people also reflected on factors other than an individual’s level of need that they felt impacts the actual implementation of the NDIS plan and package of support they were entitled to. These included where a person lived, the capacity of the person who assists in completing an NDIS application, what school and/or service the person is associated with and the personal relationships individuals or families had with those services.



What could be done to make NSW a better place for children and young people?



Fair and equal access



Listening to children and young people



Increase disability awareness and access

Children and young people wanted government health systems to be more straightforward and fairer. They also wanted to ensure that their own voices were heard when it came to creating their NDIS plan.



Fair and equal access

Children and young people focused on the importance of ensuring all children and young people with disabilities had the necessary access to supports and services, no matter who they were, where they lived or who they had to advocate for them. This meant making sure the assessment and application processes were straightforward and clear.

One participant suggested that:

“The NDIS system needs to be streamlined.”

Children and young people also called for more equitable access to services and assistance across a wide range of areas including transport, respite support, groups and activities, specialist services and health care.

Better recognition by NDIS of children and young people with complex needs, including those with both disability and mental health concerns, was also emphasised.

One young person told us that they felt they didn't get the funding that they needed:

“For NDIS to just give us the funding we need, my Mum self manages my NDIS and we don't get the funding.”



Listening to children and young people

Children and young people thought access to services should be made easier and that professionals should ensure that they listen to the voices of people with disabilities when they are personalising their NDIS plan. After noting the impact that the Local Area Coordinator had on the quality of their NDIS plan and the services they received, it was also suggested that all children and young people with disabilities be able to access their Local Area Coordinator and be able to meet with them on a regular basis.

Some young people also said that rather than feeling like their plan was adapted to suit them, they felt the NDIS restricted or prevented them from exercising choice and control. They felt they should be recognised as an experts in their lived experiences of their disability and should be offered more opportunities to have a say about what is best for them. One young person with an NDIS plan told us:

“I have never met my NDIS person as I have a new one... only talked on the phone, how can they know what I need if they haven’t met me?”

One student thought there should be more two way communication:

“More talk and more awareness around disability.”

Access & Inclusion



Children and young people spoke about access and inclusion in many different contexts including physical access to buildings and facilities, ease of access to information and opportunities to access employment, training, general support services and community events. They told us that the level and quality of this access and inclusion, and the impact of their disability in utilising these opportunities, could vary and be dependent on one or more of the following factors:

- Assistance from family, parents, guardians;
- Assistance from friends;
- Assistance from the community and community groups;
- Availability of school, education, employment and training services, particularly in rural or remote communities;
- Availability of health and disability support services, particularly in rural or remote communities; and
- Access to NDIS funding and supports.





What is working well?



Community inclusion



**Accessible schools and
community areas**



Community inclusion

Some children and young people talked about examples of being supported to be involved in community clubs and teams such as sports clubs, drama and dance, Surf Life Saving NSW and Scouts NSW. They liked the fact that these organisations had staff that were non-judgmental, encouraging, and treated them equally. Organisations and programs that children and young people thought were doing a good job included PCYC, Surf Life Saving NSW (Nippers), NSW Scouts, NSW Wheelchair Sports, Blacktown Youth Services Association, Northern Beaches Council and many more.

The things that attracted them to these organisations was fun, feeling included, respected, valued and listened to.

“Doing sports gives me a breather from all of the bad stuff.”

In some areas, children and young people felt well supported and involved in their community. Two common examples given were engagement in community and sporting clubs, events and activities both in and outside school; and participation in the Community Access Course at school to help them feel confident and comfortable in accessing and navigating their community.

Some young people talked about their school being involved in community events, national park regeneration and restoration, helping at elderly peoples care homes, gardening projects, supporting local businesses by volunteering and many sports and other clubs.

One young person appreciated the opportunity to access local recreational sports:

“We have great beaches, national park and mountain bike trails.”



Accessible schools and community areas

Building and access to facilities was something that children and young people talked about in many consultations. Children and young people said they valued schools which had been designed to accommodate wheelchairs, national park areas where board walks and paths had been purposely built so that wheelchair could access them. A number said the recently installed elevator on Sydney Harbour Bridge allowed those in wheelchairs and with physical disabilities to walk across the Bridge and enjoy Sydney Harbour.

One young person said they liked the public spaces in Sydney city because:

“There’s lifts and ramps in various public spaces like the Sydney Harbour Bridge and it’s very accessible.”



IMAGE DESCRIPTION - There is a concrete ramp with silver railing. At the top of the ramp is the international symbol of access, consisting of a blue square over-layed with a stylised image of a person in a wheelchair.



What is not working well?



Disability awareness



Barriers to accessing buildings and public places



Accessible parking and public transport



Communication



Disability awareness

Children and young people believed the main barriers to inclusion of children with disabilities are caused by societal stereotypes about the capabilities of people with disability, misunderstandings, and a general lack of community awareness and education about people with disabilities. They said this lack of support significantly limits the choices and opportunities available to them.

One young person thought more needed to be done to promote their and their family's needs:

“There needs to be more support for children and young people with disabilities and their families.”

Children and young people called for increased awareness raising efforts and training to be available to the general community to overcome stereotypes about people with disabilities and the perception that people with disability cannot or do not want to participate in mainstream activities. Some participants described feeling ignored, isolated, and disrespected as a result of this view. One young person spoke about being overlooked by others because of their disability:

“Just because you have a disability people think that you can’t.”

Another observed that this consultation was the first time they had been asked for their opinion and view of things:

“Nobody has ever asked us before.”

These barriers can have a major impact on a child or young person's full participation in the community, particularly if the young person has multiple disabilities.

One young person pleaded for the opportunity to prove themselves:

“We just need a chance like everyone else.”

Barriers to accessing buildings and public places



Physical barriers to education and community participation were also spoken about. Children and young people who used wheelchairs or walking aids described the difficulty they had finding accessible paths of travel around their school and community.

One young person in a wheelchair said she was unable to visit friends' houses as they were not able to access them. They spoke about how this situation upset them as this is something that all other children and young people were able to do easily.

This young person believed that the purchase of ramps to visit friends and access other areas without ramps should be included in NDIS plan:

“There are not a lot of places that have wheelchair access so it’s hard for me, it’s really unfair.”

Limited accessibility in schools and TAFEs as well as public spaces such as cinemas, recreation centres, shopping centres, and open spaces was identified by children and young people as a significant barrier to their capacity to participate within their community. They said this lack of support significantly limited choices available to them. One young person said that it restricted their ability to socialise with friends or play a part in their community:

“There are not many places I can go in town.”

Another young person told us:

“When I go to the shopping mall I have no access.”



Accessible parking and public transport

Parking was discussed in almost all consultations, with children and young people speaking about constant difficulties that they and their families experience almost daily. Children and young people discussed the lack of allocated accessible parking spaces, people parking illegally in disability spaces without a permit, narrow parking spaces that are difficult to get in and out of the car, and parking spaces that are located in difficult places or a long distance away from facilities.

One participant explained:

“There is never enough disability parking and it can be very hard getting in and out of the car.”

Hospital parking was an area of particular concern for children and young people and many expressed extreme frustrated at the lack of available, affordable spaces. One young person said:

“It’s disgusting that you have to pay so much for parking at hospitals.”

Public transport was another popular topic many children and young people spoke about when discussing barriers to accessing activities and services. They noted that there was a lack of accessible transport options, particularly for regional and rural communities, and that getting assistance to access non-accessible transport was sometimes a challenge. One young person explained that in their experience:

“Some of the drivers do not help. I can’t use the steps and need to use the ramp, but some drivers just sit there and do nothing.”

Communication



Children and young people also spoke about having difficulty navigating public transport because transport signage and information was hard to read, especially for those with visual impairment. Sometimes information was communicated in a way that was too complex or unclear so they weren't able to understand.

One young person said this was a result of:

“... Just bad communication.”

Children and young people also talked about barriers to engaging with others such as not being able to hear what people are saying without hearing aids or being unable to read small print. A number of young people mentioned being unable to communicate without interpreters who can sign Auslan, which restricted their ability to participate in activities or within the general community. One young person who uses Auslan spoke about their difficulties communicating with others in the community:

“Problems with communication in general, people can't communicate with deaf people and there is a communication breakdown because they can't sign.”



What could be done to make NSW a better place for children and young people?



Education and awareness raising



Listen to us



Better access to mainstream opportunities



More activities and access to opportunities for all young people



Education and awareness raising

Children and young people believed that the availability of disability education, training and awareness is an important step to try and remove the stigma attached to disability and the negative attitudes.

One young person thought that by helping the community understand and accept people with disabilities, they would be given more opportunity to give back:

“More talk and awareness about disability so that people with disability can contribute to society and have a say like everyone.”

Listen to us

Some children young people agreed that they felt included in their school and community, but all children and young people agreed that there are things that could be improved. Many children and young people believed that to understand how to improve the experience of children and young people with disabilities that adults should just ask - and then listen.

One young person put it simply:

“Just ask us.”

Children and young people also recommended that when information is provided in written formats that simple language, larger font and/or braille are utilised to improve accessibility for people with disabilities.



Better access to mainstream opportunities

Children and young people asked for better recognition and inclusion of those with disability.

“It would be good if we could just be given a chance.”

Many children and young people spoke about wanting organisations and services to consider the needs of people with disabilities when designing buildings and services. One young person thought services should think about the needs of people with physical disabilities:

“Transport NSW need to be more considerate of people who can’t walk.”



IMAGE DESCRIPTION - There is a young person sitting in a wheelchair in a vehicle. They are buckled in smiling at the camera at the edges of the image is a ramp.



More activities and access to opportunities for all young people

Children and young people also expressed frustration with the general lack of things for them and their peers to do.

Children and young people supported the availability of more inclusive activities, with one young person suggesting there were:

“Not enough opportunities for activities in the community such as music, art and sports for children and young people with disability.”

One young person said when children and young people get into trouble with parents, school or Police, it can be because they are bored:

“There are lots of kids mucking up and not doing great... they just need something to do.”

Another young person suggested more funding for local youth centres to provide activities:

“We need more funding for our youth centre and, like, a PCYC with activities like boxing and sports.”

Children and young people told us that they thought the lack of things to do meant that they sometimes came to the attention of the police. Young people recalled incidents when they felt Police had moved young people on from areas with no explanation. One young person suggested that more effort be made to engage children and young people that are getting in trouble:

“There is really nothing to do for youth, so they just go out all night and do stupid things. Just take us for walks, take us fishing or just something.”

Voice and participation

It is important to all children and young people that their value is recognised and they are supported, in line with their evolving capacities, to participate in decisions that impact their lives. Children and young people with disabilities are no different and told us they want to be consulted directly, have their opinions heard and be taken seriously by adults.





What is working well?



Forums and consultations



Professionals who make the effort to listen and understand



Forums and consultations

Children and young people gave examples of a range of different opportunities to give their opinions on issues that mattered to them, such as involvement in Youth Councils, student representative councils, youth advisory councils, and youth reference groups.

One young person put it bluntly:

“We need to have a voice because we have to live through it... you (adults) will die eventually, and we will be the next generation so we should get a say not just you.”

Children and young people also talked very positively about having opportunities to take part in consultations and being asked their views and opinions. One young person suggested there be more consultations involving children and young people with disabilities:

“They should do this (consultations) more as it is not the only time we have an opinion about stuff.”



IMAGE DESCRIPTION - There are 5 young people sitting around 2 separate tables in a classroom setting during a consultation. In the foreground are 3 young people conversing and thinking around a piece of butchers paper with green and blue handwriting.



Professionals who make the effort to listen & understand

Children and young people believed these opportunities to use their voices and express themselves were extremely beneficial, especially when they were supported by professionals that listened and understood them.

One young person spoke about how much they valued direct communication with their care workers:

“Workers understand what I mean, understand what I am going through and are supportive and very understanding.”

Another spoke about feeling heard and understood by the support agency they were working with and how this encouraged them to continue with the program:

“Key Employment is very supportive they understand what I need, and they understand what I am going through.”

Children and young people also told us that it was important to have access to services that listened and responded to their needs, particularly for mental health concerns. One young person expressed relief at the increased support at schools:

“Schools are now getting trained counsellors at last.”

Having friends, parents, family, carers, teachers, support workers and counsellors that listened and respected them was something that all children and young people said was crucial to their wellbeing. One young person suggested that, without this support, children and young people may be suffering in silence:

“How do you know if someone is struggling or having a hard time if you don’t ask them?”



What is not working well?



Underestimating the capacity of children and young people to use their voice



Decision making without appropriate consultation with the person with disabilities



Underestimating the capacity of children and young people to use their voice

Children and young people told us that when they were not given the opportunity to express themselves or were not listened to when they wanted to voice their opinion, they felt helpless, angry and frustrated. Many spoke about decisions frequently being made without their involvement or consent.

One young person expressed frustration with the common assumption that children and young people with disability did not have the capacity to speak for themselves:

“It’s as if they think we are not able to answer simple questions.”

Children and young people talked about not being asked for their views about school decisions, and not being informed about their options, choices and supports available. One young person talked about attending a Student Support Group meeting where all the adults present were asked questions about the young person rather than asking the young person directly:

“Just because you’re in a support unit does not mean that you don’t have a voice.”



Decision making without appropriate consultation with the person with disabilities

Some children and young people reported having negative experiences with support workers within government and non-government agencies. Examples of this was when children and young people felt they had not been treated with respect, where workers did not take time to get to understand their individual circumstances, and had not listening to what they were asking. Other children and young people gave similar examples of situations where teachers talked about the young person with parents and carers but did not speak directly to the young person to understand their views.

One young person felt that this approach disempowered them and prevented them from accessing potential opportunities:

“Negativity holds us back and has stopped me from having opportunities. I need support to encourage me.”

They also told us that when their voices are not taken into account that decisions are being made about their lives that are inappropriate or even damaging. Many children and young people reported that they tried to reach out to services for help but did not feel like they were being listened to. This was particularly the case for children and young people who had both disability and mental health concerns. One young person was unsatisfied with the level of support they were offered when they sought help:

“We need real support not just a number to call!”



What could be done to make NSW a better place for children and young people?



More opportunity



More independence



More awareness



Improve ease of accessibility to support services



More opportunity

Most conspicuously, children and young people wanted the opportunity to be heard in all matters that directly affected them and have their opinions valued, respected and taken seriously. There were discussions about having more opportunities to participate in group level consultations through school councils, youth groups and other community forums:

One student appreciated that their school had a school council:

“We have a school SRC (Student Representative Council) group here and they listen to us.”

More independence

Perhaps most strongly, children and young people wanted adults to recognise them as individuals who can speak for themselves. They asked that adults speak to them directly and not just to their parents or carers, especially when they are in the room or when the conversation is relevant to them:

One young person put it simply when they said:

“Just ask us!”



More awareness

Children and young people suggested that professionals that work with children and young people with disabilities be required to undertake training that would help them better communicate with them:

One young person suggested more training for professionals:

“There is not enough basic communication skills being taught.”

Improve ease of accessibility to support services

Young people also spoke about developing better systems used by children and young people with a disability, such as the NDIS, health services and Centrelink. They suggested that these systems be improved to better facilitate the voice of people with disabilities as well as create processes that would be better understood and easier to access.

One participant told us:

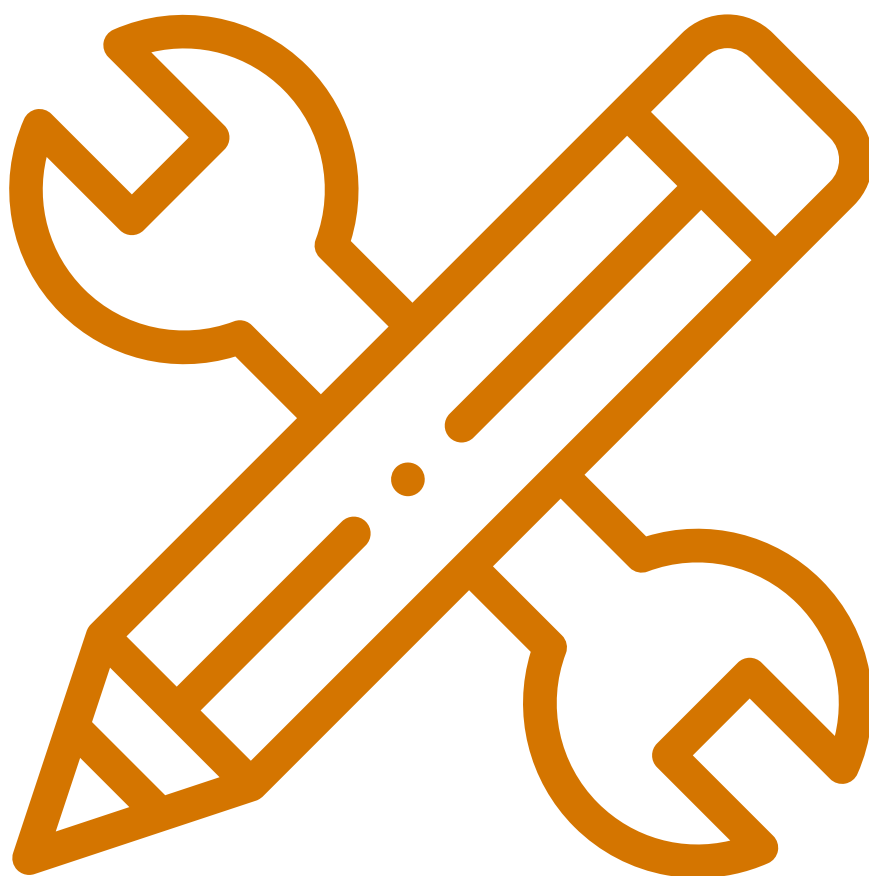
“There is never enough information that it easy to understand.”

Another young person thought the process for accessing disability supports needed to be changed:

“They need to reform the NDIS.”

Employment and training

Young people²³ with disabilities were clear that they have the same right to work as any other person in the community. Access to employment was seen by young people as a crucial factor in their quality of life, capacity to become financially independence, and to be able to participate within their community. On a personal level, they spoke about how important training and employment was in building their confidence. Most children and young people said getting a job is their number one aspiration for their future.



²³ Though both children and young people participated in these consultation, those above the age of 12 (young people as defined by the ACYP Act) were the ones that focused on this issue.



What is working well?



Employment services



Training and work experience



Employment services

Young people spoke about a range of opportunities to access support in seeking and maintaining employment. Young people spoke positively about working in various jobs including fast food outlets, supermarkets, retail and factories.

One young person told us that the support they received was critical to maintaining their employment:

“I have been working at MDS (Macarthur Disability Services) for three years now and it’s going really well. I get the support and guidance that people with disabilities need. In other jobs things have not gone quite as well. When I have had other jobs, they know your needs, but they don’t provide the support for you.”

Disability support services such as Youth Connections, Northcott, Key Employment and Macarthur Disability were just a few examples of the organisations that young people had positive experiences accessing transition to work and vocational education programs. Young people emphasised the value of being able to access services that provided holistic support whilst learning new skills and developing the confidence and self-esteem required to apply for job in the future. One young person thought very highly of their support service:

“It’s like family here, they help us with everything.”



Training and work experience

Young people identified that participation in school career development, work experience, accredited training and hands on learning in a work environment were among the most important and valuable things they learned at school. Those who were able to access vocational education and employment programs to help them learn new skills and get qualifications said they felt more confident about being able to transition into employment.

One young person explained:

“Transition to work program gets you ready and teaches you all the skills that you need for work.”

A number of young people attended ongoing work experience programs during the week. Industries where young people had work placements included: hospitality, farming, national parks, retail outlets, horticulture and cleaning. One young person was proud of the work they did to help others while on work experience:

“We go to work experience in that national park, we learn new skills and help make the parks easier for people and wheelchairs to visit.”

Many young people talked about their desire to obtain a full-time job in the future and the need to have continued support from services in order for them to be successful, safe and supported in the workplace. One young person spoke about the value of programs that prepared them for working:

“(The) Transition to Work program gets you ready and teaches you all the skills that you need for work.”

Whilst young people with disabilities who we spoke to highly valued life and vocational skills programs that were made available to people with disabilities, one young person thought of it as an exception rather than an opportunity that was readily available to their peers:

“Having programs like this, Vocational Skills for people with disabilities, we are very lucky to have that.”



What is not working well?



Lack of awareness and support



Lack of readily available services



Inability of services to cope with children and young people with complex needs

All young people we spoke to believed that the quality and availability of vocational and employment opportunities was critical to their future. Unfortunately, they told us that they faced a number of barriers to effectively accessing these opportunities.



Lack of awareness and support

In many of the consultations, young people spoke about being subject to low expectations from employers who sometimes believed that they were unable to perform task required because of their disability.

One young person thought that this attitude directly impacted the willingness of employees to hire young people with disabilities:

“Employers (are) reluctant to employ young people with disability.”

Another young person believed that this contributed to the lack of availability of employment opportunities for young people with disabilities, particularly in relation to genuine and ongoing employment:

“It can be very difficult for young people with disability to get a job.”



IMAGE DESCRIPTION - There are 2 young people sitting behind a desk with butchers paper and handwriting on it. They are sitting in front of a brightly coloured painting in a classroom setting.



Lack of readily available services

Young people spoke about the lack of employment opportunities in their local area.

One young person observed:

“There are no jobs for young people let alone for young people with disability.”

Another young person living in a rural town was concerned about how the reduction of shops and businesses in their area will impact their opportunity to access employment in the future:

“All shops and businesses are closing in rural towns and the towns are dying.”

Where young people did identify employment opportunities, they felt they lacked the skills and experience to secure a job, or did not believe they have the specified job requirements such as level of education and prior skills required. One young person said they needed more targeted training and assistance to be available to them:

“Having programs and opportunities for young people with disabilities.”



Inability of services to cope with children and young people with complex needs

Some young people talked about Disability Employment Services (DES) that helped them to seek employment and then keep a job. Many talked about these services as something that worked well, but others said that they felt unsupported, confused and had no connection to the organisations and workers supporting them. A few young people talked about having only the opportunity to do volunteer work, having to repeat the same training or course because that was the only thing available or being placed with employers who were not suitable or not being given a chance.

Young people spoke about challenges they faced interacting with Centrelink and meeting mutual obligation requirements of payment such as Newstart or Youth Allowance. One young person told us about their experience:

“Centrelink is hard as you have to apply for jobs but there are no jobs... young people are being forced from their youth allowance.”

Centrelink was commonly described by young people as being difficult to navigate, and they had trouble understanding eligibility for financial support and assistance. Young people also talked about long wait times at Centrelink offices and spoke about staff who were unhelpful or provided them with incorrect information. One young person told us they did not feel supported when seeking assistance through Centrelink:

“Workers at Centrelink look down at you.”

Another young person thought it was too hard to access payments from Centrelink:

“I hate Centrelink... you can’t get youth allowance if you’re 15 even if you have no money or support and you have to wait for hours.”



What could be done to make NSW a better place for children and young people?



More opportunity



More support



More awareness and education



More opportunity

Young people emphasised the importance of targeted and relevant vocational training and employment programs that could provide them with the skills or qualifications to participate in a workplace and could lead directly to long term employment opportunities. Young people also emphasised the importance of paid work with suitable employers, and not just volunteer work or ongoing vocational courses.

One young person spoke about the importance of providing young people with more paid employment opportunities:

“More job opportunities for young people to get work and money.”

Young people felt that there was a lack of opportunity and jobs available to them and that discrimination from employers and finding jobs in rural and regional areas also hindered their job prospects.

One young person talked about the need to ensure there were employment opportunities, and not just employment support services, in their local area:

“There are job providers and supports to help but no jobs available. Young people have to up route and leave communities to live.”



More support

Young people in employment said they would like more support and guidance from employers once they commenced their role.

Some spoke about feeling confused about workplace expectations and instances of bullying which ultimately resulted in them leaving the job.

“Putting so much effort into but not being recognised or given a chance.”

Young people thought services at Centrelink needed to be processed more efficiently and quickly, with some noting that they did not receive financial assistance for several months after applying due to the complicated process of getting evidence, identification and parental consent. One young person noted that they needed immediate support for basics like food and transport:

“We want Centrelink to give us what we need, not what we want... (and) it needs to be on time.”



More awareness and education

Employers lack of understanding about disabilities frustrated children and young people. Young people suggested that employers should be encouraged to undertake awareness training to assist them adapt to the needs of employees with disabilities and learn how to provide ongoing support in the workplace

One young person told us that they thought:

“Employers should be educated about young people with disabilities.”

Young people also told us that they thought confusion and bullying that they had experienced in some workplaces could be addressed through increased awareness raising efforts for employers, with one young person stating that:

“Employers should have more awareness of disability.”

Another young person thought employers needed to communicate with them better and understand that they may need a little more support at the beginning:

“More employers should give young people with disability more of a chance.”

Bullying and Discrimination

Children and young people spoke to us about their experience with bullying and discrimination and the impact it had on them. When they reflected on their experiences with discrimination, children and young people spoke about experiencing difficulties relating to their disability. When they reflected on their experience with bullying, children and young people seemed to regard some of those incidences as relating to their disability but also considered it a common experience of all children and young people.





What is working well?



Education and awareness raising



Support services and people

Unsurprisingly, there were a lack of examples of situations where discrimination and bullying were viewed positively.

However, children and young people did acknowledge the value of education and awareness raising surrounding the topic and spoke about how valuable services that assisted children and young people who were experiencing discrimination and bullying were.

Having someone to believe them and listen to them when they were confronting these situations, both in person and online, was critical to how they felt they coped.



What is not working well?



Discrimination



Bullying

Discrimination



Children and young people talked about experiencing discrimination in many aspects of their lives: including education, training, employment, when accessing services and navigating systems, and when trying to participate in events, clubs and general community activities.

Though children and young people believed that discrimination based on disability is getting better, one young person told us they felt:

“People still discriminate just because you have a physical disability.”

Young people believed that sometimes they are not being given an opportunity like others to show that they do have the ability.

One young person said they had experienced:

“...being discriminated against when going to job interviews.”

Another young person thought that some employers who hired young people with disabilities:

“... take advantage (of young people with disabilities) and pay very poorly.”

Children and young people thought that this behaviour could be due to a lack of understanding and awareness from employers about people with disabilities. They proposed more effort be put into breaking down barriers and changing mindsets. One young person suggested creating a:

“...Disability awareness project – Trying to navigate your way around in a wheelchair or in a blindfold so that others can see what it’s like for children and young people with disabilities.”



Bullying

Bullying was a major concern for children and young people. They said it could happen at school by other students, on public transport and in the community by other children and young people. Some also reported being bullied by adults.

Cyberbullying was also spoken about as a significant issue. They talked about how social media platforms such as Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram provided opportunities to share images or negative comments and send threatening messages.

Young people believed that bullying could be very harmful, and that it had a negative effect on children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.

One young person told us intervention to stop bullying was critical to their wellbeing: and another young person told us he was bullied by other students because he was in a special needs unit at a mainstream school:

“Kids bully you because you’re disabled or in another unit and I’m kind of really sick of it.”

Children and young people told us that they believed more could be done to stop bullying in schools and that social media platforms need to take more responsibility for what was happening on their platforms. Some children and young people said that removing themselves from social media was helpful in getting away from bullies. Others told us that they just accepted that bullying was a part of their life. One student admitted:

“Cyberbullying is a big problem.”

One young person spoke about an app that their school used to allow them to report bullying anonymously and said that it worked well for them.

What could be done to make NSW a better place for children and young people?



Awareness raising



Promotion of support services

Awareness raising

Discrimination and bullying is an inherently clandestine topic and the impact can be overlooked by those not experiencing the emotional and social difficulties associated with such destructive interactions. Children and young people spoke about the importance of increasing knowledge and awareness in the general community about the negative impact that ignorance, fear and discrimination based on disability can have on individuals. They suggested widespread promotion of the idea that diversity and difference is something to be valued and that people with disabilities have the same rights and needs as everyone else.

Promotion of support services

Children and young people also spoke about the importance of services that could help them respond to bullying and discrimination, suggesting those services should be promoted at schools and on social media. One school that sought to address this problem by allowing students to use an app to anonymously report bullying behaviours was mentioned as an example of a helpful response mechanism.

Mental health

The children and young people we spoke to during consultations told us that it was important to recognise the significance of mental health issues affecting them and their peers. They discussed the importance of awareness, of youth specific services and services that were equipped to assist children and young people that had complex or co-morbid conditions such as mental health and disability concerns.





What is working well?



Increased recognition of the importance of good mental health



Youth friendly services



Caring and supportive professionals



Increased recognition of the importance of good mental health

Increase in the recognition of the importance of good mental health was seen by children and young people as a positive step.

Youth friendly services

Children and young people spoke positively about services that were easy to access and youth friendly, such as Headspace, and services that had friendly and non-judgemental staff that were prepared to build supportive relationships with them.

A number of children and young people said mental health support and services in their area were working well. Children and young people nominated youth focused mental health organisations as places that supported children and young people well.

They said they felt counsellors and other workers at these youth-friendly organisations spent time getting to know the child or young person before asking private and sometimes traumatic questions. One young person told us about their experience:

“I used to go to Headspace for counselling and stuff and that was really good.”

Caring and supportive professionals

Caring and supportive teachers and professional staff at schools, such as counsellors, were also mentioned as supports that were valued by children and young people.



What is not working well?



Child and Youth Mental Health awareness



The importance of Mental Health services for children and young people



Acknowledging and addressing complex needs of children and young people with disabilities



Child and Youth Mental Health awareness

Many children and young people told us that they would like to see greater mental health awareness and support available for children and young people. They said they wished to see more effort going into making children and young people aware about what services and supports were available and how to access them.

One young person talked about how helpful it was when adults took their mental health concerns seriously and told them about services that could assist them:

“We need more people that understand and telling us its ok to feel this way, and this is where you can get help.”

Children and young people told us they felt there can be a stigma associated with help seeking for mental health issues and this contributes to children and young people not accessing services. They suggested this be addressed through peer to peer education because young people were better able to relate to each other. One young person suggested the value of hearing the information from a peer with lived experience:

“Youth educating youth, it works as we can relate.”

Children and young people thought schools have a role to play in providing mental health education. In particular they thought that schools should do more. Students should learn strategies to support positive mental health and wellbeing in primary school. This young person was relieved that specialist help has started to become available in schools:

“Schools are now getting trained counsellors at last.”

Children and young people said they felt education about mental health, information regarding managing stress and emotions, as well as ways to promote positive mental and normalising conversations about mental health wellbeing should continue through school. One young person reflected on the extreme consequences of not getting help:

“Lots of young people suffer from depression and, as it’s the big cause of death ... it needs to be recognised and addressed.”

The importance of Mental Health services for children and young people



Critically, not all children and young people felt they were able to access mental health services when they needed them. Some children and young people reported that they tried to reach out to services for help but did not feel like they were being listened to. We were told that children and young people had experienced services consulting with parents/carers, and not the young person themselves, and not having access to a mental health plan that would allow them access to professional support. This made things very difficult and many young people struggled even further with their mental health as a result.

One young person explained:

“Kids need to get support before things get too bad, support should be available to everyone.”

Children and young people wanted to have easy access to a range of supports and information about what services were available to them in their local area. They also spoke about the value of early intervention education and awareness from a very young age, counselling, case management, specialist appointments and crisis intervention services. More than anything, children and young people said they just wanted someone to listen and take them seriously. One young person said they wanted more mental health supports to be available to young people and better information about where to access help:

“We need more people that understand and telling us its ok to feel this way, and this is where you can get help.”

Acknowledging and addressing complex needs of children and young people with disabilities



Children and young people with disabilities spoke very strongly about their difficulty obtaining appropriate support for mental health concerns. As a child or young person with disabilities, they told us that they did not always feel their mental health issues were acknowledged. Instead, their thoughts, feelings and moods were erroneously being associated with their disability.

They reported feeling extremely frustrated with family, teachers and professionals as they did not recognise their mental health issues and they felt ignored. One young person was frustrated by the lack of services that were prepared to assist them if they were considered to have more complex needs:

“(There is) not enough support some supports are available for mild to moderate conditions... but no support for (young people) with complex mental health needs.”

Children and young people also discussed the difficulty they had accessing supports for chronic and complex mental health issues. They described difficulties in obtaining a mental health plan and then accessing specialist appointments with psychiatrists and psychologists.

One young person said:

“It is appalling to see the amount of young people with disability who have a dual diagnosis of a mental illness and a disability and they fall through every community service gap and are not getting the support that they need to live let alone be well.”

Children and young people also called for more specialist acute youth services, such as inpatient hospital options for children and young people requiring crisis support.



One young person called for:

“More mental health supports at hospitals, there is a high need for crisis supports as there is not enough beds and capacity.”

Children and young people reflected on the extreme consequences of not having appropriate support. The impact of youth suicide was discussed. One young person told us that in their experience:

“Suicide is a huge problem... especially in rural areas affected by the drought.”

Another young person insisted that more be done to address youth mental health and suicide:

“Suicide is a big problem and it should be addressed.”



IMAGE DESCRIPTION - Landscape depicting a drought scene. There is dried up brown grass in two paddocks separated by wooden stumps with a wire fence. In the background is shadows of trees and there is a soft pastel blue and yellow sunrise in the sky.



What could be done to make NSW a better place for children and young people?



Better awareness and understanding of the cross over between disability and mental health difficulties



Increased access to mental health training for professionals



Increased availability of mental health first aid and peer to peer training in schools

Increased mental health awareness and services for children and young people with disabilities



Experiences of mental health concerns are different for different types of disability. Children with intellectual disabilities, for example, are four times more likely to have diagnosable mental health problems but can often be left untreated because of diagnostic overshadowing – where “symptoms are incorrectly assumed to be related to the child’s disability rather than an underlying mental health issue”²⁴.

Children and young people that participated in these consultations spoke about experiencing this first hand and said more needed to be done to ensure that professionals understood the interaction between mental health and disabilities and ensure services were equipped to assist them.

Children and young people also supported increased access for school staff and other professionals to access mental health education and ongoing training to understand how to identify and manage children and young people demonstrating signs of mental health problems. Introducing youth mental health first aid and peer to peer training in schools so children and young people can identify danger signs in both themselves and their peers at an early age was also suggested.

²⁴ Hastings, R., Tonge, B., Melvin, G., Gray, K., and Totsika, V. 2014, ‘*What about the mental health of kids with intellectual disability?*’ The Conversation, 12 November 2014.

Secondary themes: *other important topics to children and young people*

There were several other themes of importance that children and young people spoke about in these consultations.



*Accommodation
& housing*



Animals



*Beaches, parks &
outdoor spaces*



*Climate change
& environmental
issues*



*Community
festivals & events*



Cost of living



*Drought &
Bushfires*



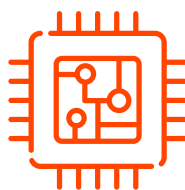
Family & Friends



*Hospitals & physical
healthcare*



LGBTQIA+



Technology

Accommodation and housing



Many young people spoke about encountering challenges with accommodation and housing.

Most children and young people lived with their parents and guardians but many of those living in private rental reported the cost of rent being a significant issue. This was talked about in both metropolitan and in regional areas of NSW. Many said their families struggled financially with rent and living costs. Others spoke about seeking housing assistance from government but reported extremely long wait times of up to three years without being offered interim accommodation options while on waitlists. Young people in this situation talked about having to move out of their school area to where they did not have a support system and did not know anybody.

Many young people also reported feeling anxious and isolated when transitioning to live independently. Some people reported being unaware of what services and support could help them resulting in them being unable to manage and succeed in independent living.

Animals



Several children and young people talked about their pets and animals and how they spent their free time caring for their animals and pets. Many young people recognised their animals as family or friends and that their dogs, cats, farm animals made them feel safe and connected in the same way.

Beaches, parks & outdoor spaces



Children and young people spoke extremely positively about the outdoors. Across NSW they talked about the range of outdoor activities available to them: beaches, national parks, being outdoors in the bush, enjoying nature walks, observing wildlife, mountain biking, riding dirt bikes and enjoying beautiful scenery. Some children and young people felt very proud and privileged to have access to the outdoors and nature.

Climate change & environmental issues



In many of the consultations, children and young people spoke about climate change and the environment. They felt strongly that not enough was being done to protect against climate change and were worried of the impact that it would have on their future. Some children and young people reported their concerns regarding polluting the sea and rivers and saving wildlife such as bees.

In one consultation in the Eastern Suburbs of Sydney a group of students spoke passionately about their concerns about the impact the development a cruise ship terminal in the local area will have on the beach and wildlife.

Community festivals & events



Children and young people across the NSW reported that communities which had a range of events accessible for children and young people with disability made them feel connected and valued. These festivals and events were annual highlights that many children and young people looked forward to participating in.

Cost of living



The cost of living was raised in many of the consultations, which is a common topic of conversation in ACYP's discussions with children and young people. Young people identified items such as groceries, transport, clothing, school uniform, food, technology devices, phone credit, toys and games being very expensive and unaffordable. They also mentioned the high costs of activities and events in the community such as going to the movies, bowling, swimming pools, sports and attending events.

Drought & Bushfires



Many young people particularly in regional areas talked about the drought happening across NSW, and the devastating impact on those communities. They believed more could be done to try and support those areas and communities. In a few consultation groups young people mentioned the recent bushfires and how people have come together to raise money for those who lost their homes. They thought more could still be done to support these areas.



IMAGE DESCRIPTION - Apocalyptic bushfire scene. There are silhouettes of gumtrees in the foreground and a raging orange fire in the background. The air is thick with dark smoke.

Family & Friends



Most children and young people talked about being reliant on their parents and families for everything including: personal care, money, transport, helping them navigate the NDIS, getting to appointments, managing daily tasks, assisting them to access support, education, activities and more. They enjoyed spending time with family on evenings and weekends and enjoyed occasions together where they were able to go to the beach, go on holidays, have BBQ's and spend quality time together having fun. All children and young people believed that things would be extremely difficult for them without the help of their family.

Having trusted friends was something children and young people talked about and how it helped them to connect, have fun, to be happy, and to feel safe and supported.

Hospitals & physical healthcare



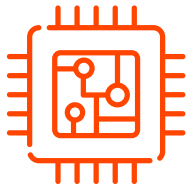
Many children and young people recognised hospitals and physical health care as working well. Having good access to doctors, dentist and specialist appointments to support them with their needs and keep them healthy. In some regional areas young people reported having to travel very long distances to hospitals or to see specialists.

LGBTQIA+



Some young people talked about how the recent same sex marriage bill was a positive thing in NSW and that children and young people supported equality.

Technology



Children and young people talked about their use of technology. Many children and young people spent their time gaming or online social media platforms. Many young people agreed that children and young people spend too much time on screens, become reliant on technology and can lose touch with reality.



IMAGE DESCRIPTION - There is a group of 4 young people in a circle. They are all looking down at their mobile phones in their hands.

Recommendations

Based on the feedback from children and young people during these consultations, ACYP has developed the following recommendations.

These recommendations seek to reflect the voices of the children and young people ACYP has spoken to during these consultations. Above all, we encourage organisations to reach out to children and young people directly and ensure they directly participate in design and implementation of any service, support, process or plan.



1. Education

Recommendations from children and young people

1.1 Increase availability of services that support vocational and educational opportunities for children and young people with disabilities.

1.2 Increase opportunities for children and young people with disabilities to be heard from directly on issues relating to their education.

1.3 Increase disability awareness education for students, teachers and other support staff.

1.4 Increase education and training resourcing and support for children and young people with disabilities, particularly for children and young people attending mainstream schools.

Recommendation/s from ACYP

1.5 That the next Department of Education Progress Report on improving outcomes for students with disability feature feedback from children and young people with disabilities sourced through direct consultations.

1.6 ACYP supports the commitments set out in the *NSW Education Disability Strategy* (p21-24) to increase availability of disability training for educational professionals and the number of teachers trained to teach special education and support mainstream classroom teachers.

1.7 ACYP supports the commitments set out in the *NSW Education Disability Strategy* (p29) to increase research promoting an education system that enables children and young people with disability to achieve consistently good outcomes and strongly encourages any research to include consultations with children and young people with disability.



2. Health and the National Disability Insurance Scheme

Recommendations from children and young people

2.1 Assist the families of children and young people with disabilities to access NDIS services and minimise reviews, particularly in relation to permanent disabilities.

2.2 Have NDIS specialists dedicated to children and young people that work with schools and Local Area Coordinators.

2.3 Ensure there are sufficient services to accept clients with complex and co-morbid disabilities, especially young people with disabilities who have mental health concerns.

2.4 Ensure equitable access to services no matter where you live.

2.5 Make the NDIS assessment process more straightforward and easier to understand.

Recommendation/s from ACYP

2.6 Consider creating NDIS Youth Specialist Advisor positions that are exclusively are delegated to support children and young people, are exclusively partnered with schools or vocational organisations and have specific training in working with children and young people with disabilities.

2.7 Consult with children and young people with disabilities about increasing resources dedicated to children and young people on the NSW Communities and Justice website.



3. Access & Inclusion

Recommendations from children and young people

3.1 Increase funding for organisations to provide services and activities for young people with disability outside of core business hours.

3.2 Ensure all buildings and their facilities are made accessible to people with physical impairments, particularly public spaces.

3.3 Make efforts to educate students, employers and the general community about the ability of people with disabilities, with the aim to overcome fear, discrimination and stigma.

3.4 Increase efforts to include children and young people in community activities and ensure the voices of children and young people with disabilities are sought out and listened to.

3.5 Increase availability and reduce costs of disability parking, particularly in and around medical facilities.

Recommendation/s from ACYP

3.8 Create a website such as ClubHelp (www.clubhelp.org.au) to provide clubs and other organisations with resources to support extending their services to children and young people with disabilities.

3.9 Create a page on the NSW Office of Sport website that promotes local clubs and community organisations that offer disability specific or disability accessible activities to children and young people.

3.10 ACYP to promote the capacity of Our Local website to search for accessible opportunities, activities, services and events for children and young people with disabilities.

3.11 Promote the free Inclusive Coaching Online course offered by Play By The Rules to encourage inclusion of children and young people with disabilities in local sporting clubs and their Model Disability Inclusion Policy.
(<https://www.playbytherules.net.au/online-courses/inclusive-coaching>)



Access & Inclusion (continued)

Recommendations from children and young people

3.6 Increase accessible transport options and raise awareness of the needs of people with disabilities using public transport and what could be done by staff and public to assist.

3.7 Ensure any public signage and transport information considers the communication needs of people with disabilities.

Recommendation/s from ACYP

3.12 The NSW Government harness the potential of Our Local and Digital Lunchbreak to highlight services that provide physical, financial, mental and social supports to children and young people with disabilities and their families.

3.13 Continue to fund/ Extend the NSW Planning Everyone Can Play grants to ensure all public recreation spaces are designed to be used by children and young people with disabilities.

3.14 NSW Transport could explore innovative options to increase access to public transport for children and young people with disabilities in smaller towns and outlying areas to be able to travel into regional centres to reduce isolation, allowing them to engage in education, training, or employment opportunities.

4. Voice & Participation



Recommendations from children and young people

- 4.1** Increase and support opportunities for children and young people with disabilities to give their opinion on matters affecting them.
- 4.2** Ensure all young people with disability have access to support services which accommodate their disability in regards to accessibility, communication and specific needs.
- 4.3** Ensure all professionals working in support services are trained to communicate effectively with children and young people with disabilities.
- 4.4** Ensure all information relevant to children and young people is in an easy to read format.

Recommendation/s from ACYP

- 4.5** In any policy or practice review of services relevant to children and young people, ensure clear mechanisms are created for children and young people to contribute, potentially assisted by services such as the NSW Advocate for Children and Young People and the NSW Youth Advisory Council.
- 4.6** The Department of Communities and Justice should work with NGOs and telecommunication companies to ensure that children and young people with disabilities have access to reliable technology that supports their communication, education and training especially for those outside metro areas.
- 4.7** Increase the number of children and young people responding to the baseline questionnaires and improve baseline key indicators for participants as reported in the NDIS quarterly reports provided to disability Ministers.



5. Employment & Training

Recommendations from children and young people

5.1 Overcome employer prejudice and discrimination in the workplace by promoting the value of employing young people with disabilities.

5.2 Increase the availability of transition services that assist young people build life skills and provide vocational training that are directly linked to long term employment opportunities.

5.3 Increase opportunities for youth employment in rural and regional areas.

5.4 Support customer service staff in Centrelink to better understand the needs of young people with disabilities looking for employment and how to support them.

Recommendation/s from ACYP

5.5 Consider creating a NSW AccessAbility Day and promote the Employ their Ability campaign to NSW employers.

5.6 Support and promote mainstream shows such as ABC's "Employable Me" which demonstrates ability of young people with disabilities to work and contribute positively to their workplaces.

5.7 Ensure the NSW Smart and Skilled program has a section of its website and a phone number specifically designed for young people with disability for the purpose of providing information on the supports that are available to them to find courses, apprenticeships and training.

5.8 Consider adding to the Disability Employment page on the NSW Public Service Commission's website to promote the recruitment and onboarding of young people with a disability as a specific group.

5.9 As part of the Premier's Priority to ensure 5.6% of NSW Government sector roles are held by people with a disability, target young people with disability as a specific cohort for recruitment.



6. Bullying & Discrimination

Recommendations from children and young people

6.1 Promote services for children and young people that specifically address bullying both in person and online.

6.2 Create a public education campaign to promote the idea that diversity and difference is something to be valued and that people with disabilities have the same rights and needs as everyone else.

6.3 Support schools to introduce apps that allow for students to anonymously report bullying and other concerning behaviors.

Recommendation from ACYP

6.4 Consider making available to all schools a harm reporting digital tool that allows children and young people to report bullying and other concerning behaviours anonymously.

7. Mental Health



Recommendations from children and young people

- 7.1** Ensure local mental health services are promoted in schools and other youth organisations.
- 7.2** Introduce youth mental health first aid and peer to peer training in schools so children and young people can identify danger signs in both themselves and their peers.
- 7.3** Require that mental health services accept children and young people with complex vulnerabilities.

Recommendation/s from ACYP

- 7.4** Support for the youth led programs developed by Batyr, Youth InSearch, Project Rocket and The Reach Foundation that encourage Peer to Peer support and training for children and young people.
<https://www.batyr.com.au>
- 7.5** Mental health and youth services provide children and young people with mental health training such as mental health first aid, accidental counsellor training, or be provided with checklists for coping strategies so that they have the knowledge and skills to support their friends, family, and others through times of distress.
- 7.6** The Teen Mental Health First Aid Course is conducted in all schools
<https://mhfa.com.au/courses/public/types/teen>.
- 7.7** Support organisations such as Beyond Blue, Orygen or CYDA to educate health professionals about the danger of diagnostic overshadowing, where symptoms are incorrectly assumed to be related to the child's disability rather than an underlying mental health issue.
- 7.8** Support the Mental Health Commission and NSW Local Health Networks to adopt a "no wrong door" approach to youth mental health that seeks to achieve the mutual aim of reducing barriers and enhancing support for children and young people with mental illness and complex needs.

Section 3



Methodology



**Supports to engage with
children and young people**

Methodology

Consultation framework

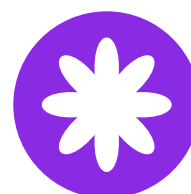
In all its consultations with children and young people in NSW, the Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People sources its information using group discussions to collect qualitative data. Group discussions are initiated through the use of the following three questions that are phrased in a way to encourage respondents to provide detail about their feelings, attitudes, experiences and imaginings:



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 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. The strength of this approach with children and young people is that it enables participants to speak about what is important to them without the parameters of defined topic areas, thereby allowing the interviewer a more accurate insight into the priority areas of the group.

Whilst ACYP sometimes collects quantitative data in the form of surveys or polls to complement the qualitative data it collects during consultations, this option was not pursued for this consultation. This was to ensure all children and young people had the opportunity to participate regardless of their level of ability, access to technology or need for assistance.



IMAGE DESCRIPTION - There are 5 young people in a room seated in chairs. They are all wearing school uniforms. The 3 children on the left are wearing glasses, there is a young person in the middle with a cane underneath their chair and the young person on the right is in an electric wheelchair.

Participant recruitment and demographics

Initially, ACYP contacted seven NSW disability peaks or advocacy groups to discuss the work of ACYP, the purpose of the consultations and seek their expert advice in conducting such research. When it came to contacting organisations for the purposes of recruiting children and young people with disabilities to participate in the consultations, the team found it challenging to identify and locate organisations that worked with children and young people and mainstream schools with support units.

Instead, the ACYP participation team worked for over six months to identify, contact and encourage approximately 200 organisations and over 150 schools when recruiting children and young people to take part in this consultation. Despite these challenges, and some initial hesitation, 24 organisations agreed to be involved in the facilitation of the consultations. The names of these organisations can be found in the Appendix.

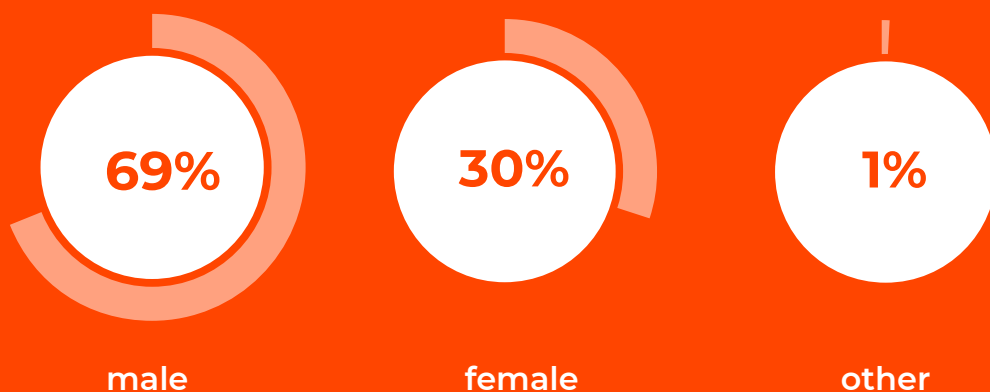
ACYP wishes to acknowledge the collaboration and support from schools, government and non-government organisations who were an integral part of the planning and organisation of these consultations.

Without their enthusiasm, open minds and willingness to facilitate the voices of the children and young people in their care, this consultation would not have been able to go ahead nor have been so successful.

**ACYP met with
*372 children
and young
people* from
24 organisations
in *45 groups* over
a period of five
months**

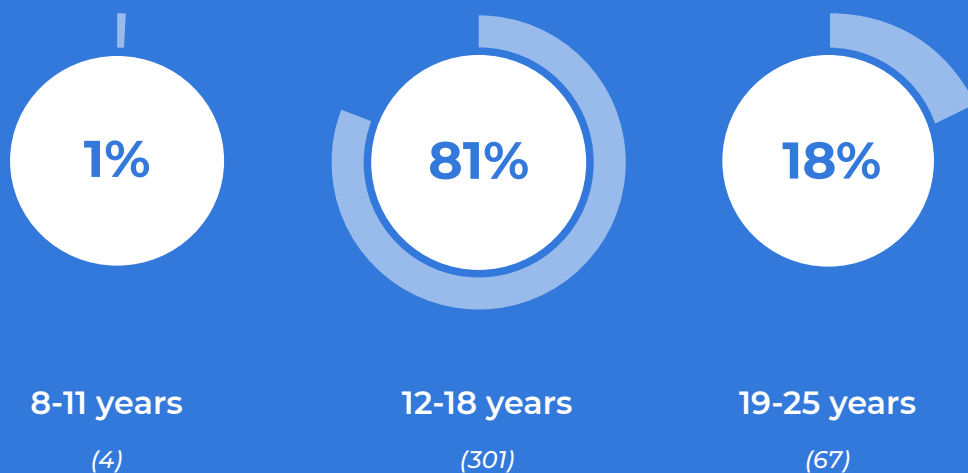
(September 2019 – February 2020).

Gender



Age

The children and young people who participated were between the ages of 8 – 24 years:



Cultural representation



Locations

Consultations were conducted in 24 locations in metro, regional and rural areas of NSW including:



**Ballina, Coffs Harbour, Grafton, Lismore, Newcastle,
Metro Sydney, Greater Sydney region***

**(Northern Beaches, Campbelltown, Bankstown, Cabramatta, Blacktown, Katoomba)*

Disabilities

The children or young people, or the organisations with which they were working, self-identified with the following categories of disabilities:



Intellectual



Physical



Learning



Neurological



Sensory



**Mental Health
Conditions**

Consultation techniques and outcomes

Facilitating the voices of children and young people with disabilities is critical to satisfying the rights of children and young people to be heard in matters affecting them. To do so effectively, organisations need to consider what techniques need to be adopted to ensure ease of participation and clear communication. With this in mind, ACYP adapted our consultation techniques to ensure as many young people as possible could participate in whatever way they felt able to do so.

In organising these consultations, ACYP ensured that it provided information about the purpose and format of the consultations to agencies and schools through the provision of documents detailing:

- **The role of ACYP, the reasons for undertaking the project, the aim of the consultation and the format the consultations could take;**
- **How the consultations would be organised and facilitated by ACYP and what support was needed from schools or organisations on the day; and**
- **The information to be given to children and young people about the consultations and their consent requirements in a child friendly and easy to read format (when written material was appropriate).**

By providing this information, ACYP sought to overcome concerns from schools and agencies with respect to potential interruption to their schedules, new challenges or practices that may be encountered by the children and young people and the ability of ACYP to adapt their practice to suit the needs of the children and young people in the consultations. Where there were concerns about audio or video recordings of discussions, ACYP conducted consultations without such devices. Direct quotes from these consultations have not been featured in this report as they are unable to be independently verified.

Each of the consultations was specifically tailored to ensure all children and young people felt comfortable to participate. ACYP adapted the consultation sessions using the following techniques as required:



Verbal consent permitted in place of written consent forms



Smaller group numbers



Shorter sessions with more breaks



Provision of and cooperation with Auslan interpreters



Informed and supported the presence of support workers



Adapted communication techniques and language depending on the communication needs of children and young people



Adapted presentation techniques and record keeping options

(large font screens, hand written notes, use of iPads, verbal records on REV software)

Facilitating the voices of children and young people with disabilities – an evidence based approach?

Despite the principles set out in international, national and state instruments, children and young people can continue to battle to be heard by those that make decisions on their behalf or about matters impacting them. Children and young people we speak to tell us that our consultation are often the first time they have had an opportunity to use their own voice to directly give feedback on matters important to them. They tell us how important it is that adults seek out their input on matters that directly impact them, listen to their voices and then put that feedback into action:

“Normally, it’s just adults that get to tell the council what to say in Parliament, and stuff. And the kids never get to say anything. So, I think it’s good that the government is hearing what us kids have to say. And not just the adults”

– Young person -Disaster consultations 2020

“All children should have the right of opinion, their opinion should be taken with respect and seriousness”

– Young person - ACYP Participation Guide 2019

“I expect that my opinions, ideas and contributions will be truly valued and will be taken into consideration seriously when developing new policy.”

– Young person - ACYP Participation Guide 2019

“Just because you’re in a support unit does not mean that you don’t have a voice”

- Disability Consultations 2020.

However, the struggle to be seen and heard is even more difficult for children and young people with disabilities who are often overlooked, even in formal consultations or research processes meant to address the subject of inclusion²⁵. Researchers have documented “ a range of barriers that discourage, prevent or actively exclude children and young people (with disability) from participating (in consultations)”²⁶.

For example, the national peak body Children and Young People with Disability Australia cite the following as contributing to barriers to participation for children and young people with disabilities:

A culture of low expectations²⁷

Where assumptions about the lack of capacity of children and young people with disabilities to participate are made to the detriment of their right to have a voice in matters affecting them, children and young people with disabilities can feel “inadequately respected, unheard and unrecognised for their potential and actual contributions”²⁸.

Social & cultural barriers²⁹

Despite almost universal commitment to the rights of children and rights of people with disabilities³⁰, some cultures and legal systems remain reluctant to satisfactorily acknowledge and implement rights in a way that would practically address discriminatory attitudes and practices. Further, the perception of children and of people with disabilities by the wider community as “the other”, means “adults may not listen, recognise or respect the preferences and needs of children and young people with disability and further, speak on their behalf”³¹.

²⁵ For further discussion see L Stafford, ‘What about my voice’: emancipating the voices of children with disabilities through participant-centred methods’ (2017) 15(5) *Children’s Geographies*, 600-613 and Jenkin et al, ‘*The Principles and Ethics of Including Children with Disability in Child Research*’ (2020) 34, *Children & Society*, 1-16.

²⁶ Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA), *Strengthening participation of children and young people with disability in advocacy* (no date), p15

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Ibid, p16

³⁰ The Convention on the Rights of the Child has been ratified by all but 1 eligible country (196 Parties); the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has 181 parties (as of July 2020)

³¹ Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA), *Strengthening participation of children and young people with disability in advocacy* (no date), p16-17

Relationship & identity barriers

In a complex twist, it is possible for opportunities for the voice of children and young people to be heard to be diminished by those that seek to facilitate young people's communication. Families and carers may be overly protective, cautious or have low expectations of the child or young person's capabilities thereby unintentionally interfering with a child or young person's right to participate in whatever capacity they are able. Family members are often surprised by a child's capacity to actively engage in research³². Attitudes of the community with respect to the capacity of a child or young person with a disability – either because of their age or their disability or a combination of the two – can also negatively impact the opportunity for participation.

Practical barriers³³

The lack of regular opportunity, adaptation of typical consultation processes and access to information about issues impacting them are all significant barriers to participation for children and young people with disability. When consultations are made accessible or are targeted at children and young people with disabilities, the lack of feedback as to the value and impact of their participation can discourage further efforts to engage with future consultation processes.

³² Jenkin, et al. *Inclusive Practice for Research with Children: A Guide*, (Deakin University, Melbourne, 2015) p5

³³ Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA), *Strengthening participation of children and young people with disability in advocacy* (no date), p18-19

Critically, it is important for community and government organisations to know that, in addition to satisfying the right of children and young people with disabilities to participate in decisions affecting them, working with children and young people to seek their views and experience has tangible value for that organisation. This is because:



Children and young people have experience and knowledge that is unique to their situation. Their perspectives can lead to more effective and relevant solutions to problems that adults may not have thought of³⁴.



Meaningful and positive participation can increase the responsiveness of organisations and their programs and, in turn, create more demand for their service³⁵.



Working with children and young people in developing and delivery policy can increase the relevance of policy and associated practice³⁶.



Establishing a positive relationship and agency reputation that will continue into adulthood and be promoted throughout the community.

³⁴ NSW Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People, *Engaging children and young people in your organisation*, (January 2019), p15

³⁵ Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA), *Strengthening participation of children and young people with disability in advocacy* (no date), p10

³⁶ Ibid

Recognition and realisation of the rights of children and young people with disabilities

A person's experience of disability is directly related to their ability to interact with their environment as well as personal factors and community attitudes³⁷. The examination of this experience, known as critical disability studies, documents a change in public attitude towards those with disabilities, progressing from the moral or medical model of disability that framed disability as an inherent fault or weakness in the individual, to a social model of disability that emphasises the adverse impact that social, cultural, political and environmental conditions can have on an individual with a disability³⁸.

The United Nations *Convention of the Rights of the Child* and *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* reflect a human rights model of disability that respects disability as a natural part of human diversity and recognises that people with disability have the same rights as all other citizens, with an emphasis on the values of non-discrimination and inclusion. The Australian Human Rights Commission considers that “for Australia to comply with its international responsibilities, all areas and levels of government in Australia have a responsibility to apply human rights based approach”³⁹.

NSW has translated these rights and responsibilities into legislation and policy reform. For example, Part 4A of the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977* (NSW) seeks to prevent unlawful discrimination against people with disabilities and provides an avenue for complaint about instances of discrimination to the NSW Anti-Discrimination Board. NSW also has a *Disability Inclusion Act 2014* (NSW) (under review in July 2020) which aims to give “statutory effect to the human rights based principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities”⁴⁰.

³⁷ ‘People with disability in Australia’, *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare*, Web Report, Cat. No. DIS 72, 3 September 2019, (Web page, accessed 18 August 2020) <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/disability/people-with-disability-in-australia/about-this-report/defining-disability>>.

³⁸ For detailed information on Critical Disability Studies refer to, for example, Watson and Vehmas, *Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies, Second Ed.* Routledge, November 2019

³⁹ ‘Human rights based approaches’, *Australian Human Rights Commission*, (Web page, accessed 18 August 2020) ,<<https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/rights-and-freedoms/human-rights-based-approaches>>

⁴⁰ NSW Department of Family and Community Services, *NSW Disability Inclusion Plan Update 2017 – A report on the implementation of the NSW Disability Inclusion Plan and Disability Inclusion Action Planning across NSW Government Clusters and Local Councils*, October 2017, p7

Specifically, it acknowledges that “people with disability have the same human rights as other members of the community and that the State and the community have a responsibility to facilitate the exercise of these rights...”(s3a). At section 4, this Act sets out 12 Disability Principles which acknowledge the right of people with disabilities to participate in social and economic life, the right to be supported to make decisions that affect their lives to the full extent of their capacity to do so and, that “the needs of children with disability as they mature, and their rights as equal members of the community, are to be respected” (s4(12)). Section 5 also recognises children with disability as a recognised group that are entitled to have supports and services provided in a way that “respects the views of the child...” and “promote(s) self-reliance and facilitate(s) the child’s active and full participation in family, cultural and social life...” (s5(5)). These principles are to be regarded by any person or organisation providing supports or services to people with disabilities in NSW.

The Disability Inclusion Act 2014 (NSW) mandated the development of a State wide Disability Inclusion

Plan as well as requiring NSW public authorities to develop Disability Inclusion Actions Plans to “improve disability inclusion within their agencies and within the community” and encourage “a shift away from a focus on service delivery and towards a human rights-based approach to disability inclusion...”⁴¹. In July 2020, all 128 local NSW Councils and all 10 NSW Government clusters had a Disability Inclusion Action Plan⁴².

ACYP also acknowledges the recent efforts of the NSW Government to emphasise and facilitate the voices of children and young people in light of the current Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability and the 2017 Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. State inquiries focusing on the experiences of children and young people with disabilities have also included the “Inquiry into education of students with a disability or special needs in NSW schools” (September 2017) and the “Inquiry into the Implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the provision of disability services in NSW” (December 2018).

However, more work remains to be

⁴¹ Dawson G, et al, *Review of the NSW Disability Inclusion Plan 2018. A report by the Sax Institute and the Centre for Disability Policy and Research for NSW Family and Community Services*, (Sydney, 2019) p7

⁴² As advised by the Stronger Communities Investment and Inclusion Directorate, Department of Communities and Justice on 21 July 2020. Further information on Local Government Disability Inclusion Action Plans can be found at <https://www.lgnsw.org.au/>

done as a 2019 review of the NSW Disability Inclusion Plan found that whilst there was “significant momentum” towards the realisation of the principles and goals of the Act, that priority groups, such as children, had received limited attention. The review recommended targeted engagement⁴³ to ensure “discrete and meaningful strategies are developed to address their needs”⁴⁴ and organisational reporting demonstrates a significant focus

on children and young people⁴⁵. The review also recommended that specific strategies to target access and inclusion needs of children and young people be developed and implemented⁴⁶. One aim of this research is to assist organisations to satisfy this obligation by identifying opportunities for increased engagement with children and young people with disabilities in NSW.



IMAGE DESCRIPTION - There are 2 young people sitting at a table. They are both wearing blue shirts and have glasses and black hair. One young person is facing the camera wearing red glasses. She has her hands up and is communicating with sign language. The young person to her left is watching her.

⁴³ Dawson G, et al, Review of the NSW Disability Inclusion Plan 2018. *A report by the Sax Institute and the Centre for Disability Policy and Research for NSW Family and Community Services*, (Sydney, 2019) p9

⁴⁴ Ibid p9, 63

⁴⁵ Ibid, p64

⁴⁶ Please refer to 'Next steps' section of this report for links to resources designed to assist organisations engage with children and young people.

Supports to engage with children and young people

Engaging with children and young people with disability

Whilst to date there has not been extensive research surrounding best practice for engaging children and young people with a disability for the purposes of research or consultation, the following publications may assist organisations wishing to understand more about how to best engage children for the purposes of consultation:



Jenkin E, Wilson E, Campaign R, Clarke M, (2020) ***The Principles and Ethics of Including Children with Disability in Child Research***, Children & Society, Volume 34,(1) (p1-16), January 2020 (<https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12356>)



Jenkin E, Wilson E, Murfitt K, Clarke M, Campaign R, and Stockman L (2015) ***Inclusive Practice for Research with Children with Disability: A Guide***, Deakin University, Melbourne (http://www.voicesofchildrenwithdisability.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/DEA-Inclusive-Practice-Research_ACCESSIBLE.pdf)



NSW Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People, ***Engaging children and young people in your organisation***, January 2019 (<https://www.acyp.nsw.gov.au/participation-guide>)



Whyte, J. ***Research with Children with Disabilities – Guidelines and Checklist for Good Practice***, Children's Research centre, Trinity College Dublin for the National Disability Authority (no date) (<http://nda.ie/ndasitefiles/ResearchwithChildrenwithDisabilities.pdf>)

Engaging with all children and young people

ACYP is mandated by the Advocate for *Children and Young People Act 2014* (NSW) (s15(b)) to promote the participation of children and young people in the making of decision that affect their lives and to support and encourage government and non-government agencies to pursue appropriate avenues of participation. To facilitate this mandate ACYP has created the following materials that can be used to assist organisations prepare for seeking the voices of children and young people:



Engaging children and young people in your organisation

This resource includes information on how to run events, gives our top ten tips for participation, and provides participation checklists for CEO's, boards, NGO front line workers and contract managers.

<https://www.acyp.nsw.gov.au/participation-guide>



Understanding and support children and young people's participation

This guide has been developed to help organisations understand the value of involving children and young people in decisions that affect them, and to walk you through aspects to consider when involving children and young people in decision making processes that affect them.

<https://www.acyp.nsw.gov.au/participation-resources/understanding-and-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-participation>



Top ten tips for children and young people's participation

List and video

<https://www.acyp.nsw.gov.au/top-10-tips-for-participation>



Participation in Practice Case Studies

Four video case studies that reflect situations where children and young people have been involved in making decision that affect them.

<https://www.acyp.nsw.gov.au/participation>



Taking Participation Seriously

Practical advice about how to involve children and young people in activities, events and decision making about issues that affect their lives.

<https://www.acyp.nsw.gov.au/participation-resources/taking-participation-seriously>



Child Rights Educational Resource

This is a freely available educational video resource that covers the meaning, history and significance of child rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. <https://www.acyp.nsw.gov.au/child-rights-educational-resource>

*More information about our work can be found at
<https://www.acyp.nsw.gov.au/>.*

We also invite interested organisations to contact us directly for support or guidance on engaging with children and young people via our email address acyp@acyp.nsw.gov.au or by calling (02) 9248 0970.

Appendix



Locations for consultations included



Community Organisations and Services



Disability Employment Services (DES)



Schools for Specific purposes (SSP's)



Support Units within mainstream schools
IO (moderate intellectual disability), IM (mild
intellectual disability) classes



Vocational Education and Training
(VET) courses

Organisations and schools at which consultations were undertaken

Disability Consultation	Date	No. of CYP
Arthur Phillip High School	28/11/2019	20
Ballina Coast High School	25/11/2019	20
Blacktown Youth Service	5/12/2019	3
Cabramatta High School	21/02/2020	16
Casino High School	26/11/2019	18
Dulwich Hill High School	4/02/2020	15
Eagle Vale High School	16/12/2019	31
Headspace Lismore	26/11/2019	14
Katoomba High School	28/02/2020	5
Key Employment	2/10/2019	16
Macarthur Disability Service	30/08/2019	13
Marrickville High School	20/02/2020	10
Matraville Sports High School	10/12/2019	16
Newcastle High School	19/11/2019	13
Northcott Ballina - Life Skills	25/11/2019	7
Northcott Casula - Job Skills	20/09/2019	14
Northcott Casula - Life Skills	5/09/2019	11
Northern Beaches Secondary College (Cromer Campus)	4/12/2019	22
Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children	11/02/2020	15
Sir Joseph Banks High School	11/12/2019	40
Uniting Event - Bankstown	27/09/2019	8
Wheelchair Sports NSW	28/09/2019	10
Wilson Park School	26/11/2019	18
Youth Connections	19/11/2019	17



| **acyp.**

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