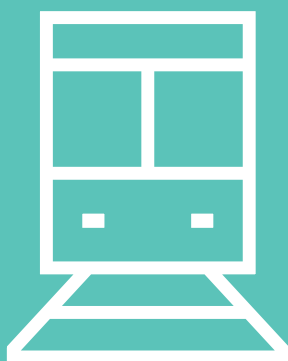
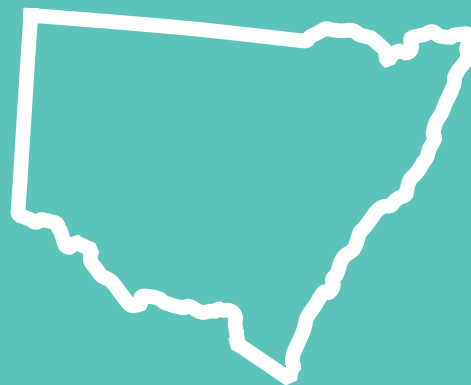


Office of the
Advocate for Children
and Young People

acyp.

Report on consultations with socially excluded children and young people



reference

Office	Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People
Report	Report on consultations with socially excluded children and young people
Date	October 2018

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We wish to pay our respects to Aboriginal elders – past, present and emerging – and 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 may have passed away.

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foreword

It has been my great privilege over the last 3 years to get an education from and to be constantly inspired by children and young people, “doing it tough or socially excluded” which is the term they prefer is used. So often these are “ordinary children and young people”, representative of their generation, finding themselves living with extraordinary challenges drawn out by their multiple disadvantages and experiences.

Far too often when the service system comes to discuss how to engage with children and young people who are socially excluded they are labeled by the terms which described how they entered the system; a child in out of home care, a young person who is homeless, a young person in detention.

Accordingly, the themes, challenges and hopes that they raised in this report are largely consistent with those raised by the broader population of children and young people in NSW. These cut across topics such as education, employment, transport, mental health, programs and activities.

Socially excluded children and young people identified some issues specific to their experiences and circumstances. These included having a safe home to live in and access to crisis accommodation support, as well as greater support in schools and for transitions out of care or detention. They were more likely than other children and young people to talk about racism and discrimination; substance abuse, violence and crime in their communities; the need for more supportive and respectful community service workers; and disengagement from school.

This report sets out recommendations from face to face consultations with around 3000 children and young people who were socially excluded. In the consultations with Aboriginal children and young people, Aboriginal and non Aboriginal children and young people experiencing homelessness,

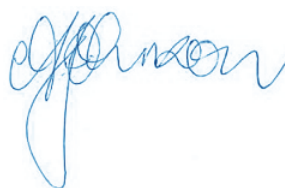
detention, or living in out of home care, continued to tell us that their key recommendation was that they needed to be provided with information about the decisions that were being made about them, and further, that they should have the chance to give their views on such decisions. This key recommendation was common in all settings, in all regions, from all cultures.

Across all consultations, children and young people spoke about their life goals and desires to achieve many things. They had practical and concrete ideas for the types of supports that would help them overcome barriers and fulfil these aspirations.

ACYP welcomes the positive steps already being taken by the NSW Government to address many of the concerns raised by children and young people, through inclusion of youth homelessness in the Premier's Priorities, addressing the issues of young people in regional NSW, service reform in Their Futures Matter, to better organise information for children and young people and the establishment of the office of the Advocate for Children and Young People.

Although as children and young people have told us much more work is needed to systematise the voices and respect for children and young across the service system.

I can hardly express the depth of my gratitude to the children and young people who bravely, honestly and constructively gave us their suggestions and recommendations to improve the lives of children and young people in NSW.



Andrew Johnson

Advocate for Children and Young People

overview

The 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, wellbeing and voice of all children and young people aged 0-24 years in NSW, with a special focus on the needs of those who are vulnerable or disadvantaged.

An important part of the mandate of ACYP, as outlined in the enabling legislation, is to give priority to the interests and needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people.

Since its commencement in January 2015, ACYP has heard from more than 18,000 children and young people on a wide array of topics and in a variety of ways, including through face to face consultations, online polling and citizens' juries. In accordance with our mandate, we strive to ensure that all of our consultations involve participants from a broad range of backgrounds and lifestyles, including children and young people who are Aboriginal, culturally and linguistically diverse, LGBTIQ+, living with disability and experiencing poverty.

Given that broad scale consultations do not always capture children and young people from a full range of life experiences, ACYP also conducts more targeted consultations to ensure that the voices of socially excluded young people are included in our work. We have held focus groups in settings such as Juvenile Justice Centres, residential and other out of home care services, homelessness services, low socio-economic status areas and we have heard from children and young people on topics such as discrimination, violence and support services.

It is important to remember when we are dealing with socially excluded children and young people that a significant proportion of this population are living with disability. For example, those in detention and living in out-of-home care have much higher rates of disability than the rest of the population and children with disability are four times more likely to be victim of violence.

We are currently undertaking a round of consultations addressing the specific needs for children and young people with disability.

To date, ACYP has heard from almost 3,000 children and young people who may be vulnerable, disadvantaged or otherwise socially excluded, which we have defined to include:

- **children and young people living in low socio-economic status areas**
- **children and young people in out of home care**
- **children and young people experiencing homelessness**
- **children and young people in the juvenile justice system**
- **Aboriginal children and young people**

This report is based on the views and experiences of those children, which were gathered through the following consultations:

What is and is not working well for socially excluded children and young people:

To develop the State's first Strategic Plan for Children and Young People, ACYP consulted with over 4,000 children and young people across the State in 2015 about what was and was not working well for them. More than a quarter of participants were from the cohorts outlined on page 5.

The supports needed before and after juvenile detention:

Between July 2017 and May 2018, ACYP visited all juvenile justice centres in NSW and heard from nearly 150 children.

How the homelessness service system can be improved:

ACYP held consultations in October and November 2016 with 60 young people in Specialist Homelessness Services in urban and regional areas across NSW about their experiences of homelessness and their recommendations for improved housing service delivery. ACYP then invited 40 children and young people from Specialist Homelessness Services in regional areas to our office in Sydney for Youth Week in April 2017 to hold further discussions about their needs.

How to prevent and address violence against children and young people:

In June and July 2017 ACYP held consultations with approximately 200 children and young people in seven schools across NSW about violence against children and young people and how to address it.

What makes Aboriginal children and young people feel welcome and supported in a variety of settings:

Since 2015, ACYP has consulted with over 1,500 Aboriginal children and young people on a variety of topics, including what makes them feel welcome and unwelcome; what advice they would give to adults who want to consult with children and young people; what was and was not working in their communities; and what they would like us to know about learning at school.

How to reform the service system for children and young people living in a low socio-economic area of regional NSW:

In 2016, ACYP consulted with approximately 160 children and young people living in a particular area to help inform local service reform. They reported on what was needed to improve the lives of children and young people in their community.

How children and young people who may be socially excluded conceptualise community:

In June 2016 ACYP consulted with over 100 children and young people aged 10-18 years from a variety of backgrounds about the meaning of 'community' and what makes them feel welcome and connected.

What needs to happen to improve the experiences of children and young people in care:

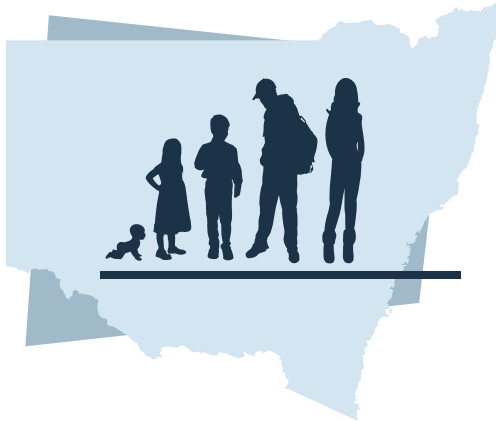
In August 2018, ACYP consulted with 40 children and young people with a lived care experience. They put forward recommendations on what is needed to improve the experiences of young people in the out of home care system.

2,324,426

children and young people aged 0-24 in NSW

5%

identify as Aboriginal



references

http://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/1

<https://public.tableau.com/profile/facs.statistics#!/vizhome/Improvingthelivesofchildrenandyoungpeople/Dashboard4>

<https://www.nsw.gov.au/improving-nsw/premiers-priorities/reducing-youth-homelessness/>

http://www.juvenile.justice.nsw.gov.au/Pages/Juvenile%20Justice/aboutdjjj/statistics_custody.aspx#AdmissiontoJuvenileJusticeCentres

<http://www.justicehealth.nsw.gov.au/publications/2015YPICHSReportwebreadyversion.PDF>



18,780

children and young people in out-of-home care

38%

identify as Aboriginal

18,936

young people aged 15-24 years helped by specialist homelessness services in NSW

60%

have been in out-of-home care

50%+

have mental health conditions



286

average daily number of young people in custody

47%

identify as Aboriginal

83.3%

children and young people in juvenile detention who met the threshold criteria for at least one psychological disorder

children and young people covered a wide range of issues in the consultations: the detailed finding and recommendations are organised under key themes below



voice



education



**Aboriginal children
and young people
and culture**



employment



**housing and
homelessness**



**violence against
children and
young people**



transport



**mental health
and substance
abuse**



**supportive
workers and
services**



**accessible
programs and
activities**



justice



**built
environment**

recommendations

Having heard from almost **3,000** socially excluded children and young people, ACYP recommends:



voice

recommendations from children and young people

- That children and young people are listened to and taken seriously when decisions are being made that affect their individual lives and the lives of all children and young people in NSW.
- That children and young people are able to give their views and these views are given serious consideration when government and NGO services become involved in their lives.
- That children and young people are provided accessible information about how to access programs and services to assist them.
- That those that work with children and young people have more training in how to understand what children and young people are going through and how to include their voices in decision making.

recommendations from ACYP

- That all frontline workers are provided with training in child rights and respectful engagement with children and young people.
- Make it easier for children and young people to find and contact services that already exist through the use of one number.
- That a review is conducted, similar to the research commissioned in the United Kingdom by the Office of the Children's Commissioner, to take an audit of how and when children and young people are engaged in the decisions made about them in out of home care in NSW.
- That Child and Youth Inspectors are trained to review the capacity and effectiveness of services to engage responsively and respectfully with children and young people.
- That a toll free phone and text line is established for children and young people to seek information to help them navigate the Government service system, connect with supports and ask questions about their rights.
- That a review is undertaken of: reportable conduct and complaints made by children and young people in NSW, and that the complaints system for children and young people is strengthened, drawing on the collective strengths of the Ombudsman, the Children's Guardian and the Advocate for Children and Young People.
- In matters before the Children's Court, the views of children are recorded in their own words and provided to Magistrates.



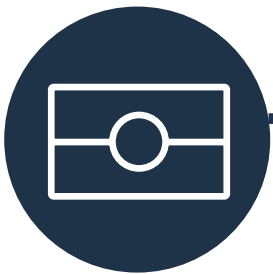
education

recommendations from children and young people

- That increased life skills programs are delivered in schools and through support programs to prepare children and young people for independent living and adulthood.
- That the Government reviews its suspension and expulsion policies and procedures with a view to reducing the maximum length of time for which a student can be suspended; expanding the coverage of and establishing new suspension centres and introducing other types of in-school alternatives to suspension; and linking behaviour management strategies with the provision of learning support.

recommendations from ACYP

- That the Department of Education and the Department of Justice consider implementing a program similar to Victoria's Education Justice Initiative to prevent disengagement and facilitate re-entry to school for young people in conflict with the law.
- That the Department of Education and the Department of Family and Community Services further collaborate to ensure that children and young people in out of home care are identified and connected with appropriate school-based support and that those who have become disengaged from education are connected back to school.
- That a review is conducted of the opportunities to enhance student voice in all elements of their education.



Aboriginal children and young people and culture

recommendations from children and young people

- That there are further opportunities to learn about and participate in Aboriginal culture throughout the state.
- That services targetting Aboriginal children and young people are designed and delivered by Aboriginal people and through Aboriginal organisations.

recommendations from ACYP

- That further work is done to examine the factors contributing to the early contact and non-diversion of Aboriginal children and young people in the criminal justice system.
- That additional programs and policies are developed to acknowledge and address the racism and discrimination experienced by Aboriginal children and young people.
- That Aboriginal owned and controlled organisations are further resourced to provide services to Aboriginal children and young people.
- Empower Aboriginal communities to have self-determination over child protection and safety matters.



employment

recommendations from children and young people

- That children and young people in conflict with the law and those accessing support services due to homelessness or other disadvantage are connected with opportunities to obtain work experience, certifications and life skills training.
- That the Department of Education considers introducing further opportunities for work experience throughout the secondary school years.

recommendations from ACYP

- That a roaming careers and services fair is established to provide information to children and young people across the state about the full range of jobs, vocations, careers and training programs that are available to them.



housing and homelessness

recommendations from children and young people

- That children and young people accessing assistance through Specialist Homelessness Services have an opportunity to remain at refuges longer than three months to allow them to achieve stability.
- That there is increased availability of services to children and young people after hours and on weekends (e.g. 24/7 drop-in youth service centres in Sydney and regional hubs).
- That there is greater support for young people to navigate the rental market and ensure they are prepared for independent living.
- That community awareness of youth homelessness and its impacts on young lives is raised.
- Improvements made to the Link2home service to ensure children and young people feel respected and supported, including less wait times.

recommendations from ACYP

- Greater investment in long term supported accommodation for children and young people.
- That the NSW Government develop an improved information strategy to ensure that children and young people know where to get help if they are at risk of homelessness.
- That an expert, multi-agency panel is convened for children and young people who 'overstay' in Specialist Homelessness Services beyond the short term to seek their input and develop accommodation plans in their best interests, including the option to remain in the SHS for longer than three months to allow them to achieve stability.



violence against children and young people

recommendations from children and young people

- That there are increased youth-specific services available to children and young people affected by violence including specific services for girls and boys.
- That age-appropriate information about where to seek help with violence is developed and distributed to children and young people in primary and secondary schools and in youth services.
- That the NSW Government explore the option of safe houses for children and young people experiencing violence.
- Campaign to raise awareness about violence against children.
- Children and young people want to be asked what they would like to happen and to develop a plan together with the intervening adult.
- Free parenting courses should be available to families
- Free anger management courses made available to parents and guardians.

recommendations from ACYP

- That the key recommendations made by children and young people are further developed and actioned, ensuring that young people are involved in the design, implementation and monitoring.
- That an independent children's advocate is placed within each Joint Investigation Response Team (JIRT) to ensure the best interest of the child are represented within the process of investigating serious child protection matters.



transport

recommendations from children and young people

- That mechanisms are put in place to ensure vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people have the means to travel safely to and from accommodation, activities and services (e.g. through the provision of travel vouchers, the development of remote Opal card top-up tools or the introduction of local youth buses).
- That there are provisions for socially excluded young people to obtain their drivers licence, including reducing the costs associated with learning how to drive, expanding learn-to-drive programs and providing insurance concessions for Specialist Homelessness Services cars that allow young people to use them for driving practice.

recommendations from ACYP

- That driver licensing programs are resourced to provide comprehensive end-to-end support for vulnerable or disadvantaged children and young people, particularly those in rural and regional areas, to obtain their driver licences.
- That transit officers receive training on how to promote the best interests of children and young people who may be homeless or at risk of harm, including through implementation of the Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places.
- That transit officers and Police are further encouraged to use warnings and cautions as an alternative to transport fines and criminal charges.
- That children and young people who are in out of home care or are involved with Specialist Homelessness Services are identified within the Revenue NSW fines system for purposes of having their fines waived.



mental health and substance abuse

recommendations from children and young people

- That the Government further invest in mental health services, detoxification and rehabilitation facilities and programs specifically for children and young people, especially those in regional areas.
- That refuges are resourced to provide comprehensive and specialist assistance to children and young people with complex mental health and substances abuse issues.
- That emergency mental health services are made available to see children and young people urgently where they are at high risk of disengaging due to long waiting periods.
- Children and young people should have access to information and online resources about recognising signs and symptoms of mental health issues, how to support a friend, when and where to seek help and how services protect privacy and confidentiality.
- Information about services and helpseeking should be actively promoted inside and outside of schools, including through posters located in toilets and around public transport hubs via television and radio ads and by social media.

recommendations from ACYP

- That the Government further invest in mental health services, detoxification and rehabilitation facilities and programs specifically for children and young people, especially those in regional areas.



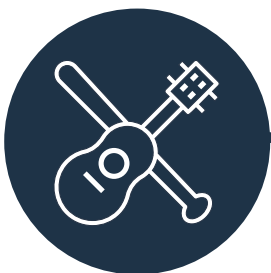
supportive workers and services

recommendations from children and young people

- That there is increased awareness of support services available to children and young people using social media, print advertisements and through schools.
- That frontline workers receive further training and support to promote respectful service provision to children and young people.
- A youth-friendly, one-stop-shop for online information about local youth services, facilities and activities should be developed and promoted across the state.
- Services for children and young people should be centrally located (and where possible, co-located), have extended opening hours at times when young people are able to attend, and support young people to travel to and from appointments.

recommendations from ACYP

- That, where possible, services targeted to Aboriginal children and young people are delivered through Aboriginal owned and controlled organisations.
- That exit interviews are introduced to examine the ongoing support needs of children and young people leaving care.
- That early childhood services are resourced to provide further opportunities for early identification and intervention for children and young people with disability.



accessible programs and activities

recommendations from children and young people

- That further free or low cost cultural, sporting and creative activities specifically for children and young people are made available on weekends and during school holidays in venues that are accessible and well connected to transport options.
- That services targeting children and young people are conveniently located, open at times when young people are able to attend and linked with transport support.
- Opportunities should be created and promoted for children and young people to volunteer in their communities.

recommendations from ACYP

- That extended hours Youth Services Hubs are established in multiple regional locations to provide children and young people with opportunities to participate in activities; connect with peers; seek health, education and employment information and connect with support services.



justice

recommendations from children and young people

- That Juvenile Justice NSW continue to enhance its transition planning for children and young people exiting Juvenile Justice Centres.
- That referral pathways are improved to connect young people involved in Juvenile Justice with community-based programs (e.g. education and employment programs, as well as cultural programs for Aboriginal children and young people)

recommendations from ACYP

- That all care and protection and criminal proceedings involving children and young people are heard by specialist children's magistrates.
- That the Youth Koori Court is fully funded and expanded across the state to allow culturally appropriate and supported case management of Aboriginal young people in conflict with the law.
- That investigation is made into the introduction of Aboriginal owned and controlled rehabilitation healing centres.
- That the minimum age of criminal responsibility is raised and that underage children and young people who come into conflict with the law are connected with support services to address their underlying needs.
- That exit interviews are introduced to examine the ongoing support needs of children and young people leaving Juvenile Justice Centres.



built environment

recommendations from children and young people

- That there is greater inclusion of children and young people in the design of parks, sporting facilities and other open spaces in their communities.

recommendations from ACYP

- That the My Metropolis app is used to promote greater inclusion of children and young people in the design of parks, sporting facilities and other open spaces in their communities.

methodology

All consultations were conducted face to face in small focus group settings. Questions varied across consultations. They included:

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

What makes you feel welcome and not welcome in your communities?

What should happen in your communities to stop violence against children and young people?

What supports would have helped you not enter the Juvenile Justice system?

What supports do you need after you are released from custody?

What are the main priorities for children and young people in care?

A complete list of consultation questions is included in Appendix 1.

detailed findings



voice

Like adults, children and young people desire to have their voices heard in all aspects of the decisions being made about their lives. This includes their individual circumstances (such as where they want to live if their family breaks down) as well as systemic issues affecting all children and young people in NSW.

“A good society values the opinions of young people, even if they are inexperienced.”

“Adults to treat children with respect, all children should have the right of opinion, their opinion should be taken with respect and seriousness.”

Not having an opportunity to contribute to the making of decisions that affect their lives is something that is often raised by young people; and was a common theme that emerged during the consultations with socially excluded children and young people.

“Not being heard or listened to. Not having a say.”

In the majority of consultations with young people experiencing homelessness, children and young people reported feeling

“disrespected” and “invisible” by workers, services and the broader system. One young woman, who had been experiencing homelessness since 14 years of age, expressed frustration at never having been asked what would help her:

“I’m 20 now and this is the first time I’ve ever done this.”

Similarly, during consultations for the Plan, socially excluded young people expressed a strong sentiment that they are not being listened to and did not know what was happening to them.

“I wish they could be honest and just tell me what’s going on.”

Some young people in care reported that their workers did not listen to them and what they wanted. They spoke about wanting more rights in care, including the right to choose where they stay.

“Putting kids in the back of a car driving them away and not telling them where they’re going until they hop out of the car. We need information we need to know what’s going on.”

“A massive thing about my life in care is that I wasn’t always listened to by my caseworkers and carers and stuff so I think that’s it’s really trying to make sure that kids are listened to, what they’re saying, and taken seriously. Because people would just dismiss us all the time and be like ‘oh she’s okay’ when something’s obviously wrong.”

Children and young people said they want adults to talk with them about what it is they want to happen and work out a plan together.

“Instead of immediately jumping to get them out of that situation, I guess we need a plan...but it can be really destructive to them, if they immediately get taken away from their families. You need to discuss it with them, and what they want. Talk about their needs, I guess.”

In many instances, they discussed feeling confused about what was happening when the Police or the Department of Family and Community Services became involved in their situation, and talked about wanting more information as well as a dedicated person they could talk to throughout the process for clarification, support and advocacy. They also called for children and young people to be engaged in the development of an action

plan to address violence against them, rather than having interventions imposed upon their families without their views being taken into account.

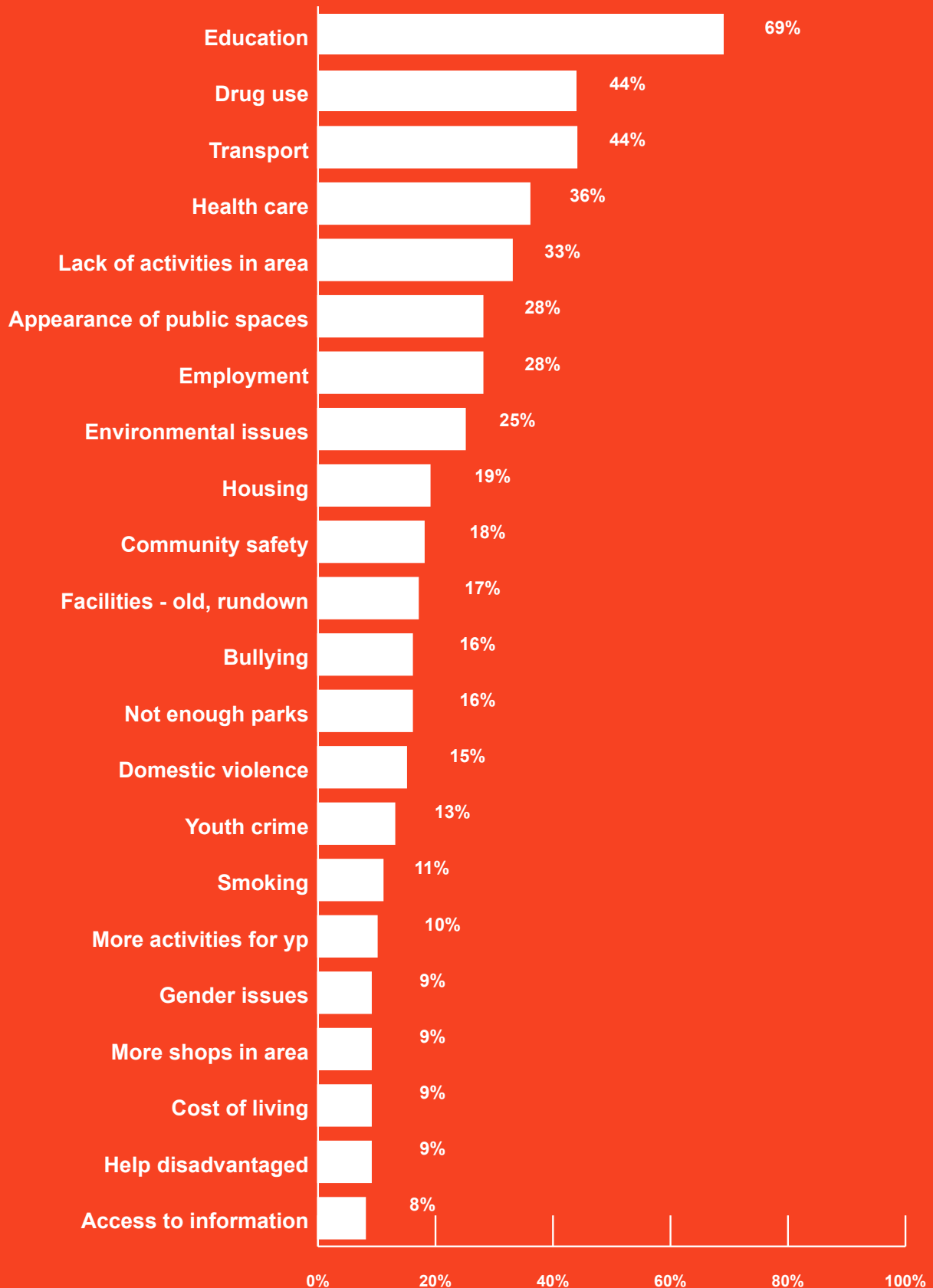
In all consultations, children and young people experiencing social exclusion said that they wanted to be treated with respect and listened to. They are often going through extremely difficult circumstances and are highly vulnerable. Children and young people reported that they therefore need greater and real connections with their workers. They need their workers to be open and honest with them and explain things clearly to them in simple terms. This includes what is happening to them; what they are able to have a say in and what they cannot have a say in. Even when young people’s wishes cannot be met; young people reported that they are okay with this, as long as it is explained to them.

“Honesty within the processes of their caseworker roles of what they can and can do is important. They should not give false hope or down grade the truth just to ‘spare the child’s emotions’.”

“Explain things better. Instead of using big words that some people our ages don’t understand.”

Figure 1

What is not working well for socially excluded children and young people?



Note: Based on consultations for the Strategic Plan for Children and Young People. N=1,104 children and young people.



education

In many of ACYP's consultations, we ask children and young people what is working well for them, what is not working well for them and what the Government should be prioritising. Education is consistently the top response to all three of these questions (See Figures 1, 2 and 3).

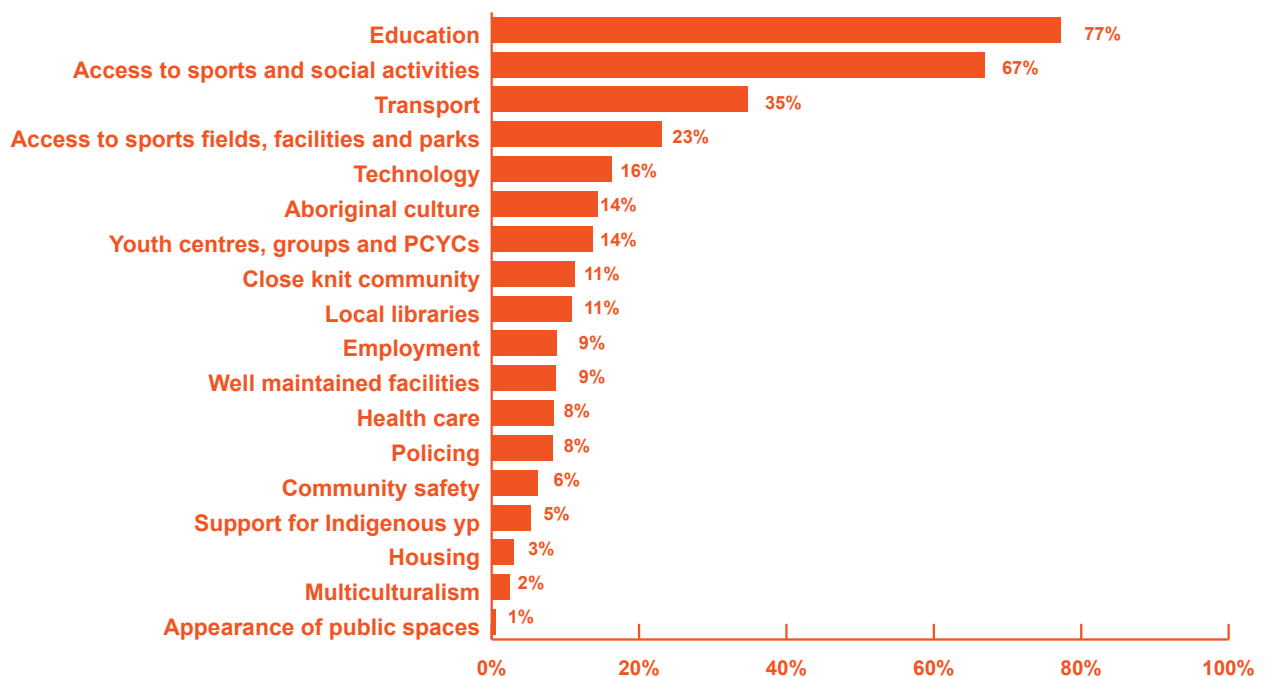
During the consultations for the development of the Plan, socially excluded children and young people reported that the following aspects of education were working well for them: distance education; school sport; nice

and helpful teachers; good subject choices; homework centres; tutors and mentors and other programs.

Aspects of education that were reported as not working well for them included bullying; work being too hard with not enough support; some teachers treating all students as the same when some students cannot learn at the same pace as others; too much homework; and not having the same opportunities as young people attending non-government schools.

Figure 2

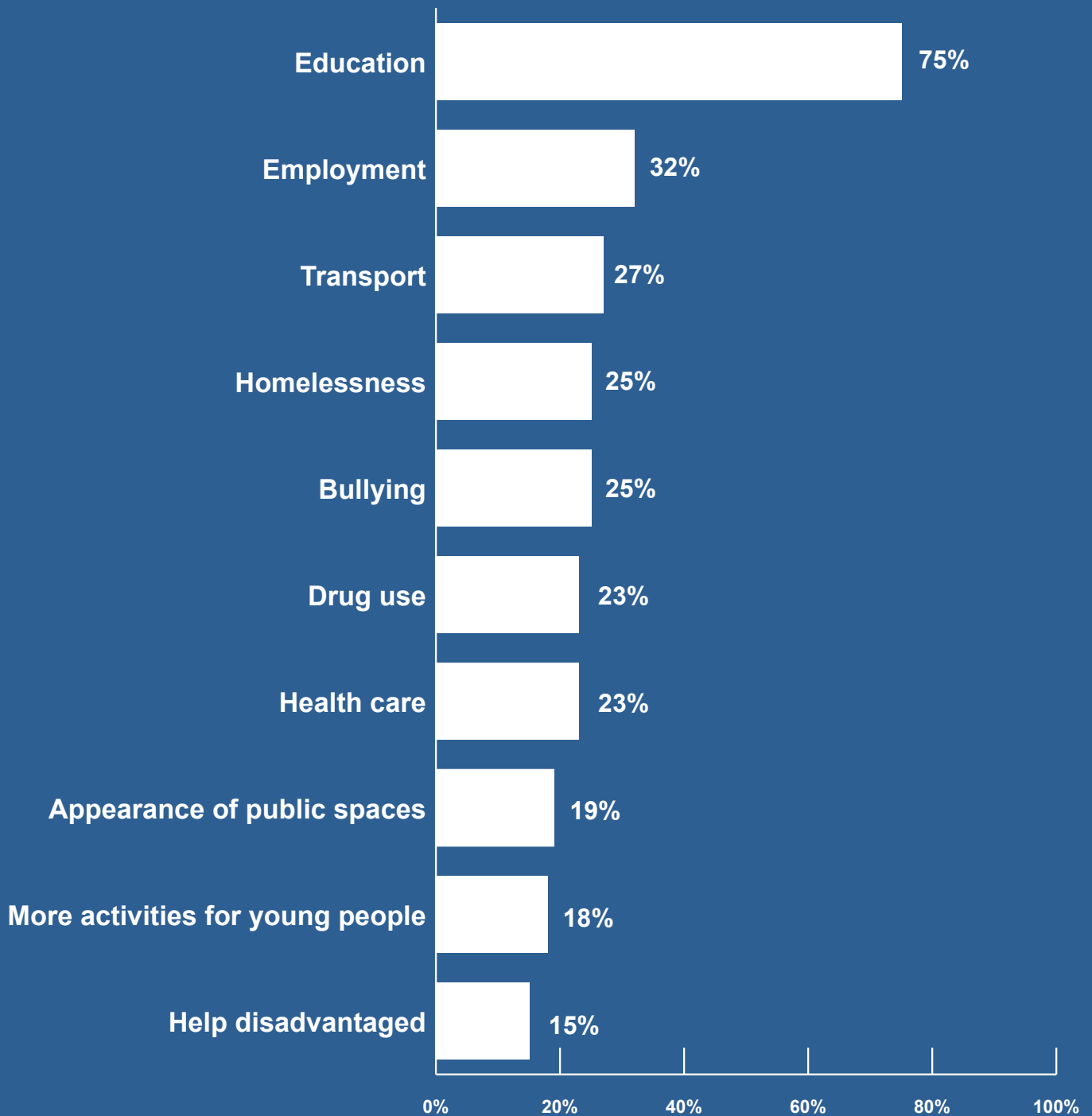
What is working well for socially excluded children and young people?



Note: Based on consultations for the Strategic Plan for Children and Young People. N=1,104 children and young people.

Figure 3

What should the NSW Government focus on to improve the lives of children and young people?

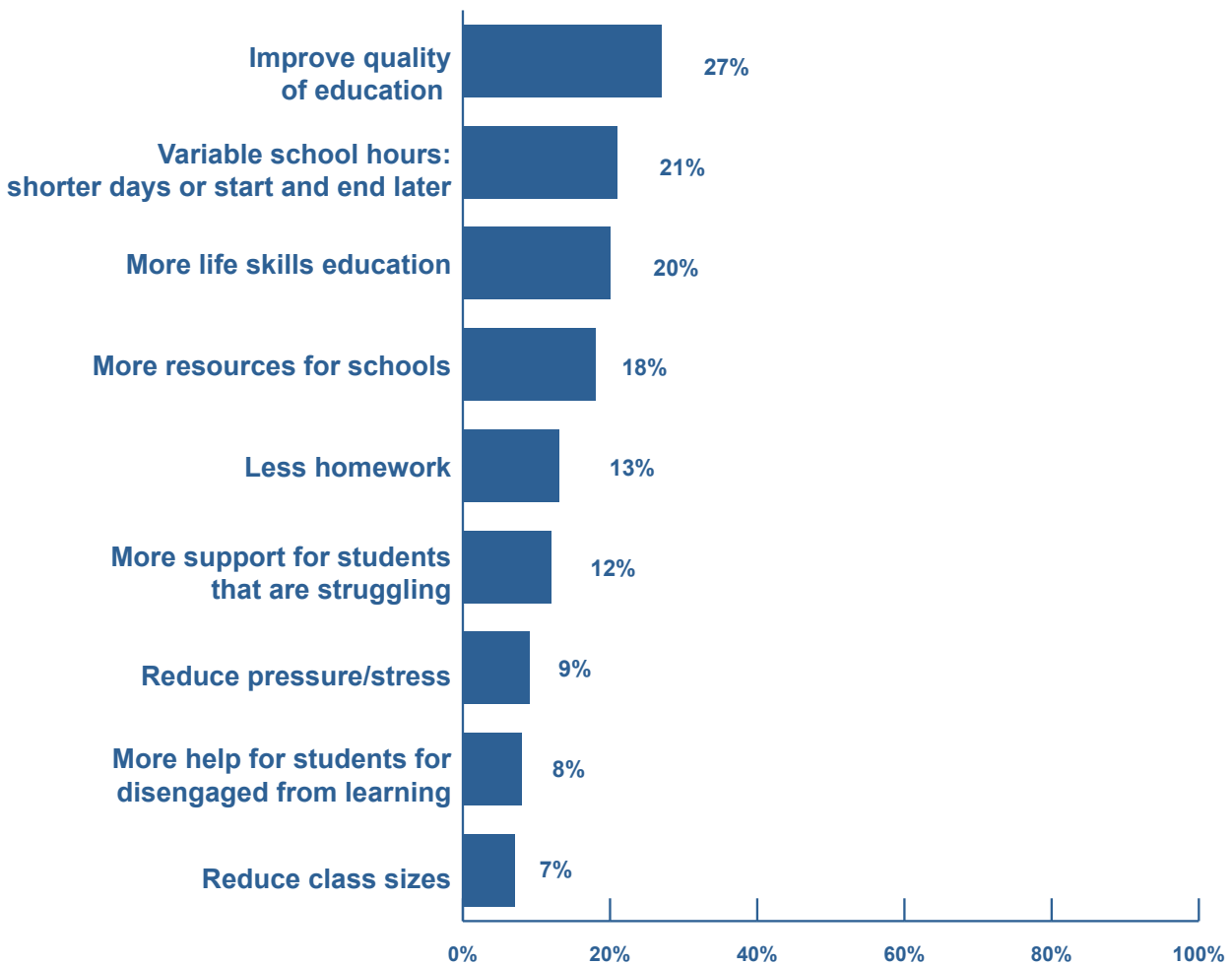


Note: Based on consultations for the Strategic Plan for Children and Young People. N=1,104 children and young people.

During the consultations for the development of the Plan, socially excluded children and young people had many suggestions for what could be done to improve education for them. These are shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4

What should the NSW Government focus on to improve the lives of children and young people: Detailed findings for Education



Note: Based on consultations for the Strategic Plan for Children and Young People. N=1,104 children and young people.

As shown in Figure 4, the most common things children and young people asked for were better teaching and education; varied school hours to suit their life circumstances and life skills education. Participants further reported that more support is needed in mainstream schools for disadvantaged students. They said that they had become disengaged from their school because their schools were not equipped to deal with them, catering only for “ordinary” students. Some young people in these consultations spoke about disadvantaged students getting into trouble from some teachers for not being able to buy the materials needed for class.

More than one quarter of young people reported that they would like more life skills education at school. Specifically, young people spoke about learning things at school that are not needed in life; that they want to learn about **“how the world works”** and things needed for the future **“like taxes and careers”**



A consistent theme was disengagement from school. The overwhelming majority of participants thought that schools should do more to support vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people to keep up with what was being taught.

“Extra teaching support in class for children who can’t keep up.”

Many of the young people in Juvenile Justice Centres reported that they had been disengaged from school for several years and that this had contributed to their offending.

“Yea, we’re not at the school, you know, that’s when we getting bored. We sitting around with nothing to do, we may as well do this...next thing you know, we’re in here [detention].”

There were a variety of reasons for their non-attendance. While some chose not to attend because they felt school was not engaging or not relevant to their interests or future careers, nearly all expressed the desire to go to school but felt that there were barriers to their participation.

Some young people said that they found school too difficult, and that they could not keep up with the lessons, which made them feel “stupid”. Many said that their difficulties with learning or concentration had contributed to their behaviour issues in class, and most of the young people reported receiving detentions, suspensions and expulsions.

“You know this person’s not good at this, this person’s not good at that, why do you give us all the same test? Everyone has their own way at being smart.”

“School made me feel stupid, straight up. I came last in every subject, the test and stuff, it’s trying to make you know that you’re stupid.”

“Teachers need to look at you more as a person than a number.”

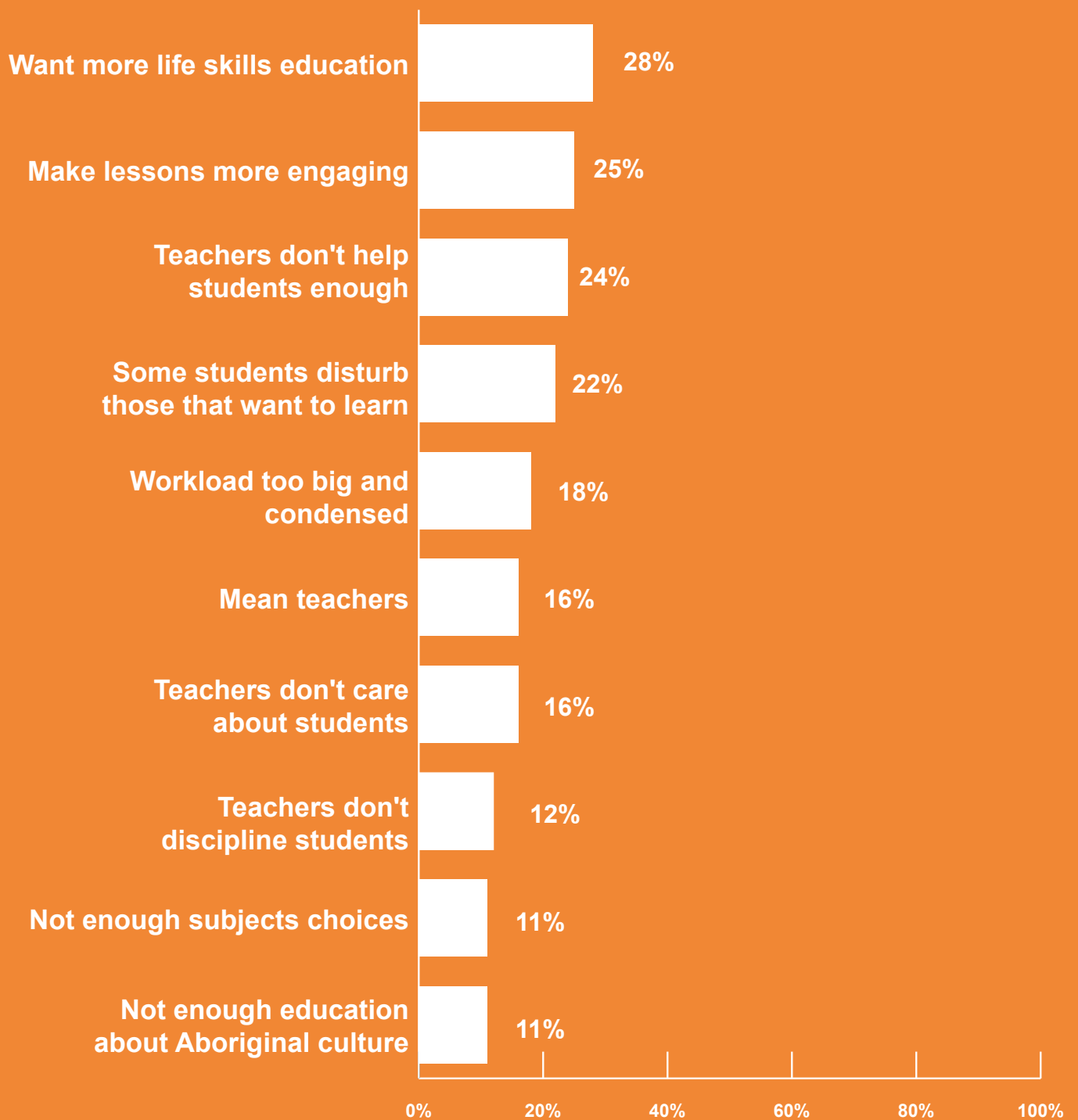
“Most of these young fellas need an education, they’re only 14, 15. There’s not even that much education there for them, you know they getting suspended from school nearly every day of the week. They get suspended when they come back from a suspension, they getting suspended again. It’s terrible and it should stop.”

“You’re not at school cos you’ve been suspended, and you’re going in town and [the police] think you’re up to something suss. ‘Why are you in town for, it’s a school day’ and I go, ‘I’m suspended’.”

During ACYP’s consultations with approximately 500 Aboriginal children and young people in 2017, participants were asked what they would like us to know about their learning in school. Consistent with the consultations for the Plan, Figure 5 shows that more than one quarter of young people reported that they would like more life skills education at school. Specifically, young people spoke about learning things at school that are not needed in life; that they want to learn about “how the world works” and things needed for the future “like taxes and careers”; they want learn basics in English and Maths including percentages “so that it can be used when shopping”; how to buy a house and how to vote.

Figure 5

What would you like us to know about learning at school?



Note: Based on Nations of Origin consultations (2017) with 505 young people

Similar comments were raised by young people in out of home care:

“Being able to know how to budget and banking cards, licensing and ID cards.”

“Proper resources and teachings around the responsibilities of becoming an adult and how to be stable after care.”

“More life skills be taught, cooking skills and basic living skills.”

Figure 5 also shows that one quarter of participants from 2017 consultations with Aboriginal children and young people (24.9%), mentioned that they would like lessons to be more engaging. In particular, they spoke about wanting more practical classes; for teachers to make learning more fun and to incorporate new things into their daily teaching methods.

Just under one quarter of young people in this consultation felt that schools could do more to help students in class. They would like teachers to spend more time explaining things; to help students more so they understand concepts; and to be more supportive. Young people discussed that not all students are on the same level and that some teachers do not stop to provide extra support to students who need it.

Consultations with young people in Juvenile Justice Centres and those experiencing homelessness yielded similar findings. Young people in Juvenile Justice Centres reported that mainstream school was not best suited to their needs. They stated that large class sizes were a barrier to them receiving the extra support they require. In addition, during consultations with young people experiencing homelessness it was reported that some schools did not understand how their experience of homelessness was impacting on their ability to learn. One young person expressed the following:

“Schools are a safe place for most kids, but they need to understand, work with and support young people with challenging behaviours better.”

Across all consultations, socially excluded young people said that schools should be more aware of the different learning abilities and needs within the classroom. They suggested that if this diversity was better recognised, and teachers were better equipped to teach according to the learning style and ability of each student, students may be less likely to become disengaged from mainstream school.

Linked to this, many of the young people in Juvenile Justice Centres reported that the schools within these centres were working well for them. They generally reported that having smaller class sizes and teachers who understood and supported their needs allowed them to achieve accomplishments that they had not previously thought possible.

Children and young people experiencing homelessness also felt there are opportunities for schools to better support homeless young people or those at risk of homelessness. In addition to one-on-one support with school counsellors and other school staff, they suggested that information should be provided to students about the issue of youth homelessness and the support services available in the local area. It was suggested that the issue be discussed in PDHPE class from Year 9 and Link2Home cards should be distributed in school. In the words of one young man:

“Lots of kids are being kicked out (of home) from my school, so knowing more about where to go and what to do would be really helpful.”

“if we get suspended, we shouldn’t be staying home, instead of keeping us out of school they should be in a single class with a single teacher.”



Young people in nearly every Juvenile Justice Centre raised the issue of long suspensions (up to 20 days), and reported that it is often during a long suspension that they get into trouble with police, as they typically lack supervision and constructive activities during this time. Large periods of time away from school also cause young people to fall further behind, so that when they return to school, they are not able to follow along and end up misbehaving and being disciplined again. The young people we heard from told us that the cycle of back-to-back suspensions frequently repeats until a student is expelled or drops out.

“Nearly every day, every time I went to school, I get suspended for 20 days, go back get another 20 days, just be suspended.”

Young people reported that alternatives to missing out on education would be more helpful as opposed to being forced to having nothing to do for long periods of time. They called for in-school or out-of-school alternatives to suspension to maintain their connection to education, as well as greater one-on-one support to address their learning needs.

“If we get suspended, we shouldn’t be staying home, instead of keeping us out of school they should be in a single class with a single teacher.”

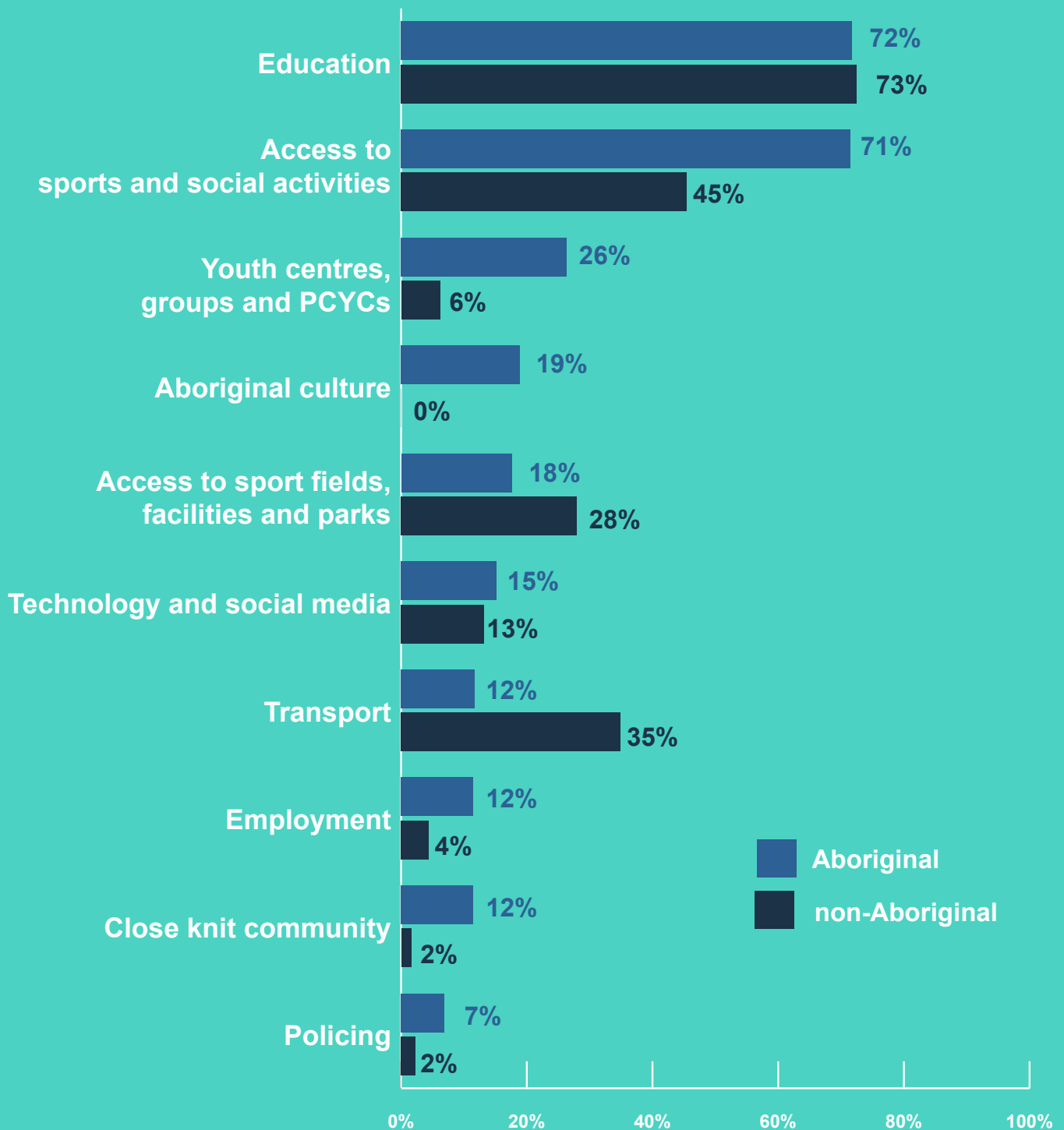
Consistent with the findings from the 2017 consultations with Aboriginal children and young people outlined above, all of the socially excluded children and young people we heard from felt that they were not sufficiently equipped with the skills needed for life as an adult. Areas specifically mentioned included: paying bills and taxes; household chores including washing and cleaning;

cooking; how to write a resume and prepare for a job interview; managing finances, real estate agents and landlords; how to read and understand the fine print in contracts; the practical steps to get into university, TAFE or employment and general time management. This is particularly crucial for children and young people who transition to independent living at an early age, especially those who have experienced the breakdown of their family or care placement.

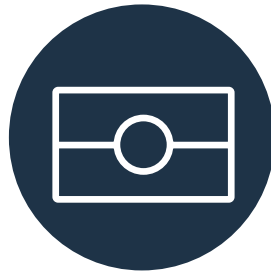
Across all consultations, socially excluded children and young people called for greater availability, understanding and support from school counsellors and other staff to help them address issues occurring outside of school, such as family violence and mental health problems. This came up very strongly in consultations about homelessness and violence, with children and young people recommending compulsory education in schools about the type of help that is available for students who are experiencing violence. Intervening early to protect children and young people from violence is key to preventing a number of poor outcomes, including long-term involvement with the criminal justice system.

Figure 6

What's working well for children and young people: Aboriginal versus non-Aboriginal children and young people



Note: Based on consultations for the Strategic Plan for Children and Young People. N=1,104 children and young people.



Aboriginal children and young people and culture

Aboriginal children and young people were markedly more likely than non-Aboriginal children and young people to report that youth centres and groups are working well for them. More Aboriginal children and young people also reported that access to sports and social activities was working well for them than non-Aboriginal children and young people did.

In addition, almost one in five Aboriginal children and young people discussed that Aboriginal culture was working well for them. This included NAIDOC week, having Welcome to Country, optional Aboriginal studies at school, elders teaching children and young people, cultural dance and community languages.

Across all consultations with Aboriginal children and young people, the importance of maintaining a connection to culture was consistently raised:

“To have a culture at the heart of who we are, Aboriginal culture being rich in our lives and being able to feel a part of community.”

“For Aboriginal kids to have a culture plan that just doesn’t say their name on it and to have more leaving care staff and more support.”

“Be able to have a cultural support service that provides mentoring for Aboriginal people.”

Many Aboriginal young people in out of home care and in detention expressed a preference for Aboriginal workers, noting that they could connect more easily with someone who shared their cultural background and life experiences.

“[It would be good to have] an Aboriginal worker who can help us get a job, you know, and who knows what we’ve been through and how it is for us.”

“[It’s important to have an Aboriginal worker] because we’ll be able to connect with them better, be able to speak up more.”

Figure 6 shows the differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children and young people to the question of what was working well for them for the consultations for the development of the Plan. As shown, Aboriginal culture was raised as working well. Other aspects linked to culture that were more commonly raised among Aboriginal children and young people were access to sporting activities; youth centres, especially PCYCs; and being part of a close-knit community.

When Aboriginal children and young people spoke about aspects of culture not working well for them, issues raised included Aboriginal language being lost; Elders being disrespected and children being removed from their families.

One Aboriginal young person in detention spoke about the devastating effects of being removed from their family:

“I’ve been with 11 different carers you know what I mean....all I wanted when I was a young kid was to be with my family... it really took a part of me, you know and it really affected my life you know what I mean, young Aboriginal kids getting taken away from their family, it’s not right you know what I mean, you know, just saying sorry and stuff like that there, that’s not gonna help us.... cos it’s affected our lives.... growing up the way we grew up we never had them, you know what I mean, them opportunities.”

Some young people in detention spoke about having access to culture whilst in custody. They spoke about how those opportunities had been able to prompt them on a path towards rehabilitation. Aboriginal young people said that practicing culture provides them with a sense of purpose and direction in life. Young people wished they had greater opportunities to engage in ongoing teachings of culture upon release within their community. They spoke of the need to reconnect with Elders, learn their traditional language and dance, and overall ways of life and being, such as creating artefacts and learning how to live off the land.

“that’s one thing I want to get across to the government, taking young Aboriginal kids out of their homes, it affects us, you know what I mean, and probably half the reasons why we are in here, you know, I know that’s one of the reasons why I’m in here.”

racism and discrimination

Across all consultations with Aboriginal children and young people, racism and discrimination were raised as big issues. In a 2016 consultation with over 200 Aboriginal young people, participants were asked what makes them feel unwelcome in their communities. Their responses are shown in Figure 7.

Almost 60% of young people in this consultation raised discrimination, racism and youth stereotypes as issues in their communities causing them to feel unwelcome. Some reported that peer groups at school are defined by race. Others spoke about homophobia, sexism and racist teachers at school. Some young people also spoke about stereotypes of shopkeepers that young people are criminals.

Just over half of the young people said that the behaviour and attitude of other people can make them feel unwelcome. This included the person's tone of voice; being spoken down to; being excluded from activities and events; and simply negative attitudes towards young people.

One third of young people spoke about feeling unwelcome at school, including some adults not caring about them; some teachers speaking rudely to them and not being allowed in certain places of the school.

Just under one-quarter of young people (24%) reported that experiencing bullying and conflict causes them to feel unwelcome in their communities. In particular, they spoke about being laughed at; getting dirty looks and cyber bullying.

Another issue raised in consultations with Aboriginal young people was the feeling that they were being stopped or monitored by some police as a result of their race.

“Yeah coppers and security guards at shopping centres... We want to walk in here, we want to spend our money that we earned, that we were given. We getting tracked, we getting followed, you know.”

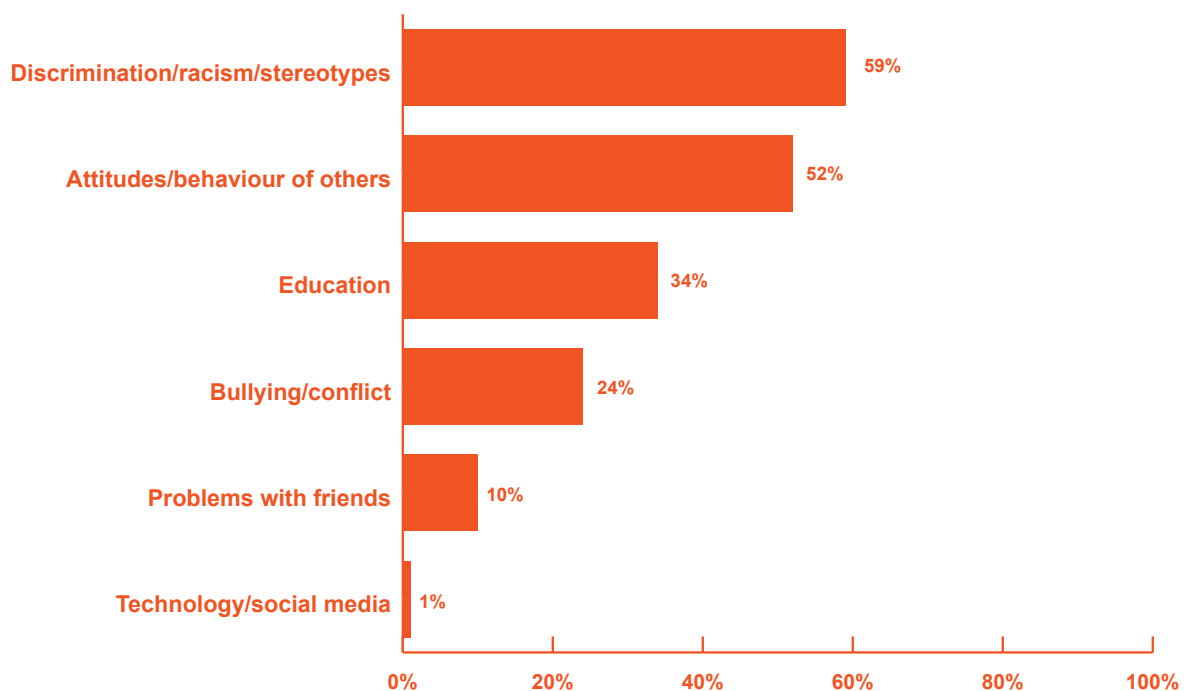


Figure 8

What is not working well for young people in relation to employment: Findings from the consultations for the Plan

What is not working well: Employment

Not enough employment opportunities for disadvantaged young people

Lack of opportunities for work placements/experience

Lack of jobs in rural and regional areas

Hard to get work with no prior experience

Youth wage is too low

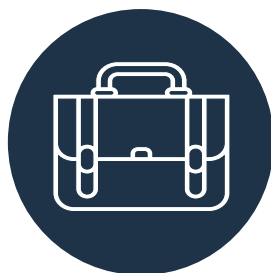
Hard to find casual and part time employment

Not enough apprenticeships for young people

Not enough assistance/support for young people to find jobs

Young people not aware of their rights with regards to employment

Job application process is difficult



employment

Socially excluded children and young people across all settings reported feeling worried about their employment prospects. Figure 8 shows the major employment concerns raised by children and young people during the consultations for the Plan.

Concern about being able to find work was particularly pertinent to early school leavers. One young man experiencing homelessness had disengaged from school in Year 9. He was unable to pursue further education and subsequently unable to gain employment. He spoke about having extremely “limited opportunities for life.”

Similarly, young people in Juvenile Justice Centres reported that what they want most when they leave custody is to get a job. The career interests of the young people consulted with included cooking, carpentry, construction, bricklaying, glazing and engineering. Many said that they wanted to work in order to support themselves and their families, as well as to have structure in their days and a constructive way to spend their time. They further discussed that not having a job or anything else to do was a significant contributor to their offending, and that access to employment would reduce the likelihood of reoffending.

“Kids should be able to go straight out and get straight into jobs you know or like have something lined up, I don’t know, work experience, cos they don’t go out and look for that themselves if they get the help in here to do that when they get out it would be good.”

For socially excluded young people living in rural areas finding work in small towns is also challenging. In addition, the cost of public transport makes it more difficult for these young people to travel to find work in other towns.

Young people reported that a major barrier to employment is the unrealistic expectations of employers regarding previous work experience and qualifications for entry level jobs. In the words of some young people: “certificates are expensive, I can’t afford to get a bunch of certificates” and “how can I get experience if I can’t get a job to gain the experience?”

Young people asked for greater opportunities to find employment and assistance in doing so. They asked for help with resume writing, support to engage in job readiness courses as well as having jobs ready for them to go into. For example, some young people in custody suggested there should be incentives for employers to hire young people leaving custody.

“Towards your release, they should plan out a lot of things for you. Like a job, or schooling over there they just release ya and say good luck. That’s why boys just come back. But if they say, aw your gonna go do this job, go to this school and gonna do that and the boys are excited to get out, it would change a lot.”

Some young people also suggested they should be able to engage in full time employment before completing Year 10. Others reported that there should be more work experience opportunities in the school system and from an earlier age. This would assist young people in gaining the necessary skills to obtain employment by the time they finish school.

As part of the service reform consultations in a low socio-economic area, young people were asked if anything worried them about leaving school and getting a job. As described above, lack of employment opportunities in their area was the most common concern. They also reported that employers typically require experienced workers, making it difficult for young people to gain the experience in the first place. Young people were also worried about not getting a good job and low wages, making it difficult to afford housing and transportation.

Some young people in this consultation expressed concern that their past experiences would limit their future opportunities. They raised issues such as poor education and bad school reports, bad experiences in previous employment and receiving bad references as a result and having a bad history and being labelled negatively, even if they had changed.

Some young people were worried that mental health problems and disabilities would be barriers to them gaining employment. Others were concerned that their physical appearance, such as tattoos and piercings, would preclude them from being employed.



homelessness and housing

Across consultations with socially excluded children and young people, many spoke about not having a safe home to live in, not having enough beds in medium to long-term accommodation and not having access to crisis accommodation suited to their needs. They also raised that due to bed shortages, they are often offered accommodation that is too far away for them to travel to. Further issues raised by young people were not being allowed to have their family or friends visit them at the supported accommodation and the three month tenure in crisis refuges being too short, leaving young people with nowhere to live at the end of the period.

Children and young people experiencing homelessness have additional issues around a lack of available support after normal business hours and over the weekend. They recalled experiences of being kicked out of home in the middle of the night and not having or knowing a service to help with accommodation. They also discussed the trauma of having to re-tell their story each time they approached a new service or refuge; and not having access to basic services, as forms require that they have a permanent address.

The availability and accessibility of food is a major issue for children and young people experiencing homelessness. Many reported

that healthy food is very expensive and out of their reach. Others spoke about feeling unwell after being given food that was well past the expiration date by services they were accessing. When asked about what was not working well for them, young people experiencing homelessness spoke about not having enough to eat, skipping meals.

Socially excluded children and young people consistently raised the issue of requiring assistance with housing. Many young people ACYP consulted with had spent time living on the streets, usually after being kicked out of home. They suggested that young people doing it tough should receive assistance to secure housing and live independently. Likewise, children and young people in Specialist Homelessness Services called for greater support for young people to enter and navigate the rental market.

In every homelessness consultation, children and young people reported needing support much earlier than they received it. They spoke about remaining in unsafe situations as a consequence of not knowing where to go for help or what services were available in their area. When services and supports are provided early, before a child or young person disengages from school, and before complete family breakdown occurs, there is enormous potential to positively change the trajectory of a young life.

It was also reported that the support system is complicated and children and young people are experiencing significant challenges in trying to navigate it. Children and young people discussed needing concurrent supports across various domains (i.e. health, education, housing, employment, and financial), and the difficulties in obtaining the right support at the right time.

In several of the consultations with children and young people experiencing homelessness, participants reported feeling worried and anxious about where they were going to go after their initial three months had expired in a youth refuge. Young people who were working towards their goals, had secured employment, and were making concerted efforts to get their lives back on track, spoke of feeling very concerned about facing another perilous and uncertain housing situation.

Young people experiencing homelessness also discussed their experiences with trying to get emergency accommodation. In most of these consultations children and young people reported long wait times and felt the initial assessment process was onerous. Some children and young people understood that services can be limited in their capacity to provide support, given the shortage of physical accommodation available across the State. However they expressed a desire to be provided with some form of support. One young man said:

“A hot meal, just something, I don’t want to be told there isn’t anything they can do for me”.

When accommodation was organised, some young people raised issues about the safety of some accommodation they were placed

in. In the words of two young people aged 15 and 16 years:

“I had drunk people banging on my door.”

“My experiences of TA (temporary accommodation) were similar to that of a crack den.”

In many of the consultations, young people reported the need to be able to access a safe space after hours where it wasn’t necessary to book a bed in advance. In several of the Sydney-based consultations, young people reported that a 24 hour/7 day a week drop-in centre was needed with crisis beds, social workers, food, counsellors and internet facilities.

Another issue raised by socially excluded children and young people was not knowing that housing and other support services exist. Children and young people engaged with Specialist Homelessness Services reported that the type of information they most needed when they first became homeless included access to information about their rights; the numbers they could call for help; details about any eligibility criteria for services; and information to help them confirm that services are safe and welcoming for children and young people. They also sought information about services or places where they could get a meal, talk to a support worker and charge their mobile phones or top up credit. Some were looking for information about particular forms of support, such as services for families, young people with disability, LGBTQIA+ young people or Aboriginal young people. Many talked about wanting information about the process of accessing homelessness support, from the initial stages of experiencing homelessness to eventually finding long-term accommodation.

“More information about the actual process of accessing homelessness support - from the initial stages of experiencing homelessness, young people want to know how to navigate the system, step by step”

When asked how and where this type of information should be provided, young people suggested a website that children, young people, schools and services can use and share. They also recommended posters at bus stops, train stations and tunnels, radio and television advertisements from the perspective of a young person, and social media campaigns across Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

For those young people living independently or within a supported living arrangement, there were many concerns about the cost of the private rental market. Young people reported difficulties in covering their basic needs after paying housing costs:

“After rent is taken out, which is highly subsidised, I have no money left for the week.”

Children and young people experiencing homelessness reported couch surfing, sleeping in parks, sand dunes and on the streets. Others spoke about the hierarchy of sleeping rough and which areas were more or less safe to sleep:

“Sleeping on trains isn’t safe...but it’s safer than on the streets.”

“Buses aren’t safe either, drivers are powerless, but they’re more safe than trains.”

Across several consultations with children and young people experiencing homelessness, concerns were raised about being offered accommodation that is too far away for them to travel to. One young woman spoke of her experience of being placed a long distance from her community and school as this was the closest available placement at the time. She reported commuting two hours every morning to school and three to four hours home as the availability of public transport in the afternoon was much less frequent.

During the consultations for the Plan, young people experiencing homelessness also raised the issue of having to re-tell their story each time they approached a new service or refuge. Young people discussed the trauma involved with this and were of the view that their records should be shared among services to avoid them having to relive their experiences regularly.

results of focus groups with 202 children and young people

Top 5 responses when asked what forms violence against children can take:



physical abuse

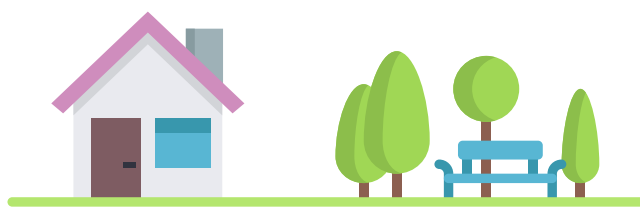


emotional abuse



sexual abuse

Top responses when asked where violence against children takes place:



private places + public places



everywhere

Top responses when asked how to end violence against children and young people:



awareness campaign



safe houses



support services



violence against children and young people

Violence against children and young people was reported as a major issue across the many different consultations.

Young people experiencing homelessness often reported not feeling safe in their family home and that violence was one of the primary drivers of their being homeless. Similar experiences were described by young people in Juvenile Justice Centres, with several reporting having had spent time living on the streets, usually after being kicked out of home.

“If my dad didn’t kick me out, I wouldn’t have been in here [detention] I reckon.”

“I was always on the streets from about 6 years old. All I knew was crime.”

In more general consultations, when asked to describe what violence means, participants articulated that violence against children is physical, emotional and sexual in nature.

“It can come under as sexual, emotional, physical, mental and it can really impact someone’s life as they go through it.”

“It’s life changing, there’s no peace. It can wreck your childhood. It’s very scary, it’s harmful, you can feel very afraid.”

Children and young people highlighted that violence can take place anywhere, and discussed violence in the home, at school, on public transport, in the workplace, in sports, at parties, in public places and online.

“It can pretty much happen anywhere at any time.”

“We were actually debating over what and where so much so that we just concluded that it could happen anywhere.”

Children and young people in low socio-economic areas also spoke about feeling unsafe in public spaces due to violent and anti-social behaviour. They said that lack of security and police presence contributes to feeling unsafe.

The experience of violence is a major issue for socially excluded children and young people. This is often a precursor to young people becoming homeless, entering the out of home care system and often the juvenile justice system.

Children and young people discussed wanting greater recognition by support workers in relation to the violence and abuse they experience in their homes and greater support to overcome the trauma endured.

In consultations with young people experiencing homelessness, young people spoke favourably of workers who acknowledged that:

“domestic violence is against young people, not just physical violence between mum and dad.”

However, in some of experiences shared by children and young people, it was reported that they felt disrespected by some of the workers in the service system. Young people reported that services place too much emphasis on family restoration, even in situations where significant violence was reported and known to authorities.

Other young people reported wanting more family support programs, which allowed children and young people to remain connected to their family, while ensuring their safety. It was reported this could be face-to-face or online. Similarly, respite services were seen as an important option for children and young people that may help to prevent long-term family break down. Young people spoke about the need for safe options to go to escape violence in the home. They frequently raised that the lack of youth-specific violence related services is an issue; with some young people reporting experiences of significant violence and abuse in adult settings.

One young man stated “when I stayed I would fight with my parents which never ended well.” He would leave home during

tough times, and found it challenging to always be reliant on a mate for a place to crash. He reported “feeling really bad when I can’t give anything to my mates when I crash at their place.”

He felt that it was important for young people to remain connected with their families, and for them to feel safe in doing so. Respite services, in conjunction with family support programs provide families with greater opportunities to work through their grievances and increase the likelihood that children and young people can remain in the family home.

Given that violence has consistently emerged as a concern in consultations across a variety of topics and locations, ACYP conducted targeted consultations on the issue of violence in June and July 2017. Children and young people that took part in these consultations offered many recommendations to address violence, including the introduction of free courses to help parents develop non-violent ways of managing anger and mandatory check-ups for parents with a history of substance abuse or violence.

“We believe that you know how to parent from your parents. And if there’s violence in the family... you need to educate the parents on how to parent.”

“Stricter laws for parents who have been known for abuse of substances and they end up having regular check-ins with doctors and child services to check that everything is okay.”

They also offered practical suggestions for assisting children and young people in need. These included the provision of safe houses; safety alert systems for those in emergency

situations; education for students about what constitutes violence, the rights of children and young people experiencing violence, and the supports that are available; and an anonymous helpline specifically for children and young people experiencing violence.

“We could have more safe houses.... somewhere where you can talk to people...and you can go there and it’s kind of like child care but you can go freely.”

Children and young people also spoke about the need to educate both adults and young people about different kinds of violence. Many said that this should be compulsory in schools and should teach young people to identify violence, who to talk to and how to report. It was suggested that this could be done through the PDHPE curriculum.

“...Education on violence, making it a compulsory program for primary and high school. That’s to identify what violence is in general, because most people don’t exactly know what it is, especially emotional violence. It’s not talked about.”

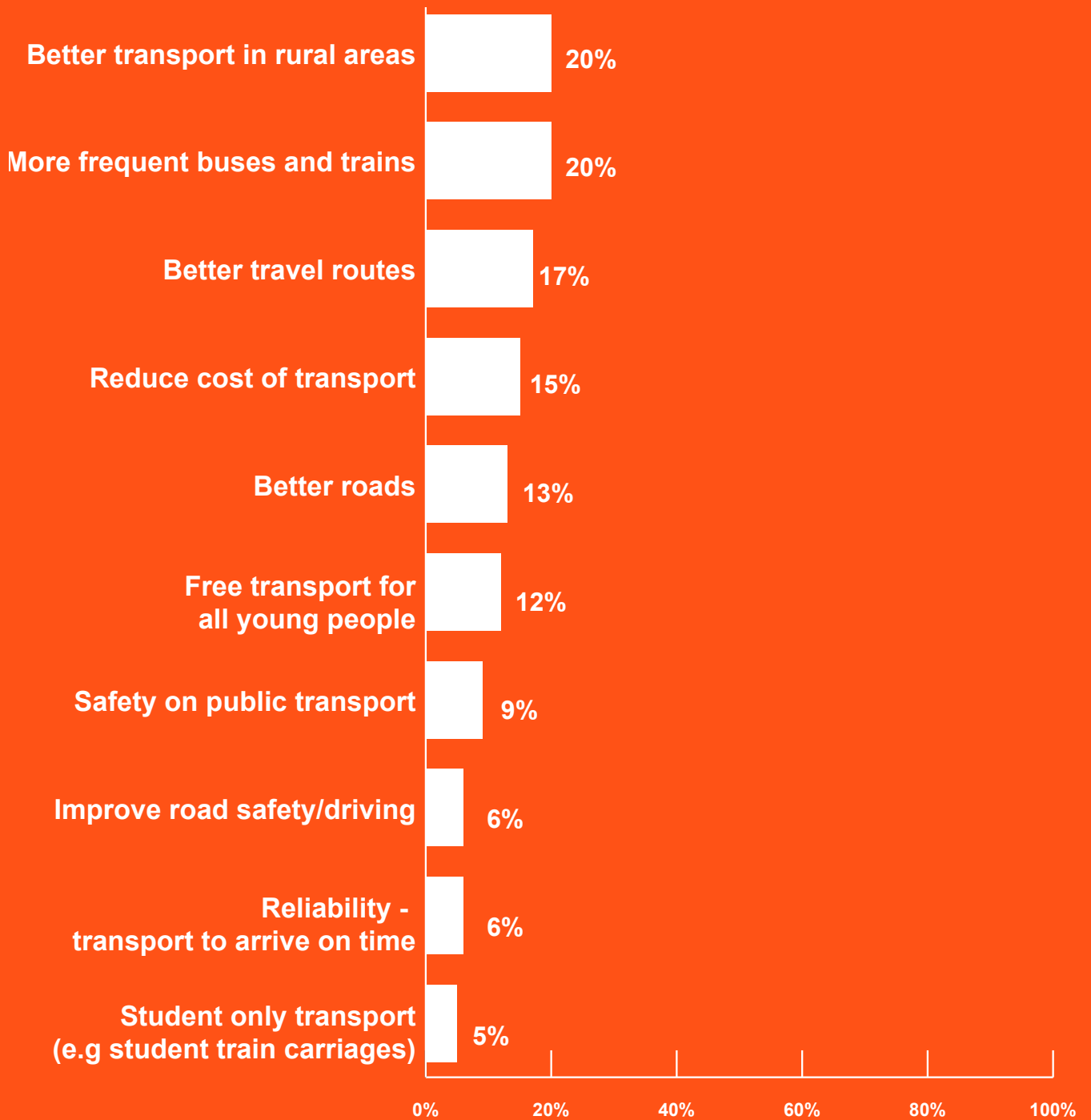
Children and young people discussed the need for all children to be educated about their right to be free from violence.

“I know that kids in out of home care they get this charter of rights book... I think that all kids should be exposed to that and they should learn that they have the right to feel safe, that they have the right to not be harmed.”

“Instead of focusing on education they should also focus on what’s happening outside of school. Like what the kids are getting up to, if they have drugs problems, gun use, family problems, domestic violence and stuff like that. They should try to solve it within school cos that’s where boys spend most their time.”

Figure 9

What should the NSW Government focus on to improve the lives of children and young people: Detailed findings for Transport



Note: Based on consultations for the Strategic Plan for Children and Young People. N=1,104 children and young people.



transport

For many children and young people, access to public transport allows them to be connected. It gets them to and from school and other study, to extra-curricular activities and enables them to socialise on the weekend.

However, for socially excluded children and young people, especially those in rural and regional areas, transport is a considerable challenge. Many children and young people face significant barriers to getting a driver licence and cannot afford public transport fares, particularly in non-urban areas where there are fewer travel options and concessions. As a result, they may have limited access to employment opportunities, educational programs and health and support services. They may also be more likely to come into conflict with the law for unlicensed driving or fare evasion.

Figure 9 shows what socially excluded children and young people reported what they would like improved in relation to transport during the consultations for the Plan. One in five children and young people asked for better transport in rural areas (20.0%) and more frequent buses and trains (19.7%).

During consultations with young people in Juvenile Justice Centres, they spoke about receiving fines when using public transport and having no means to pay the fines and being arrested as a result of altercations with transit officers or police.

“If you don’t have money you end up jumping a train, get in trouble, get arrested, end up in here [custody].”

“I’m pretty sure I got like 3 grand worth of fines, cos I haven’t been able to pay em, so they just went basically up and up and up.”

Similar issues were raised by children and young people experiencing homelessness. Fare evasion on public transport was reported as an issue. With very limited income or no income at all, children and young people are sometimes having to travel without valid tickets. They also reported receiving fines for sleeping on trains, buses and station platforms because it was the only safe place they could find given their circumstances. Children and young people experiencing homelessness in regional NSW spoke about being kicked out of home late at night without any money and having to “hitch-hike”, “walk long distances in the dark” and “beg the bus driver for a free ride” to get to a friend or family member’s home or to crisis accommodation.

Socially excluded children and young people also expressed concerns about safety on public transport and were supportive of increased police or train guard presence on trains and stations. Some ideas given to increase their sense of safety were to have more police patrols on buses and trains, to have more security cameras and make student-only carriages on trains.

In order to prevent and divert young people from transport-related conflict with the law, children and young people suggested that travel vouchers could be provided to those in need. It was recommended that vouchers be made available in shops or services with extended trading hours. Suggestions varied based on what was available in their area; examples included Woolworths, 7-Eleven or police stations. Other young people felt that an Opal card that could be topped up remotely by homelessness services, caseworkers or the Bail Assistance Line would also be helpful.

Children and young people in Specialist Homeless Services reported that the costs associated with learning how to drive and getting a driver licence, including paying the written and practical tests and for lessons, were prohibitively expensive. For those living in rural areas, a lack of licence severely limits their ability to access work and education, especially on weekends or after hours. Young people said that the costs of getting a licence and maintaining a car are a major barrier to employment, including being able to get to job interviews and to work sites.

Young people in out of home care and experiencing homelessness also discussed that access to a sufficiently licensed driver in order to log the required 120 hours of supervised driving, including a minimum of 20 hours of night driving, is a significant barrier to getting their licence. Another reported barrier is access to an adequately insured car. Difficulties are magnified for young people in residential care and Specialist Homelessness Services.

“Driving we have to do 120 hours of learners we get 50 hours of free driving lessons but how are we suppose to do the other 70 hours when we can’t use the work cars or the resi workers personal cars?”

During consultations with homeless young people, it was suggested that these services should be able to teach them how to drive as part of their case management plans. For example, if specialist homelessness services were granted insurance concessions and could insure their cars for learner drivers, young people in refuges would have greater opportunities to gain their licence. Limited access to volunteer driver reimbursements for fuel and other expenses can also be a barrier to enabling community-based organisations to provide volunteer supervision for young drivers. Young people have also reported that they may not have 100 points of identification or have difficulty in obtaining it, which can be a barrier to meeting the requirements to obtain a driver licence.



mental health and substance abuse

Mental health concerns are a major issue for many socially excluded children and young people, as well as for children and young people more broadly. In our general consultations with children and young people, some of the needs they identified included more accessible information about mental health issues and services from a single, reliable source; opportunities to meet their school counsellors when they commence school; and greater privacy and confidentiality when seeking help. They noted that services should be conveniently located but should not have entry points that make it obvious to outsiders that they are seeking help, and they expressed a desire to seek initial information anonymously.

In consultations with socially excluded children and young people, depression, anxiety and trauma were reported most often. While young people had many positive experiences with mental health services, such as Headspace, others reported long wait times to access these services, particularly in regional areas. This is especially problematic for young people that require immediate treatment and also those in temporary or crisis accommodation. For young people requiring medication, cost can be an issue, particularly for young people experiencing homelessness.

Young people requiring drug and alcohol rehabilitation facilities also discussed problems with no youth specific facilities. These young people are forced to access adult facilities that do not cater to the needs of young people. Further, while they reported being committed to rehabilitation, they felt that facility policies are too strict in relation to smoking and as a result their treatment is terminated unfairly.

During the homelessness consultations, participants discussed their experiences of depression, anxiety, and trauma. Many young people reported being unable to work due to experiencing poor mental health. One young male spoke about being able to work for four years because he was:

“terrified of police, employers, anyone with authority.”

It was reported that Headspace offered a beneficial service to young people who didn't feel comfortable accessing a mainstream doctor. In some regions however, there are wait lists, which is problematic for children and young people who need more immediate treatment. In certain cases, particularly in crisis refuges, children and young people may not be engaged with a service long enough to wait for an appointment.

Other barriers and gaps often raised in consultations include the cost of travel to mental health services, availability of transport and the lack of mental health services available outside of business hours. This is especially the case for children and young people living in regional and remote areas.

Some children and young people also reported that mental health services frequently diagnose their behavioural issues as mental health issues and that in many cases they were offered medication. They reported feeling like there were not enough alternative approaches available. One young male reported,

“I feel like an alien cause I have to take these meds everyday”.

During consultations with young people experiencing homelessness, it was raised that too many young people with complex drug and alcohol and mental health needs are in homelessness services when they should be in rehabilitation services. Some expressed a strong desire to address their substance use, but reported significant barriers to accessing detox and rehabilitation facilities in NSW. They felt that facilities were designed to support adult populations, were unaware of the specific needs of children and young people and had long waiting lists. One young person who was able to access a detox facility told us that after leaving detox, he was refused help by some services due to his “high needs”.

Children and young people consulted with in the development of the Plan spoke favourably about the support available for those with

mental health problems, especially 24 hour support services and organisations such as Headspace and Beyond Blue. However, they also reported that they would like to see greater mental health awareness and support. While some spoke about the stigma associated with accessing support and feeling embarrassed; others discussed having open conversations about mental health in school contexts. Some young people discussed still not knowing what help is available. A common theme throughout the consultations was the need for more information about how they can help their friends with mental health concerns and how to recognise when their friends might be in need of mental health support.



supportive workers and services

Across all consultations with socially excluded children and young people, participants spoke about the need for greater support. They were clear about what they needed from workers and the system as a whole.

Across all ACYP consultations with socially excluded children and young people, supportive workers was consistently raised as of critical importance. Whether they were FACS caseworkers, NGO caseworkers or any other support service workers, children and young people spoke favourably of support workers, who “stuck their neck out”, “bent the rules” and went above and beyond their core responsibilities to meet the needs of the child or young person.

For example, during the consultations with young people in out of home care, young people discussed the lack of support after turning 18 years of age; lack of privacy; support workers not taking young people’s voices seriously; not being truthful to young people; not respecting young people’s culture and having multiple case workers with no continuity.

“We need more consistent caseworkers that stay with you for more than a few weeks or months. This would help as they would get to know you better and be able to help you properly.”

“Case workers not listening to our needs and wants to feel safe. Take us seriously”

“Need more support when a young person leaves care.”

“A better focus of transitioning to independent living.”

In the consultations for the Plan, young people in out of home care discussed the lack of assistance once they turn 16 years of age, due to no longer being classified as a ‘child’. Some young people discussed experiences of being in independent living at 16 years of age, making it impossible to complete their schooling (for example, no access to the internet to do assignments).

Young people in out of home care also expressed a strong sentiment that they are not being listened to and did not know what was happening to them:

“I wish they could be honest and just tell me what’s going on.”

Young people reported a desire for a greater and real connection with their workers.

“They need to sit down and listen to kids’ stories, their lives, before they can understand who the kid is properly.”

What makes a good caseworker

- ✓ Someone who respect, listens, and follows up on what is happening
- ✓ Does not makes promises that can not keep – be honest – not give false hope
- ✓ Goes out of their way - shows that they care
- ✓ Gets to know you – mutual trust
- ✓ Unbiased, friend, a person to talk to, energetic, show that they care
- ✓ Provides essential support to help you reach your full potential
- ✓ Does not pass judgment, acknowledge barriers
- ✓ Respect – who we are but not what the case file says
- ✓ Advocates for you and not just following the rules – individualised
- ✓ See you as a real person not just a file
- ✓ Eye contact - not read so much – do not focus on note pad
- ✓ Respect the person's culture
- ✓ Someone to talk to about your interests
- ✓ Should be match with the person – i.e. sporty case worker not paired up with a non-sporty young person
- ✓ Admit where they are wrong and admit when the young person is right
- ✓ Be honest and not sugar coating
- ✓ Be casual but professional
- ✓ Do not wear uniform when picking up at school – do not announce caseworker at reception
- ✓ More Aboriginal case workers for Aboriginal children
- ✓ Someone who is real with you

When things were working well for them they stated it was when a worker “breaks the rules” or goes the extra mile.

“I was in PCYC, they was picking me up every morning, taking me out, doing boxing, feeding, giving us food, it sort of kept me out trouble and off the streets a bit more.”

“My case workers worked hard to keep in contact with my biological mother- e.g. move to Sydney where she lived pay for her flights to visit us etc”

When it was reported that caseworkers were not working well, other issues raised were that workers are often too young in age and maturity.

“Don’t make promises you can’t keep”

When children and young people spoke about supportive and respectful workers, they referred to workers who would “drive me to appointments”, “call and remind me to take my medication”, “help me plan and set goals, and support me to reach them”. Children and young people spoke favourably of workers, who regularly checked in “to make sure I’m alive”, and who they felt truly listened, and who didn’t place unattainable expectations on them.

“Someone who cares about you and that remembers that while it is a job, it’s OUR life.”

Children and young people in Juvenile Justice Centres described a good worker as someone who is respectful and caring, able to listen and have a laugh or joke around with young people. They also reported that a good worker should have an understanding of the backgrounds and life circumstances of young people in custody; be motivating and supportive.

“Mine motivated me to get a job, I actually got a job.”

“Mine reminded me of my family, that was the good thing about mine.”

Some young people reported negative experiences of support workers within Government and non-government agencies. When children and young people spoke about unsupportive workers, “not being listened to” was often mentioned. In relation to this, one young woman stated that “if they listened to me and my brothers, I wouldn’t be here now”.

Some young people experiencing homelessness reported the difficulties they encounter due to the inflexibility of welfare workers, “if you miss an appointment with your welfare officer, your payment gets cut”. This was particularly relevant for young people in regional areas who have further distances to travel and limited transport options.

Children and young people experiencing homelessness reported mixed experiences of their engagement with government telephone services. Some children and young people spoke favourably about workers who “made a real effort to change their situation” by calling other services on their behalf, calling the child or young person back if the call was terminated and giving the young caller’s number out to homelessness services so they could call the young person directly. Children and young people viewed these as positive experiences, even in situations where accommodation wasn’t provided. Similarly when workers returned to the young person throughout the call and provided an update, even when there was no specific outcome to report, young people felt “less anxious”, “reassured” and “a little bit supported”.

Children and young people also reported wanting more regular contact with their support workers.

“It would be better, like not every day but more in the week, like if you see em three times a week just so, so they can help you get a house or a job or something, like if you don’t have a structure, you’re just going to collapse or go back to drugs and doing crime.”



accessible programs and activities

Socially excluded children and young people face significant barriers to accessing programs and activities. These activities are either too costly or young people's circumstances prevent them from engaging in them.

“There isn't a lot of opportunities for them to get out and do things without them paying a lot of money which most families can't afford.”

“Well, I would have rather do them [activities] everyday than not do them, because then it would have kept me occupied and something to do instead of mixing with the wrong people.”

In the consultations for the Plan, young people in out of home care reported that they were required to move around too much and therefore unable to engage in activities that other children and young people take for granted, such as taking part in sports of their choice, catching up with friends, family outings and going to the movies.

Young people in Juvenile Justice settings spoke about wanting more access to courses and free programs to occupy them. Specific activities mentioned were fishing, camps, sport and Aboriginal programs. Similarly, young people experiencing homelessness

reported feeling very socially isolated and a need for more positive safe places to go.

Across all consultations, vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people raised the issue of not having enough to do to keep them occupied and out of trouble.

“Activities, there should be activities that kids can participate in, its hard to expect kids to stay out of trouble when there is nothing for them to do.”

Socially excluded children and young people often expressed disappointment at not being able to participate in programs and activities that 'ordinary' children and young people take for granted.

Young people in Juvenile Justice Centres repeatedly raised that greater opportunities to participate in free sport and recreation activities would have been beneficial prior to entering juvenile justice and can be deterrents to engaging in criminal activity.

Other specific activities mentioned included art programs, excursions and trips away, swimming, rugby league, paintball and Duke of Edinburgh. Some young people reported that youth centres were accessible to them, but there were not enough activities offered by them. Others did not like that youth centre

activities ended in the afternoons and would like to see night activities offered, such as movie nights. Many young people spoke favourably of PCYC programs and activities.

“Good cops work at PCYC, they help us, they do boxing training with us. PCYC helps a lot, it helps us stay off the streets, get fit and that.”

A minority felt that they would like to access activities not offered by PCYC, as police involvement was a deterrent for some young people to engage with the service.

The need for more activities while in custody was also brought up by young people. They reported liking ‘morning programs’, getting up early and being active.

Young people in custody also would like these programs and activities to be available to them after their release to support their transition back into their communities. Rugby league, soccer, AFL, boxing and breakdancing were all noted as activities that would assist in the transition process.

Independent living skills programs were also noted as something that would be extremely valuable. Young people reported that these programs should include information about how to live on your own, how to cook and how to get a job.

Aboriginal children and young people spoke about a need to connect to Aboriginal culture outside of custody. They reported that this could occur through Aboriginal youth programs and cultural activities in the community.

Similarly, children and young people experiencing homelessness spoke favourably about services that offered fun activities and

social events that they would otherwise not be able to engage in. They also spoke positively about services that involved them in the decision-making processes and organisation of activities offered.

A few of the activities that were mentioned included: going to the movies, sailing, BBQ’s and going to the beach. One young woman reported that activities such as these “make me feel I am part of a family” with another reporting that it “takes away the depression for an hour or so”.

Some young people reported feeling very socially isolated and felt a need for more positive safe places for children and young people to go. This was particularly important for children and young people living in violent households.

“If there were services, I could at least socialise, instead of staring at the ceiling all day”.

The desire for access to more sport, recreation and social activities was also raised during consultations for the Plan and those for service reform in a low socio-economic area. In the latter, children and young people typically reported wanting improved skate parks in their areas and better places for young people to hang out. During consultations for the Plan, lack of access to activities was raised most frequently by children and young people living in rural and regional areas (30.9% in rural and regional NSW compared with 10.5% in Sydney). Specifically, children and young people talked about local areas not having enough activities to keep young people out of trouble; not enough sport available, especially for girls and at low cost; youth centres not being open late enough.



justice

Young people in custody raised several issues that were specific to their experiences of incarceration. These were around the educational and cultural programs available in detention; wanting to be connected to supports after their release; transitioning back to their communities and differing internal centre practices.

A majority of the young people we heard from in Juvenile Justice Centres reported that the schools within these centres were working well for them. They generally reported that having smaller class sizes and teachers who understood and supported their needs allowed them to achieve accomplishments that had not been possible in mainstream school.

They also spoke highly of the opportunities in detention to obtain a white card, gain certifications, complete Year 10, engage in TAFE courses and learn about Aboriginal culture. They felt that these opportunities were not as readily available in the community.

Young people in detention reported needing ongoing support once they leave custody to assist them to stay out of trouble. These supports include employment, housing, education, mental health, drug and alcohol and family support.

“We want help to try and get jobs and that on the outside, cos if we haven’t got it, the environment we just go back to, cos us three are from the same place, we just gonna end up back in crime cos we got no jobs offered and we don’t know where to start to get one.”

“Towards your release, they should plan out a lot of things for you, like a job, or schooling. And if the boys have a problem with their family they should advocate, or they should get different housing for them. If they have drug problems they should refer them to counsellors and that”

While participants understood that the juvenile justice system is intended to rehabilitate young people, some felt that juvenile detention merely serves to prepare young people for their eventual transition to adult jail. They requested there be more opportunity for rehabilitation and therapy so they didn’t have to come back into custody. Young people said that some programs were monotonous and the opportunity for therapy and rehabilitation was lacking.

“They need to sit down and listen to kid’s stories, their lives, before they can understand who the kid is properly.”

Young people in detention spoke specifically about wanting services and programs that would help address the underlying causes of their offending. It was identified by many that committing offences was a necessity in order to survive. As a result, they reported the need for access to services and programs that were tailored specifically to young people involved with the juvenile justice system that would assist them in ceasing to reoffend. Young people wanted opportunities both in and outside of custody to work on their rehabilitation and skill development. They felt that targeted programs specifically for young people involved in the juvenile justice system would be more beneficial than services and programs involving young people who had not experienced similar circumstances and backgrounds.

Transitioning young people back into the community was an area in which young people wanted greater support and attention. Young people in rural and regional areas generally felt that they received less support than young people in urban areas as there was more limited access to opportunities and services.

Young people spoke frequently about not being able to be released on bail as they did not have stable accommodation in the community. Limited spaces within youth refuges and other alternative housing services made it difficult for them to fulfil the requirements to meet bail.

Young people did not want to be released back into the same circumstances and risk factors which had led them to custody. They wanted to begin engaging with support services and networks while they were still in custody, and continue to work with the same services upon release to increase the likelihood of transitioning successfully into the community.



built environment

Socially excluded children and young people often talked about the built environment not working well for them. Some specific issues raised included housing redevelopments; disruption caused by construction in the local area; lack of youth centres, libraries, community centres and safe spaces in areas where there are many disadvantaged young people; and not enough foot paths, making it unsafe for children and young people to walk around.

Aboriginal children and young people in several consultations reported that “Aboriginal housing is not as good as white housing.” They also reported that in their communities trees were being taken down and there were no flowers or plants to make the area look nice.

Socially excluded children and young people often raised the desire for their communities and public spaces to be cleaned up. Specific issues discussed included abandoned buildings; the dumping and burning of rubbish, littering, vandalism and graffiti.

In some low socio-economic areas, children and young people spoke about problems caused by development in the area. They reported that housing redevelopments have resulted in families being displaced, resulting in a lost sense of belonging. Redevelopment had also displaced children and young people from their schools, which led to them feeling a lack of control and choice over their education.

appendix 1

consultation questions

This report is based on the voices of 2,922 socially excluded children and young people. Information about the specific consultations they participated in appears below.

Consultations for Strategic Plan for Children and Young People

- What is working well for children and young people in NSW?
- What is not working well for children and young people in NSW?
- What are the top three things you think the NSW Government should do to improve the lives of children and young people?
- What are the qualities of a good society for children and young people?

Responses based on a total of 1,104 children and young people aged 5 to 24 years. More than one-quarter (26.7%) were located in areas outside Sydney.

Consultations with young people in Juvenile Justice Centres

- What programs/services/supports did you need before you entered detention?
- What programs/services/supports do you need when you get out?

Responses based on 148 children and young people aged 10 to 21 years. Consultations were held in all six Juvenile Justice Centres in NSW; three of which are based in regional NSW.

Consultations with young people experiencing homelessness

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

- What is/is not working well in relation to Link2Home?

Responses based on 98 children and young people aged 13 to 24 years.

Consultations with children and young people about their conceptualisations of violence

- What does violence mean to you?
- Where are the locations that violence happens to children and young people?
- What should happen in your communities to stop violence against children and young people?

Responses based on 202 children and young people aged 10 to 18 years.

Consultations with Aboriginal young people at the PCYC Nations of Origin Tournaments 2016-2018

- What is working well for children and young people in NSW?
- What is not working well for children and young people in NSW?
- What are the top three things you think the NSW Government should do to improve the lives of children and young people?
- What makes you feel welcome/unwelcome in your communities?
- What would you like us to know about learning at school?
- What do you think are the best ways to stop racism in schools and in communities?

Responses based on 1,072 children and young people across the period 2016-2018. Young people that took part in the 2015 Nations of Origin consultations have been included in the Strategic Plan consultations tally.

Consultations on how children and young people conceptualise community

- What are the things that are working well in the communities that you are connected to?
- What are the things that are not working well in the communities that you are connected to?
- What are the things that make you feel welcome in a community?
- What are the things that do not make you feel welcome in a community?
- What are the most important things you need to feel like a part of a community you are connected to?
- Using one word, what does community mean to you?

Responses based on 100 children and young people aged 10-18 years.

Consultations with children and young people with a lived care experience

- What is working well for children and young people in care?
- What is not working well for children and young people in care?
- What are the main priorities for young people in care?
- What can workers do to assist young people to be prepared for adulthood and independent living?
- How well are young people in care able to access information and resources?

Responses based on 40 young people aged 14-24 years.

Consultations with young people about service reform in a low socio-economic area

- What is working well for children and young people in your area?
- What is not working well for children and young people in your area?
- What are your top three things that need to be focused on to improve the lives of children and young people in your area?
- What are your thoughts about going to high school? (Primary students only)
- Does anything worry you about finishing school and getting a job? (High school students only)
- What are the important things to you about where you live?

Responses based on 158 young people aged 10-18 years living in the Wyong area.



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