

Tasmania's Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy

Save the Children welcomes the Government's commitment to developing Tasmania's first long-term Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy and the level of ambition expressed in the Strategy discussion paper. We also celebrate the effort put into ensuring the voices of children, young people and families inform this process.

This brief submission focuses on the overarching vision for the Strategy, and the priorities in translating this vision into action. In drafting this, we have been guided by input from the children and young people we work with every day.

A unifying and ambitious vision for Tasmanian children and young people – making Tasmania the best place to grow up as a child in Australia

The development of a long-term Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy provides the opportunity for Government and community to build momentum around a shared vision for Tasmanian children and young people – one that is ambitious enough to truly stretch our imagination and actions beyond the current state.

With abundant community spirit and strengths, strong economic fundamentals and a pristine natural environment, Tasmania should be – and can be – the best place to grow up as a child and young person in Australia.

Save the Children's own vision statement, referenced in the discussion paper, provides both an ambitious goal for children, young people and the society they live in and the pathway to realising this vision and goal. Every child in Tasmania should survive into adulthood, be fully protected from harm of all kind, have their holistic development supported so that they can thrive, and be invited and able to fully participate in their communities and in decisions affecting their lives.

Achieving this vision requires putting children and young people's rights, interests, outcomes and priorities at the centre of our decisions and actions at every level – our policy settings, investments, partnerships, service delivery, advocacy and accountability frameworks. It requires all relevant services, and all other actors – across Government and the wider community – to be working coherently and intentionally towards this shared vision – a vision that Government has a vital leadership role to play in setting and catalysing action towards.

Centring children and young people in this way necessarily entails a holistic approach to child and youth wellbeing, which sees children and young people 'ecologically' in the context of their communities, as well as reflecting a child rights approach. As such it reflects both evidence and principle in informing system design.

What Tasmanian children and young people say

What might it look like for Tasmania to be the best place for a child to grow up in Australia?

It is clear that despite best efforts, some Tasmanian children continue to miss out on the basics, and that the system is not always meeting their needs. There are many funded services, but some children are missing out altogether or not getting the quality support they deserve.

Across February, we talked to nearly 80 children and young people in our Tasmanian programs, aged between 5 – 17 years, and sought their response to the following questions, to inform our response to Tasmania's Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy:

If you were in charge of Tasmania, what would you do to make it better for you and for all children and young people?
What do you think children and young people in Tasmania need to make things better?

In order, the top 10 issues raised by children and young people were:

1. Play and recreation
2. Education
3. Housing availability and/or cost
4. Support for individuals and families
5. Bullying, racism and violence
6. Poverty
7. Transport costs and availability
8. Environment
9. Food security and/or cost
10. Personal and community safety

This feedback can readily be grouped and mapped against the existing Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework domains:

More help for families, kids and young people

"Education for our parents."

"Help for families so that they have someone they can talk to about things."

"Make youth workers more accessible not just when they are seen to need one but beforehand."

"People to care about us."

"Support more people who understand or just someone to talk to and to have constantly. Many children do not have a person like this in their lives."

"I get constant support and encouragement and hope from my youth worker and this has been more beneficial than I can explain in words throughout my teenage years. "

"You need to keep helping me after I am 18 too."

Domain:
Tasmanian
children and
young people
are loved and
safe

More places to go for help with food if you don't have any at home

"Free food van for children to access healthy meals."

"Cheaper food and houses."

"That they all have access to healthy food."

Affordable housing for children and families

"More housing for people who can't buy one."

"Better shelters."

"I would make sure everyone has a house and a backyard to ride bikes."

"Dirt bikes and a house, and also money and food. Even old people don't have food."

Domain:
Tasmanian
children and
young people
have material
basics

More mental health services for children and adolescents

"Increased funding for mental health services for children and adolescents. And a mental health emergency department for faster access, assessment and connections with services."

More access to subsidised activities and events for families without enough money

"I would make 50% of everything in the shops and playcentres cost less to go into."

"Everything costs too much, and my Mum doesn't have money to pay for extra things, so I miss out unless my friends' parents take me and pay and then I feel bad."

Making school more fun and interesting, with support for essentials

"Different classes at school e.g. more coding and sport options."

"School is over policed."

"All children to have their own bag."

"All children to have their own lunch/free lunch at school."

Opportunities to have a say on the issues that affect them

"Have the people who make the rules understand what it's like to be a kid, it's different to how it used to be."

"To be able to talk to people that run the state and share our worries (so all kids feel safe)."

"I don't know if you would have the power to do all this."

More access to subsidised activities and events

"More festivals and events that don't cost money to get in to."

"Make sure that all kids have same access to everything so all kids get to play sport."

More age-appropriate parks and spaces

"Kids keep burning down houses and cars because they have nothing to do."

"Gagebrook has such a bland park and Bridgewater has a better park. If kids had something to do then they wouldn't get in so much trouble."

"All the parks are for little kids."

Better transport options

"More public buses so we can afford to get to the supermarket. "

"More buses out of Cygnet."

"Free parking at hospitals and swimming centre."

More respect, less bullying and racism

"Make Tasmania more multicultural where we are all happy and treat people well."

"An adult on school buses so children don't get bullied."

"Stop violence on kids."

"Make everyone friends."

Taking care of the environment

"I would make sure we look after the environment and look more into it and make changes."

"I would make sure we keep plenty of country and not make it all city."

"10 cent recycling needs to come to Tasmania."

Domain:
Tasmanian
children and
young people
are healthy

Domain:
Tasmanian
children and
young people
are learning

Domain:
Tasmanian
children and
young people
are participating

Domain:
Tasmanian
children and
young people
have a positive
sense of culture
and identity

Compared to the general population of children in Tasmania, the children quoted here are disproportionately likely to experience challenges in accessing the services and supports they should have.

They are from a range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds and live in both urban and rural settings. Their families may have experienced intergenerational unemployment and trauma, housing insecurity, low educational engagement, family violence, mental health and/or drug and alcohol abuse. Many experience poverty and material deprivation, and the imminent withdrawal of JobSeeker supplements and JobKeeper employment subsidies by the Federal Government will exacerbate the challenges.

But, like the incredible authors of the Imagination Declaration, these children and young people have the same aspirations as every Tasmanian child – to be happy, healthy, cared for, and for everyone to belong. They don't label themselves as disadvantaged, vulnerable, or marginalised – and neither should we.

The children and young people we work with are telling us that things need to change in both the way that the community treats children and their families, and the services they access and experience. Some of this requires new investment, but much can be achieved within the existing suite of activities listed in the discussion paper.

Practical ideas for change

To realise the potential of all Tasmanian children and young people, not just those that start and stay ahead, Save the Children encourages additional attention on:

- Investing in community infrastructure that is co-designed by children and young people to ensure it is relevant, engaging and safe for them, including age appropriateness and cultural appropriateness.
- Continuing to boost the role of schools in our communities and addressing the social and emotional wellbeing barriers to full engagement in school.
- Ensuring accessible and appropriate community and hospital child and adolescent mental health services.
- Providing statewide throughcare support for young people transitioning out of Ashley Youth Detention Centre back into the community.
- Expanding geographic coverage of proven models and pilot programs that address the accessibility or affordability of the material basics that prevent children and young people from participating fully in community life.
- Ensuring all services affecting children consider their specific and unique needs, especially services that are not traditionally thought of as 'child and family' services yet have a large impact on children's and young people's wellbeing, including health, homelessness, employment, justice, and local government infrastructure.

Putting children and young people at the centre of Tasmanian society

Underpinning all of this should be a fundamental reimagining of the role of children and young people within Tasmanian society, a recognition of the value of focusing on and investing in their wellbeing, and a commitment to place children and young people at the centre of all decision-making and activities affecting them.

As referenced in the discussion paper (p 10), Save the Children believes that this starts with the recognition that children are bearers of rights who have the agency, energy,

interest and capacity to contribute, rather than with the old-fashioned idea of children as vulnerable and requiring protection.

The history of successive waves of reform effort and investment by all Australian governments, often without commensurate shifts in all children's and young people's outcomes, is testament to the limits of a purely protection-based approach to children's and young people's welfare and wellbeing.

When children's and young people's perspectives are centred, and when they are genuinely – not tokenistically or sporadically – heard and taken seriously about the issues that affect them, their ability to access the supports and services they need, and their health, wellbeing, education, employment and broader life-course outcomes and opportunities are enormously strengthened. Centring children's perspectives, voices and participation can be a game changer.

We suggest that each of the governance steps or procedures outlined on p 58 of the discussion paper be reviewed to consider ways of systemically incorporating the voice of children and young people. For example, how might children and young people take part in shaping budget and policy decisions, advising government decision makers, informing program design, monitoring and providing feedback on implementation, and setting and reviewing success measures as part of evaluation?

To facilitate children's and young people's involvement through formal decision-making, structures, processes and institutions such as those mentioned above, the right conditions must be created and fostered for meaningful, ethical and safe child participation, at a systemic and a local level. This includes, for example, building children's and young people's awareness of their own rights, strengthening their capacity to engage with government and other decision-making and services, and supporting or resourcing service providers to undertake meaningful and ethical child participation.

We would be very happy to provide more detail about, or discuss, any of the above.

Both Government and partners like Save the Children have a role to play in supporting and creating the conditions and changes needed to truly centre children and young people in all decision-making and activity in their communities and at a state-wide level. There is significant expertise available – within Australia and globally – about best practices and effective approaches to design and implement these changes in practice. What is needed is a commitment to bring this expertise and experience into Tasmania. This Strategy should make such a commitment.

Measuring success

SCA believes there would be benefit in continuing to align the Strategy performance indicators with the existing Framework domains. These are already known, accessible to the community, and based on evidence about what children need to be happy, healthy and learning, in an ecological and holistic frame.

Outcome indicators should be meaningful, few and available at the population level over an extended period of time. They should also balance indicators of risk with strengths-based measures that reflect the positive childhood experiences we know help mitigate the impact of adverse events, build resilience in children from an early age, and maximise the likelihood of healthy development.

We welcome the commitment to develop a child and youth wellbeing information strategy to help community and the sector better target our efforts, measure our

impact and remain accountable to children. We particularly support the inclusion of child-voice surveys as a key building block in this strategy.

SCA strongly encourages collaboration between States, Territories and the Commonwealth to align outcomes and link publicly available datasets through the forthcoming successor to the expiring National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children. This is critical to reducing duplication and gaps not only for service providers and governments, but most importantly for the children and families whose improved wellbeing and outcomes are the ultimate objectives of all our efforts.

Ultimately, we will know that we have achieved this vision for Tasmania when children and young people themselves are supported to be able to tell us that we have. This is the goal we are striving for, and how we will know we have achieved it. Tasmanian's Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy can and should provide the vision and the pathway towards this brighter future.

About Save the Children

Save the Children is Australia's leading child rights organisation. We have worked in Tasmania for the past ten years delivering early childhood, youth and family support services. We support young people involved in the youth justice system, provide parenting education, coaching and practical support to parents ensuring children are safely cared for in their homes, support primary school aged children to remain engaged with education, and deliver early childhood education and family support for newly arrived culturally and linguistically diverse families.

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