



Message for Children's Week 2018

The theme of this year's Children's Week is one that underpins the very essence of my role as Children and Young People Commissioner. The importance of ensuring that *'children's views and opinions are respected'* is not only enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child but is also reinforced within many pieces of relevant legislation here in the ACT.

As the experts in their own lives, it is important to recognise that meaningful engagement is more than just asking children and young people what they think about things that we may want their opinion on. Even more significantly, it is about finding out what is important for children and young people themselves. In a recent consultation with children in the ACT, we did just that.

Our recently released report, *KIDS HAVE BIG THOUGHTS TOO*, details what close to 120 children thought was important when it comes to changes in their lives. We heard that mutual respect matters with children saying things like *"parents tell you what to do/don't do, but then they don't do it themselves"* and *"they need to hear my side of the story"*. Children also reflected that time is important with comments such as *"some people take longer than expected to do things"* and *"make time to talk about it properly"*. Wanting to be known and understood was also important for children. We heard that *"adults need to get you and know where you're coming from"* and also that children don't want adults to *"just say 'it's all going to be okay'"*; they want us to *"get it and talk about it"* and to *"be interested in what we're saying"*. Children also told us that *"adults direct and control too much"* and that we *"should guide instead"*. They would also like adults to *"listen to our ideas and why it's important"* and to *"take it seriously"*.

Children were very clear about wanting to *"have a say"*. They want us to let them *"explain our side of the story"* and to *"let us try to sort it out first before you help"*. They were clear that *"adults need to be trustworthy and supportive"* and that part of being trustworthy is being willing to share our own experiences – *"parents might have gone through it as well. It would help if they think back to what they did"*. Children also appreciated that adults have needs too, commenting that *"adults need to look after their own mental and physical health"*. Importantly children want adults to *"[be] proud of us when we try... even if it didn't work out"*.

There is much that we, as adults, can learn from children and young people in seeking to understand their experience of the world around them and the ideas they have about making changes for the better. Investing in processes that harness the expertise of children and young people will help us make sure that Canberra is both child safe and child friendly... a place where children and young people are confident they will be taken seriously about things that matter.

As always, I would like to extend my support to the ACT Children's Week Committee. I look forward to being part of the Children's Week 2018 celebrations, and to continuing to hear the views and opinions of children and young people in the ACT about things that are important in their lives.

Warm regards,

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