



THE VOICES FOR TASMANIAN YOUTH

Speaking Out for a Safer Tomorrow: Our Messages for Change

*A Report from The Voices for Tasmanian Youth
Consultative Council*

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge and pay respect to the palawa people of lutruwita/Tasmania as the original and ongoing custodians of this land and for the more than 40,000 years they have cared for their country and their children.

Acknowledgements

The Commissioner for Children and Young People, together with the *Voices for Tasmanian Youth*, thank the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the Tasmanian Government for supporting this important work.

We also extend our thanks to the Sexual Assault Support Service and Laurel House for their guidance and support throughout this project, and to the external reviewer for providing feedback during the planning stages for this work.

Lastly, we thank Terrapin, who have worked in collaboration with the *Voices for Tasmanian Youth* to bring their messages to life through art.

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Any questions regarding this report or the work of Tasmania's Commissioner for Children and Young People more generally may be directed to the Commissioner by emailing childcomm@childcomm.tas.gov.au or by telephoning +61 3 6166 1366.

For more information, visit: www.childcomm.tas.gov.au.

A message for victim survivors of abuse

As we carried out our work, we have held those with lived experience of abuse in our minds and in our hearts. Your stories matter deeply to us, and we want you to know that you are not alone in your journey.

You are deserving, you matter, and you are not responsible for what happened. We hope this report will make a meaningful difference for you and bring about the changes you deserve.

With all our care and support,
The Voices for Tasmanian Youth

Reading this report

This report is about preventing and responding to child sexual abuse.

Reading this report may be hard.

Take a break if you need to.

On page 7 of this report there are some ways to find people you can talk to if you need help.

If you are a young person reading this report and your experience is different, or you have a different view, that is okay.

Understanding that everyone's experiences are different shows how complicated this problem is.

We hope that some of the things you read here will ring true for you. Because although your story may be different, you are not alone.

If you are an adult reading this report, we ask you to read and think about the included questions.

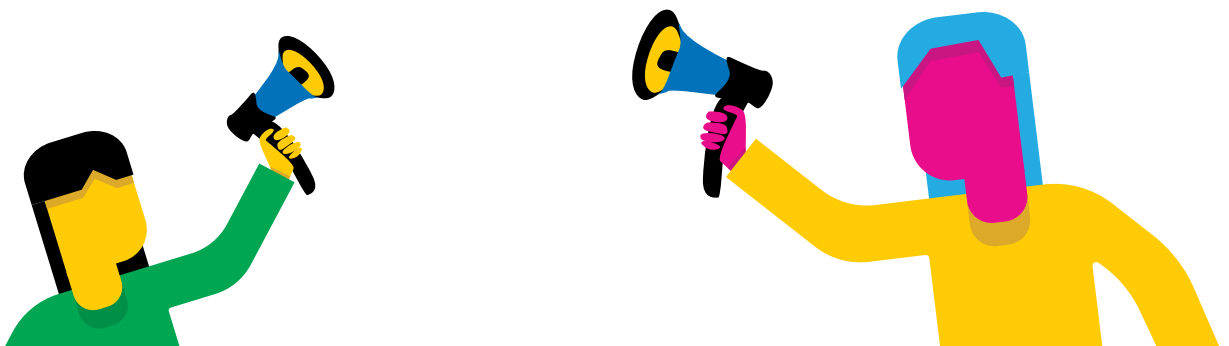
Some of these questions are for adults who work with children or young people.

Some are for adults who design policies and make decisions.

Some are for every adult.

Speech bubbles indicate direct quotes from the Voices for Tasmanian Youth members during workshops.

The case studies represent a collection of stories and lived experiences raised during workshops, reflecting the common experiences faced by children and young people.



Contents

Acknowledgement of Country	2
Acknowledgements	2
Reading this report	3
Contents	4
Breaking the Silence for our Generation: A statement from the Voices for Tasmanian Youth	5
Who We Are	5
Why Our Voices Matter	5
Why You Should Listen	5
Our Vision for a Safer Tomorrow	6
“When a child is safe and supported, they can do anything.”	6
About This Report	6
Support services	7
How We Did This Work	8
Engagement Approach	8
Identity and Direction	8
The Key Messages of the Voices for Tasmanian Youth	8
Message 1: Update communication and education about sexual abuse for better awareness and prevention ...	9
Our Vision	9
Challenges	10
Actions	10
Message 2: Young people have valuable insights that can improve conversations and decision-making	12
Our Vision	12
Challenges	12
Actions	13
Mia’s* Story: Safety responses in schools	14
Message 3: Feeling safe in institutions improves attendance and engagement	15
Our Vision	15
Challenges	15
Actions	16
Message 4: Improve reporting systems to make them safer and more accessible	17
Our Vision	17
Challenges	17
Actions	18
Charlie’s* story: Inaction of reporting systems	19
Message 5: A greater focus on prevention and rehabilitation will improve safety	20
Our Vision	20
Challenges	20
Actions	21
Letter from the Acting Commissioner for Children and Young People	22

Breaking the Silence for our Generation: A statement from the *Voices for Tasmanian Youth*

Who We Are

We are the *Voices for Tasmanian Youth*, a group of 19 children and young people, aged 10 - 18, representing diverse communities, identities, and experiences from across Tasmania.

Our group was established by the Commissioner for Children and Young People (CCYP) to share our views during the development of the Tasmanian Government's Child Sexual Abuse Reform Strategy and Action Plan.

Since this time, we have grown and evolved, creating our own name, identity, values, shared vision, and goals.

Why Our Voices Matter

Over the past few months, we have shared important and sometimes tough conversations about sexual abuse and our safety in government institutions, in our communities and online.

Talking about sexual abuse can be challenging, but it is crucial that our voices are included in these discussions and in the decisions that directly affect us. When we are genuinely heard, policies and practices are more likely to meet our needs and improve our safety and wellbeing.

'It is very important to acknowledge that young people know more about their own lives than you do.'

(Young person, aged 16)

As the *Voices for Tasmanian Youth*, we are advocating for changes to enhance the safety and wellbeing of all Tasmanian children and young people. We are committed to ensuring that our voices, along with the voices of other Tasmanian children and young people, are truly listened to, are taken seriously, and are acted upon.

Children and young people have been silent on this topic for too long. **Now, together, we are breaking the silence for our generation.**

Why You Should Listen

Through this project, we have discovered just how often children and young people like us feel unsafe and unheard in our institutions and communities.

Sadly, we also know that child sexual abuse is far too common.

According to the 2023 Australian Child Maltreatment study¹, about 1 in 4 Australians have experienced child sexual abuse. This means you probably know someone who has experienced sexual abuse, even if you don't realise it – whether it's your sibling, friend, child, parent, or colleague.

This devastating reality is heart-wrenching and completely unacceptable.

Children are our future, and it's up to all of us to protect them and make sure they feel safe and cared for.

1. Daryl J Higgins, Ben Mathews, Rosana Pacella, et al, 'The prevalence and nature of multi-type child maltreatment in Australia' (2023) 6 *Medical Journal of Australia* S19-S25.

“When a child is safe and supported, they can do anything.”
(Young person, aged 16)

About This Report

This report is for everyone.

For government, policymakers, leaders, and advocates – we offer you our advice on how to prevent abuse and make government institutions, communities, and online spaces safer for all children and young people.

For parents, caregivers, and adults who spend time with children and young people – you will find critical insights and actionable steps you can start using today.

For those with lived experience of abuse – this report is a message of support and solidarity, as well as a call for change.

In the pages of this report, you will find our collective vision for change, the challenges we need to overcome, and recommended actions, divided across five key messages.

Our aim in publishing this report is to influence and shape future policies affecting the safety of children and young people, and to make sure young voices are heard in decision-making.

We invite you to listen, understand what it's like to be a young person today, and join us in being part of the solution.

‘Silence and apathy towards issues, especially these kinds of issues, is a breeding ground for it to happen again’.
(Young person, aged 17).

Our Vision for a Safer Tomorrow

We want a Tasmania where every child and young person feels safe, supported, and empowered to speak out.

We want a future where adults genuinely listen, understand our experiences, and respond effectively. Where they build trust and open communication on topics like sex, consent and abuse.

We want sex education that reflects our real lives and diverse experiences, promoting emotional, mental, and physical safety.

We want a future where young voices have an equal say in decision-making, shaping safe environments in our institutions and communities.

We want institutions that are safe spaces, where everyone feels welcome, respected, and supported. We need to trust the institutions that serve us, so that we feel confident attending school, accessing healthcare, and seeking help.

We want reporting systems that are safe and easy to use. Where we know where to get support and who to report concerns to. Where complaints are handled independently and effectively.

We want a future where cycles of violence are broken, and every young person is empowered to thrive through a focus on prevention, rehabilitation, and supportive networks.

We want a safer tomorrow for all children and young people.

Support services

The following services listed below can be contacted for support

Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800

1800 Respect: 1800 737 732

Lifeline: 13 11 14

Family Violence Counselling Support Service: 1800 608 122

The Tell Someone website: tellsomeone.tas.gov.au

13YARN Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Crisis Support: 13 92 76

Blue Knot (childhood and complex trauma support): 1300 657 380

A Tasmanian Lifeline: 1800 984 434

Sexual Assault Support Service (SASS): 03 6231 0044, 1800 697 87 7 (after hours)

Laurel House: 03 6334 2740, 03 6431 9711, 1800 697 877 (after hours)

If you are worried about the health and safety of a child or young person, please contact the Strong Families Safe Kids Advice and Referral Line on 1800 000 123.



How We Did This Work

Engagement Approach

Section 13 of the *Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2016*, provides the Commissioner with the power to establish a consultative council of children and young people.

In setting up the consultative council for this project, and to ensure ethical engagement with children and young people, a relational approach was adopted. This meant that CCYP invited expressions of interests from children and young people who had an existing participatory relationship with the Commissioner, or who had an existing support relationship with a key stakeholder organisation.

The engagement approach was developed in consultation with subject-matter experts and in partnership with support organisations including Laurel House and the Sexual Assault Support Service (SASS).

Participants in this project choose how they want to participate - whether through one-on-one discussions, group workshops or creative projects. Children and young people also determine how often they are involved and the work that they contribute to.

To ensure a safe and trauma-informed experience for all, regular safety check-ins are conducted and 24-hour support from SASS and Laurel House is available. Education and training sessions on sexual safety, consent, and self-care were provided by SASS and Laurel House to strengthen members' knowledge and ensure they felt supported when discussing sensitive topics.

Identity and Direction

The *Voices for Tasmanian Youth* established its identity and direction by creating their own name, mission statement, logo and visual identity. They drafted an internal agreement, 'Being Our Best Selves' (BOBS), outlining key expectations and values. The *Voices for Tasmanian Youth* also determined their work focus and goals, leading to the establishment of four subcommittees centred around their key outputs. These included:

- (1) This written report
- (2) An interactive art installation
- (3) A social media campaign and
- (4) Roundtable meetings with key decision-makers

The Key Messages of the *Voices for Tasmanian Youth*

Through a series of conversations and brainstorming sessions, young people shared their safety concerns and discussed their visions for change. These conversations were then thematically analysed and divided into the five key messages contained in this report.



A Mountain of Voices

During this project, the *Voices for Tasmanian Youth* chose to collaborate with Tasmanian puppetry and creative arts company, Terrapin to create a *Mountain of Voices*.

A Mountain of Voices is an interactive art installation that invites Tasmanian children and young people to share their thoughts and ideas with the adults around them. Young people (no adults allowed) can climb the custom-built mountain installation and speak their statement into a megaphone to the listening adults below. Young people are also invited to write a power statement or draw a picture on a sticky note, which they can add to the sides of the mountain. As the statements build up, each young person who climbs the mountain is lifted up by the voices of their peers. These statements will be collected, documented and built into a living record, permanently reminding people in power to uphold the rights of young people.

To learn more, check out the *Voices for Tasmanian Youth* [webpage!](#)

Message 1: Update communication and education about sexual abuse for better awareness and prevention

Our Vision

Imagine a Tasmania where we, as young people, feel truly understood and supported. In this future, leaders and decision-makers are deeply aware of our experiences, leading to effective policies that reflect our realities.

Comprehensive sex education is integrated into our curriculum, emphasising emotional, mental, and physical safety.

Our parents, caregivers, and teachers understand the complexities of modern technology and consent. They also recognise the various ways abuse can

occur, including in diverse relationships. They talk to us openly and honestly, using clear language that helps us feel safe and informed. We no longer turn to unreliable sources for information because we receive accurate, respectful, and comprehensive education on sex and relationships from our schools, parents and caregivers.

In this future, we navigate a world where digital consent and online safety are widely understood, thanks to proactive measures to educate both us and the adults in our lives. Our community is united in recognising and addressing signs of abuse, with dedicated school staff providing age-appropriate information and support. Conversations about preventing, identifying, and responding to sexual abuse are normalised, creating an environment of trust and openness.

As a result, we feel empowered to make informed decisions, leading to healthier relationships and a significant reduction in sexual violence.



Challenges

Outdated communication and education:

- Decision-makers and those in power often lack understanding of what it's like to be a young person today, leading to outdated and ineffective policies.
- Current communication and education about sexual violence is outdated.
- Adults and authority figures often don't recognise or talk about online sexual abuse.
- Social changes mean that parents, teachers, leaders, and policymakers need to be re-educated on sexual abuse risks.

*'The curriculum is still lagging behind the culture that we are trying to create'.
(Young person, aged 17)*

Intergenerational gap:

- There is a big difference between what young people experience and what adults understand, especially when it comes to technology and consent.
- Adults often don't understand the different forms of abuse, particularly abuse in diverse, non-stereotypical and LGBTQIA+ relationships.

*'I'd like to see these topics being explored more and from a younger age'.
(Young person, aged 17)*

Misinformation has serious consequences:

- Adults either avoid talking about sexual abuse altogether or use euphemisms due to fear of

upsetting young people. This just confuses children and young people and makes them less safe.

- When there is a lack of current, comprehensive sex education, young people look to pornography for information. This can lead to misconceptions about sex and harmful behaviours.

*'I can name 20 people, who have been hit up online by old men, who are all under the age of 18 off the top of my head and I shouldn't be able to do that, that's so scary'.
(Young person, aged 17)*

Actions

Update education content and curriculum:

- Change how consent and sexual abuse is taught to incorporate comprehensive sex education that covers diverse relationships and different forms of abuse.
- Integrate sex and consent education into the overall curriculum, rather than treating it as a separate program.
- Emphasise the importance of teaching emotional and mental safety, together with physical safety.

Recognise the role of technology and social media:

- Increase recognition of how technology can be used to start and carry out abuse.
- Teach both adults and children about digital consent and online safety.
- Safety and security software for computers should be affordable and universally available.

Educate parents, caregivers, teachers, and providers:

- Teach parents and caregivers to recognise signs of abuse and provide appropriate support.
- Better equip adults to talk about consent and sexual abuse with children and young people, including by using clear and literal language.
- Encourage open and honest discussions about sexual abuse between adults and children and young people, instead of relying on videos or books.
- Appoint dedicated staff in schools to provide age-appropriate information on sexual safety and abuse.

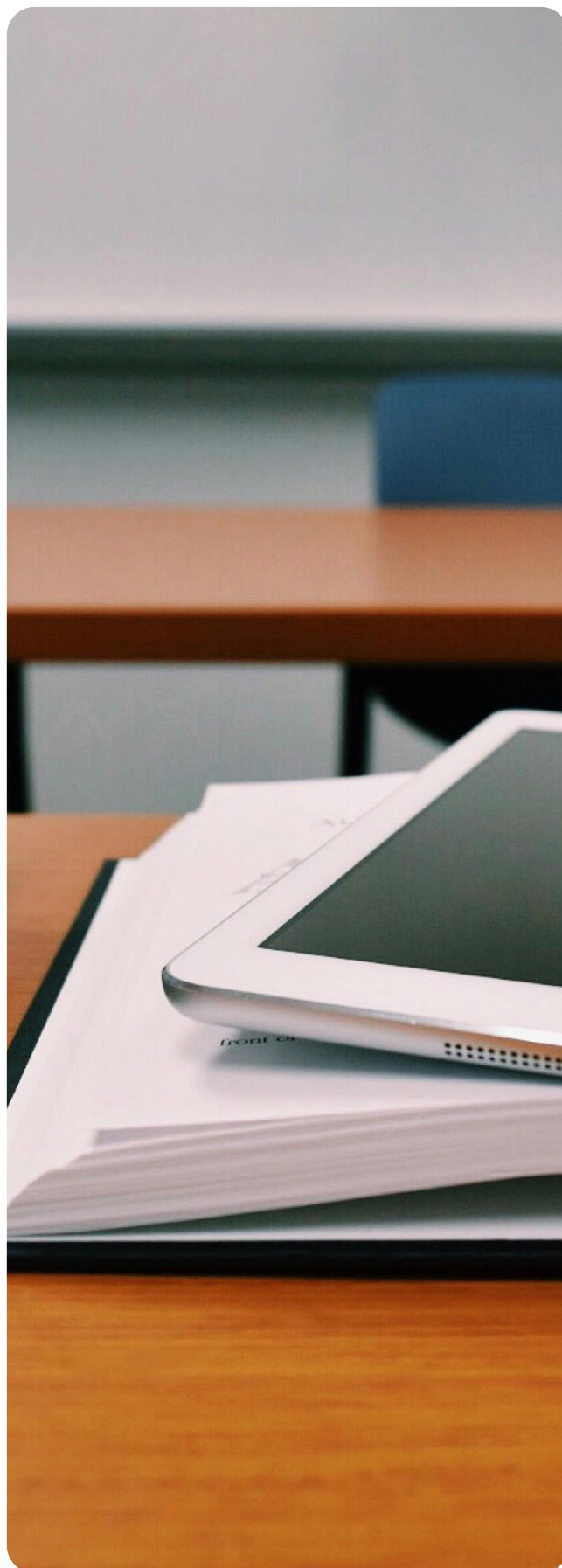
*'People who are from older generations and people who are in government at the moment, they're just so unaware of what's going on, like sexual assault and stuff like this was a thing when they were younger but it wasn't as prevalent and it wasn't as widespread as it is, it's not just like you can be walking down the street and get cat called and whatever, even when you're sitting at home in bed doing absolutely nothing it can happen at any time through social media'.
(Young person, aged 17)*

Questions for reflection

How can comprehensive sex education be integrated into the overall curriculum to make it more effective?

Explore the importance of clear and literal language when adults discuss sexual abuse with young people. Why is this crucial?

Suppose you are a policymaker. What steps would you take to ensure that sex education policies are up-to-date and relevant to today's digital age?



Message 2: Young people have valuable insights that can improve conversations and decision-making

Our Vision

Imagine a Tasmania where we, as young people, are genuinely heard and respected in conversations about sexual abuse. In this future, our voices are equal to adults in decision-making processes, ensuring that safety measures in schools, detention centres, out-of-home care, and medical settings are shaped by our views and ideas.

Regular check-ins help adults to understand our needs, empowering us to have more control in our relationships with them. Youth advisory groups and student councils are strengthened and have significant influence, enabling young people to make meaningful changes for our safety and wellbeing. This collaborative approach makes us feel valued, heard, and safe.

In this future, mutual respect between young people and authority figures, like teachers, is a foundation of our community. Staff are trained to listen and address our concerns effectively, creating a supportive environment where we can openly discuss sensitive topics without fear of stigma or embarrassment.

Schools provide various channels for us to share our experiences. This improved communication builds trust and understanding, ensuring that all young people, especially those who are vulnerable

or marginalised, are listened to, believed, and not judged.

Together, we create a society where every young person feels empowered, secure, and free from the threat of sexual abuse.

'It's quite taboo – it's a hard thing to talk about, a lot of parents just brush it off.'
(Young person, aged 17)

Challenges

Young people are often not being heard in conversations about sexual abuse:

- When young people do share their experiences, their voices are often dismissed or ignored.
- Safety mechanisms in institutions like schools, detention centres, out-of-home care and medical settings are created without young peoples' views and ideas. This makes young people feel unheard and unsafe.
- Older generations often struggle to discuss these issues, avoiding meaningful conversations with young people.
- Young people, particularly those who are vulnerable or marginalised, need to be heard, listened to, believed, and not judged.

'They want us to feel comfortable in the education system, but they don't listen when we say the things that are happening that make us uncomfortable and so I think they should actually make changes.'
(Young person, aged 17)



School responses are often ineffective:

- School responses to issues are not co-designed with children and young people. This leads to practices that can make students feel unsafe.
- School councils and student representatives don't have enough influence or power to make meaningful changes.

Actions

Empower young voices:

- Elevate the voices of all young people, including those who are vulnerable or marginalised, to be equal to those of adults in decision-making processes.
- Involve young people in discussions about implementing safety responses.
- Conduct regular check-ins with young people using various methods such as wellbeing surveys, to better understand their needs and take action based on their feedback.

'[Students should] have just as much of an impact in decisions that are made to keep them safe within schools'.

(Young person, aged 17)

- Empower young people by giving them more control in their relationships with adults.
- Strengthen the role and influence of youth advisory groups and student councils in decision-making processes.
- Ensure that young people can have a genuine and significant impact on decisions that affect their safety and wellbeing.

Encourage mutual respect:

- Foster mutual respect between young people and authority figures, like teachers.
- Train staff to listen and address young peoples' concerns effectively.

Improve communication:

- Create more effective ways to hear children and young peoples' stories and experiences.
- Schools to provide better ways for students to talk about sensitive topics, like sexual abuse, without feeling embarrassed or uncomfortable.
- Use point-of-view videos created by young people to share their perspectives.

'There should be an equality of power between young people and those in the positions of power that can abuse them. Like, it's very hard to do that. But it is very important to acknowledge that young people know more about their own lives than you do'.

(Young person, aged 16)

Questions for reflection

What are the potential consequences when young people's voices are dismissed or ignored in discussions about safety mechanisms?

Suppose you are in a leadership position in a school (such as a principal). What steps would you take to involve young people in discussions about implementing safety responses in your school?

How can regular check-ins with young people help adults understand their needs better? What could these check-ins look like?

Mia's* Story:

Safety responses in schools

At my school, safety issues either get addressed incorrectly, or not at all. We have toilet stalls with locks so bad, you can kick them in. I had a door kicked in on me once, and even though it wasn't meant for me, it still made me feel unsafe. Now, I refuse to go to the toilet alone because people just elbow or kick the doors open.

Our school's vaping policy is another example. As a way of cracking down on the vaping issue and violence at my school, we now have only one toilet open for girls and one for boys. Because of this, students are waiting in 40-minute lines to go to the toilet. We are missing class and we can't go at recess or lunch.

And even before they did that, teachers were just standing in the toilets. If they thought there was more than one of you in there, they would look over the cubicles and be like, 'are you vaping?' Like, what if I'm on my period, what if that chick was pissing, but no you're just going to stand and look over. I wouldn't do that to you. I'd get in trouble if I did that to you. So, you shouldn't do that to me.

Even if the vaping issue is happening, it's not fair to take away someone's right to privacy and their right to go to the toilet. It makes you feel unsafe... and I know this is happening across a lot of other schools.

What also makes me mad is that my school seems obsessed with vaping, but bigger risks to our safety, like sexual abuse, don't get any attention. It's frustrating to see so many posters about vaping risks

** This case study is a made up story about 'Mia' (who is not a real person) however, 'Mia's' experiences and views represent those of the children and young people who are part of the Voices for Tasmanian Youth.*

but not even one about sexual abuse or harassment. Our real concerns are getting ignored.

Maybe if schools talked to students and included us in the decisions about our safety, they would create policies that actually make us feel safe. They want us to feel comfortable in the education system, but they don't listen to the actual concerns of young people.



Message 3: Feeling safe in institutions improves attendance and engagement

Our Vision

Imagine a Tasmania where we, as young people, feel completely safe and supported in our schools and other institutions. In this future, environments are welcoming and inclusive, where everyone is treated with kindness, empathy, and respect. This culture of understanding eliminates harmful stereotypes and combats stigma and discrimination, making us feel valued and secure. Teachers, foster carers, and staff are trained to handle sensitive issues effectively, ensuring we are always heard and supported. Systems are in place so we have access to a trusted, independent person to talk to. Our privacy and dignity is upheld in all aspects, from private toilet cubicles to confidential conversations.

In this future, feeling safe in our institutions leads to higher attendance rates and better academic performance. Safety and accessibility allows us to engage fully in our education and other essential services like healthcare. Mental health challenges are reduced as peer-to-peer violence and abuse are recognised and addressed proactively.

This safe environment not only enhances our well-being but also reduces pressure on services and boosts workforce productivity, contributing positively to the economy. Sexual assault is prevented, and its serious impacts on mental, physical, and emotional health are mitigated, allowing us to build healthy

relationships and pursue career opportunities without past trauma holding us back.

Together, we create a society where every young person can thrive, free from fear and full of potential.

*'Safety in institutions makes them feel accessible and available to everybody and makes you feel safe when you access them'.
(Young person, aged 16)*

Challenges

Feeling unsafe at school and other institutions leads to poorer outcomes:

- Feeling unsafe at school results in decreased school attendance and weaker educational outcomes. Safety in institutions is therefore crucial for high attendance rates and better academic performance.
- Feeling unsafe in institutions, particularly schools, contributes to mental health challenges.
- Peer-to-peer violence and abuse needs to be better recognised and addressed.
- Feeling unsafe in institutions also puts pressure on services and impacts workforce productivity and the economy.
- Sexual assault can cause serious mental, physical, and emotional trauma, affecting future relationships, job prospects and economic productivity.

*'Attendance rates will go up if people felt safer in school'.
(Young person, aged 17)*

Feeling safe in schools and other institutions is essential for accessibility and engagement:

- Safety boosts confidence and access to necessary services, like healthcare.
- Trauma caused by unsafe experiences affects mental health across age groups.
- Bullying and harassment, especially by teachers, negatively impacts school attendance and well-being.

*'My attendance got significantly worse at the start of this year, when I started regularly getting aggressively harassed for existing in my school. Yeah, your attendance goes down when you don't want to be there and you come up with a fuck of a lot more ways to get out of being there'.
(Young person, aged 16)*

- There needs to be better respect for children and young people's privacy in institutions.
- Toilets should be individual, private cubicles with no gaps in doors and working locks. There should not be any urinals.

'People would be more likely to access institutions and feel safe doing it. You're more likely to go to the doctor and you're more likely to go to a hospital if you don't feel like you're going to have an unsafe experience while doing it'.

(Young person, aged 16)

'It affects the economy because people aren't as effective'.

(Young person, aged 12)

Actions

Create welcoming and accepting settings for all young people:

- Create environments where everyone feels welcome, safe and respected.
- Encourage understanding, kindness and empathy to combat stigma and discrimination.
- Take steps to reduce harmful stereotypes, particularly harmful gender and sex stereotypes.
- Train teachers, foster carers and staff who work with children and young people to handle sensitive issues better and create environments where children and young people feel heard and supported.
- Put systems in place so that children and young people always have a trusted, independent person they can talk to and get support from in institutions.

Questions for reflection

How does feeling safe in schools and other institutions impact attendance and academic performance?

Discuss the relationship between safety in institutions and the confidence and engagement of young people.

Picture yourself as a parent or carer. How would you advocate for better safety measures and supportive environments in your child's school or institution?

Message 4: Improve reporting systems to make them safer and more accessible

Our Vision

Imagine a Tasmania where we, as young people, feel confident and secure in knowing how to report concerns and abuse. In this future, we are well-educated about clear and accessible avenues for reporting issues, both inside and outside the institutions where the incidents occur. Independent reporting options are readily available, ensuring that we can speak to a dedicated, impartial person who prioritises our safety and privacy.

We are kept informed about the process and outcomes of our reports, making us active participants in the resolution. This transparency and involvement builds trust in the system, as slow police responses and confusing court processes are addressed and improved. The sometimes-harmful practice of automatically notifying parents or caregivers is reconsidered, protecting those of us who may face issues at home.

In this imagined future, robust support systems are in place for children and young people those who report abuse or concerns. Safe spaces are created where we can access services and support without fear of mistreatment or stigma. Increased funding for organisations like SASS, Laurel House, and Headspace ensures that we have the resources we need, especially those of us who are vulnerable or marginalised.

Additionally, organisations like Police and Community Youth Clubs (PCYCs) and the CREATE Foundation are empowered to help us connect with each other and speak up. This comprehensive support network fosters an environment where we feel empowered and safe, knowing that our voices are heard and that we are protected throughout the reporting process and beyond.

Together, we build a community where every young person can thrive, free from fear and full of hope.

'I feel like police are kind of scary to go to.'
(Young person, aged 17)

'It makes me feel particularly unsafe that when I'm reporting these people and nothing is happening.'
(Young person, aged 16)

Challenges

Avenues for how to report are unclear:

- There needs to be better education, awareness, and clear information on how to report issues.
- Children and young people need to know where to go to report concerns.

Reporting systems feel unsafe:

- There needs to be clear avenues for reporting issues outside of the institution where the issue occurred.
- There should be clear options for reporting to independent people who do not know the person being reported.
- Children and young people should know what happens after they report something and be involved in the process as much as possible.

- Children and young people should be informed of any outcomes to reports they have made.
- Police can be slow to communicate and respond to complaints, which hinders trust and confidence in the reporting system.
- The court process is often confusing and frightening for children and young people.
- Automatically notifying parents or caregivers about incidents or reports can sometimes cause more harm, especially if there are issues at home.
- Boost funding for organisations that help children and young people connect with each other and empower them to speak up, like the CREATE Foundation.

'Nothing seems to happen with reports and it's kind of scary to report it to someone who knows the person. Like if you're reporting a teacher and that teacher knows the other teacher, you don't know if they're just going to talk about you behind your back.'
(Young person, aged 17)

There is not enough support for young people who report abuse or other concerns:

- Those who report need access to better support both during and after the reporting process.

Actions

Independent avenues for reporting:

- Create independent ways to report concerns and abuse in all institutions.
- Raise more awareness of any existing independent processes for reporting concerns or abuse that don't rely on internal systems.
- Have dedicated, independent people in schools and other institutions who children and young people can talk to, and report concerns to.

Provide more support:

- Create safe spaces where children and young people can access services and support without fear of mistreatment or stigma.
- Increase funding for services like SASS, Laurel House, and Headspace.
- Provide more funding to organisations that provide safe spaces for young people, especially those who are vulnerable or marginalised, like PCYCs.

Questions for reflection

How does having independent reporting options enhance the safety and privacy of young people?

What are the benefits of involving young people in the reporting process and keeping them informed about the outcomes?

If you were a young person who reported an incident, what kind of support would you expect to receive during and after the reporting process?



Charlie's* story: Inaction of reporting systems

When I started high school, the art room was my favourite place. My art teacher seemed supportive at first, but over time, his behaviour changed. He started making comments that were kind of creepy and made me feel uneasy.

Reporting him felt impossible.

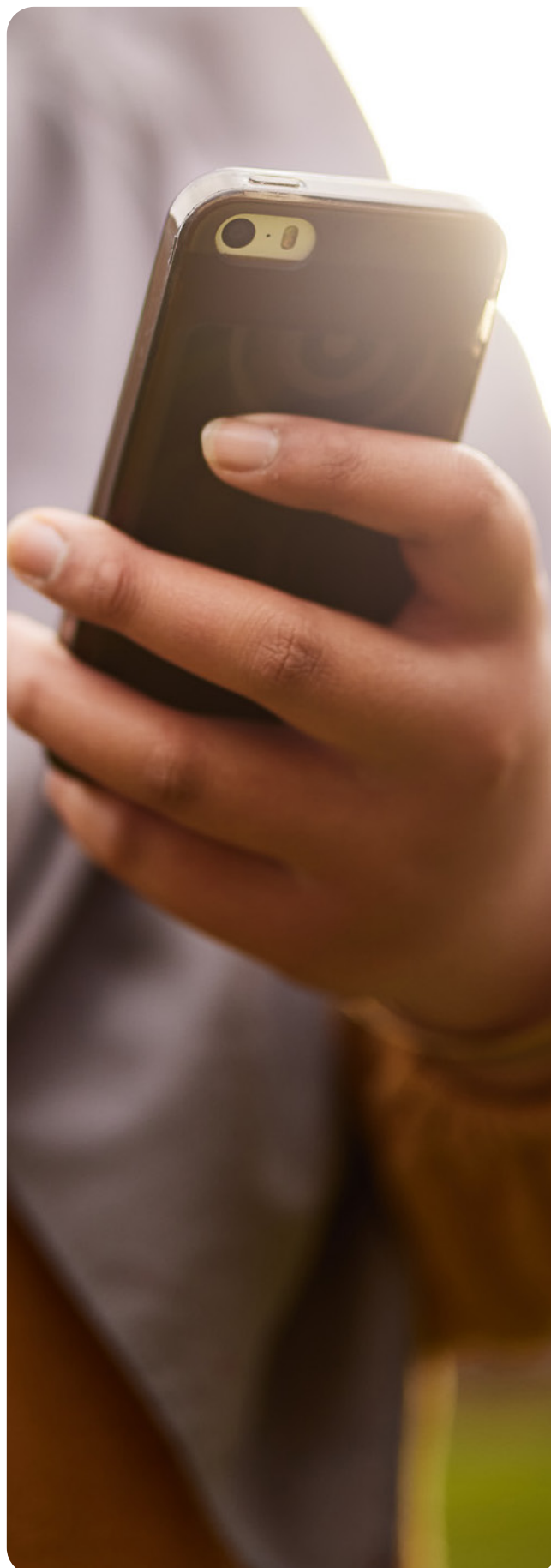
I had heard about other students who had spoken up, but nothing had changed because the Principal didn't take action. I also heard that the Principal was friends with my art teacher, so it felt completely pointless and scary to report. I didn't know what the Principal might tell my teacher, or what they might say behind my back.

I talked to my parents about it, hoping for their support. The conversation was awkward though, and it was basically dismissed. "These things are complicated," my dad said, and my mum just changed the subject. I felt trapped and unheard.

I began skipping art class and my grades dropped. My once-favourite subject became a source of complete dread. I felt unsupported and stuck in an environment that refused to change.

It would be so much better if we had a safe, accessible, and anonymous way that you could report concerns to someone who is outside the school. This would make it less scary to report and might mean that something actually gets done about your concerns.

* This case study is a made up story about 'Charlie' (who is not a real person) however, 'Charlie's experiences and views represent those of the children and young people who are part of the Voices for Tasmanian Youth.



Message 5: A greater focus on prevention and rehabilitation will improve safety

Our Vision

Imagine a Tasmania where we, as young people, experience a proactive approach to preventing violence and abuse, with access to early intervention and rehabilitation both for those who use violence, and those who violence is perpetrated against. In this future, preventive measures are a priority, and issues are addressed before they escalate into more serious problems. Education and support programs guide us away from paths leading to violence, ensuring that minor incidents are effectively managed and resolved early on.

The harmful cycle of violence is broken with a focus on helping those at risk before they cause harm to others. We understand that *“hurt people, hurt people.”*

In this envisioned future, the shift towards rehabilitation over punishment is fully realised. Ashley Youth Detention Centre is closed, and resources are redirected to restorative justice programs aimed at repairing harm and rehabilitating offenders. A comprehensive restorative justice system supports offenders to change, focusing on their reintegration into society rather than simply locking them up.

‘Violence only causes more violence’.
(Young person, aged 17)

In this future, societal views support these changes, recognising the need to address social and economic factors contributing to crime and violence. Increased support for those affected by violence creates a compassionate and understanding community.

Together, we build a society where every young person has the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive in a safe and supportive environment.

‘Why do we not try to stop it until it gets to the point where they’re really bad cases and in some cases, people lose their lives, and we’re like, “oh now we care”, when it could have been stopped at a minor incident’.

(Young person, aged 15)

‘At the end of the day the people who end up in those facilities are the people who need the help the most’.

(Young person, aged 17)

Challenges

There needs to be a greater focus on prevention and rehabilitation:

- Early intervention is crucial to stop violence and abuse from getting worse.
- Violence and punishment can lead to more violence – “hurt people, hurt people”.
- We need to shift towards helping those who offend to change instead of just locking them up.

Early intervention is key:

- Prevention efforts should start early to stop problems before they get worse.
- Current systems often fail to address minor incidents, leading to more serious incidents later.

Actions

Implement preventive measures:

- Prioritise early intervention programs to address issues before they escalate.
- Focus on education and support for young people to prevent them from becoming involved in violence.

Shift towards rehabilitation:

- Close Ashley Youth Detention Centre and invest in alternative restorative justice programs that focus on helping young people change.
- Establish a restorative justice system that focuses on repairing harm and rehabilitating offenders.
- Invest in preventive behaviour education to address underlying issues and prevent future violence.

Change societal views and systems:

- Move away from punishing those who offend and focus on rehabilitation.
- Provide more support for individuals affected by violence.
- Advocate for systemic changes that favour rehabilitation over incarceration.
- Address social and economic factors contributing to crime and violence.

'We need to change the social views away from, "oh you're in here 'cause you did something bad" to "oh you're in here, how can I help you not be in that space again'.

(Young person, aged 17)

Questions for reflection

Discuss the challenges and benefits of implementing early intervention programs to prevent violence and abuse.

Suppose you are a policymaker. What steps would you take to shift societal views towards supporting rehabilitation over punishment?

How does the concept of "hurt people, hurt people" underscore the importance of a compassionate approach?



Letter from the Acting Commissioner for Children and Young People

Thank you for taking the time to read this report by the *Voices for Tasmanian Youth*, a consultative council of 19 children and young people established by Commissioner McLean. The Council was established to help inform the Tasmanian Government's development of a 10-year strategy for upholding the rights of children by preventing, identifying and responding to child sexual abuse. Council members each have a specific interest in influencing change for their peers and future generations through these crucial reforms.

The need to better promote and protect the rights of children enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has never been greater. These interconnected rights include the right to be free from all forms of violence and abuse – the right to be safe and to feel safe. They also include the right to participate in decision making processes that affect children and young people, and to receive developmentally appropriate information and support to participate, should they wish to do so.

This report presents the views, aspirations, and ideas of the Council on how to better prevent and respond to child sexual abuse, especially in institutional settings. I extend my heartfelt thanks to the *Voices for Tasmanian Youth*. As experts in their own lives, they have important things to say. I am sure you will agree that their insights, courage, compassion, and willingness to engage are invaluable.

The Office of the CCYP assisted the Council in the analysis of the key themes that emerged from their discussions and to prepare this report. However, the content (and vibe!) is very much the work of the *Voices for Tasmanian Youth*, ably led by their writing sub-committee.

I commend the Tasmanian Government for supporting this project and welcoming input from children and young people early in the development of its draft strategy. This project presents a unique and vital opportunity to transform the way we view children as agents in their own lives. This report serves to reinforce the message that we have heard before - children and young people want to be involved in decisions that affect them.

Children and young people also want to know what happens with the information and opinions they share with decision-makers. Put simply, they feel safer and happier when they can see how their views have influenced policy design and implementation that affects them.

It is important that we change the way we do things so that engaging with children and young people who want to be heard on these issues becomes 'business as usual'. It is incumbent on decision-makers to provide developmentally appropriate and trauma informed opportunities for children and young people's active involvement in those conversations. Meaningful participation processes take time and commitment.

Together, we can ensure that the voices of children and young people are not only heard but also have a tangible impact on the policies and practices designed to protect them. The Office of the CCYP looks forward to continuing this important work with the Tasmanian Government, our community, and, most importantly, the children and young people of Tasmania.

Isabelle Crompton
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