



THE VOICES
FOR TASMANIAN
YOUTH

Messages for Change

Our Perspectives on Change for Children

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.

Acknowledgement

The Acting Commissioner for Children and Young People, together with the Voices for Tasmanian Youth, thanks the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the Tasmanian Government for continuing to support this important work.

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

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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 5 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 you have a different view, that is okay.

We know that this is a complex problem and that everyone's experience and ideas are different.

If you are an adult reading this report, we ask you to read it and think about what you can do to better understand what the world is like for young people today.

If you are an adult who is making decisions and designing policies, and especially if you are making decisions about *Change for Children* and *Collaborating for Change*, we respectfully ask that you take this report seriously. We know what it is like to be a young person in Tasmania today.

Please note: Speech bubbles indicate direct quotes from the Voices for Tasmanian Youth members during workshops, or from our written contributions to the work.

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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.

Breaking the Silence for our Generation:

A statement from the Voices for Tasmanian Youth

Who we are

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

In Stage 1 of this project, we worked with the Commissioner for Children and Young People (CCYP), and the Acting Commissioner (CCYP), to share our views during the development of the Tasmanian Government's draft Child Sexual Abuse Reform Strategy, *Change for Children*, and its first 10-year Action Plan, *Collaborating for Change* (the draft). We developed 5 key messages through several months of conversations and brainstorming sessions.



Our 5 Key Messages

1. Update communication and education about sexual abuse for better awareness and prevention.
2. Young people's insights can improve conversations and decision-making.
3. Feeling safe in institutions boosts attendance and engagement.
4. Improve reporting systems to make them safer and more accessible.
5. Focusing on rehabilitation will enhance safety.

At the end of Stage 1, we presented the Government with our first report *Speaking Out for a Safer Tomorrow: Our Messages for Change (Speaking Out)*.¹

In Stage 2, a slightly older group of 7 of us, aged 16-18 continued to work together, with the Acting Commissioner, to provide our feedback to the Government about the draft. Our work was supported by a Project Lead from the Office of the CCYP, who facilitated our discussions during the workshops, in addition to supporting the co-production of this report.

How we did this work

In Stage 2, some of us chose to participate in a series of semi-structured online workshops, while others chose to provide written feedback. At each workshop we reviewed the draft focusing in turn on each of the 5 key messages from *Speaking Out*. Our written feedback followed the same structure.

1. You can read our first report here: <https://childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/CC-Voices-for-Youth-Report-DIGITAL.pdf>

We also reviewed 2 'easy read' documents released by the Government about the Government's efforts to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse.

The Office of the CCYP conducted a thematic analysis of our discussions and written feedback, and the Office provided this to the Government as a series of 5 Mini Reports. Each Mini Report presented a summary of our feedback.²

About this Report

This report is our full response to the draft. It is designed to be read alongside our earlier report, *Speaking Out*, which can be accessed on the Commissioner for Children and Young People's website: <https://childcomm.tas.gov.au>.

In this report, we focus on the 5 key messages we originally shared with the Government. We explore how the Government has responded to these messages. To ensure the Government could consider our feedback throughout the *Change for Children* consultation period, the Office of the CCYP provided regular Mini Reports to the Government, each focused on feedback about one of our key messages.

This report combines those Mini Reports. It also shares our thoughts, suggestions, and recommendations for improving communication with children and young people to uphold our right to participate.

2. Mini Reports were provided to the Government at regular intervals throughout the three-month consultation period, giving the Government more time to reflect on our feedback.



Message 1:

Update communication and education about sexual abuse for better awareness and prevention

"This message matters because children and young people growing up now have more diverse relationships and more avenues for abuse to occur than the adults in their lives did when they were young."

(VTY Member)



In Message 1 we asked the Government and the community to help us learn about sex and sexual abuse through a comprehensive approach that is part of a supportive and informed culture and system. We appreciated references to improving communication and education about sexual abuse in the draft. We were pleased to receive a letter from the Tasmanian Government's Reform Lead confirming that there will be more consultation with young people about this.³

- We want to emphasise the advice that we gave in *Speaking Out*,⁴ that education about consent, sex and sexual abuse needs to go beyond specific school classes, so that schools foster a culture of open conversation about safe and respectful relationships.
- We want to highlight that education about relationships and sex should include information about a diverse range of intimate relationships.
- We also want to stress the need for adults to better understand the critical role of technology in young peoples' lives – meaningful conversations about sexual safety must include online environments because this is where many of our experiences take place.

"... we need more education in things like online dating, harassment online, like...exact specifics rather than just an overview of the issue."
(VTY Member)

3. We received a letter from the Project Lead thanking us for the *Speaking Out* report and the other work we did as part of Stage 1 of the Voices for Tasmanian Youth. The letter outlined a commitment to working with us throughout the development and implementation of the Strategy.

4. You can read the *Speaking Out* report here: <https://childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/CC-Voices-for-Youth-Report-DIGITAL.pdf>

Navigating the draft

- As a group, we shared a range of views about our first impressions of the draft.
- Some of us found the draft very difficult to understand and navigate. This meant that it was often challenging to readily understand and think about the content and what it means for children and young people.
- As stated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, all children and young people have the right to genuine participation in matters that affect them (Article 12). Children and young people also have the right to receive information that is accessible to them (Article 13). To support children and young people's right to participate, it is important that documents are accessible and engaging, tell us what we need to know in clear and direct language, and are age appropriate.⁵ Providing high-quality, child-friendly documents from the start of the *Change for Children* consultation period would have better empowered us to contribute our insights from start to finish.⁶
- To enable children and young people to exercise their right to participate, Government should do everything needed to make sure all versions of important documents like *Change for Children* and *Collaborating for Change* are accessible enough to allow this.

"What does that actually mean?" (VTY Member)

5. See for example: Lundy, L, (2022), *How to Write a Child-Friendly Document*, <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/how-to-write-a-child-friendly-document/>

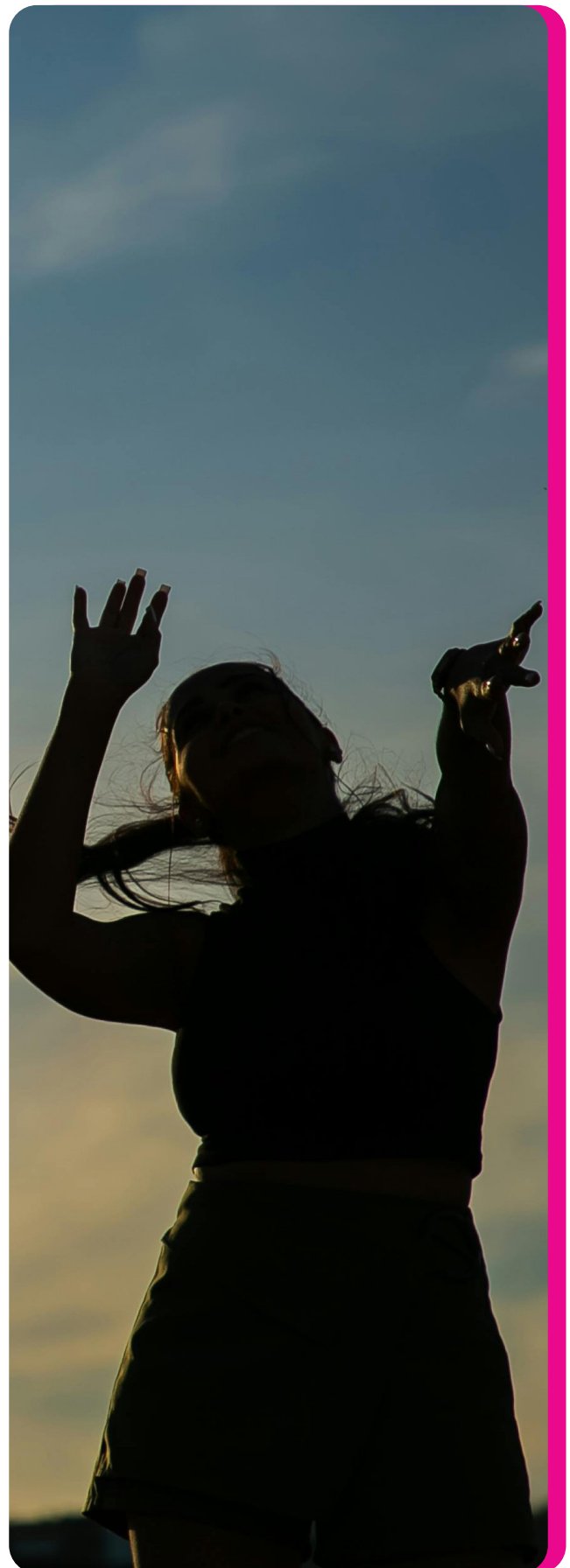
6. Three 'easy read' documents were added to the *Change for Children* website during the consultation period. These documents seek to communicate the overarching aims of the reforms arising from the Commission of Inquiry; however, they do not appear to be intended to engage children and young people in the *Change for Children* consultation process.

Initial impressions of the content

- Most of us were impressed by the aims and goals of the draft and really liked the use of inclusive language, as well as the parts that recognised the past failings of the Government.
- Some of us felt that it seems like the Government is trying to make things better for children and young people, but we found it hard to be sure because the draft was so difficult to understand.
- We really liked seeing the use of diagrams as a way of making complex ideas and content easier to understand.
- Some of us felt unsure about whether there was anything 'new' in the draft.
- We were happy to see the proposed closure of Ashley Youth Detention Centre, and the commitment to raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility included in the draft, but we felt strongly that these, and other important changes, should be actioned much sooner than is currently planned.

"I think it was really beautiful that in the dedication they said, 'in their memory and for all the victims, we commit to real change', which shows that they are actually serious."

(VTY Member)





Message 2:

Young people have valuable insights that can improve conversations and decision making

"This message matters because as young people we are the only people who truly understand what being a young person is like in our current time and we have a right to affect what decisions are being made for us as much as adults do."

(VTY Member)



In Message 2 we encouraged the Government to think about a future where young people feel genuinely heard and respected in conversations about sexual abuse.

- Some of us thought that the draft appears to show a good understanding of why the voices of children and young people are important.
- We were pleased to see references to support services.
- Many of us appreciated the ‘experience of a child or young person’ visual.⁷
- We could see that the draft includes some content from *Speaking Out* about the importance of listening to the voices of children and young people.
- Some of us thought Message 2 was reflected well in the draft. Others found it difficult to know if the Government had really listened to our advice because the draft was long and difficult to understand.
- We would like to see terms like ‘victim-survivor’ explained early in the Strategy.

“Like they did listen to what we had to say, but I think they also missed out some important chunks.”

(VTY Member)

7. Page 11 of the draft *Change for Children: ‘Experience of a child or young person’*.



The Child and Community Voice Priority Area

- We were pleased to see the inclusion of the Child and Community Voice Priority Area.
- This priority area reflected quite a lot of our higher-level advice to the Government, but we really wanted to see more specific information about how the Government will act on its commitments.
- The Government needs to ensure it is engaging with a larger and more diverse group of children and young people.
- We talked about the need for the Government to create and strengthen a range of methods for all children and young people to access advocacy, and to be heard. This could include through existing school student representative councils and surveys. We would like to see more options for reporting to people who aren’t teachers or principals, but who are still based in schools.

“I would suggest... they engage with a more varied group of young people and in some other ways.”

(VTY Member)

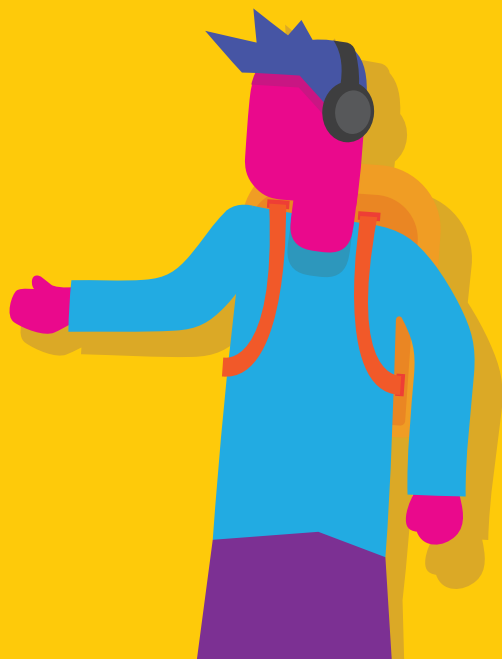
Understanding ‘the how’

- We appreciated references in the draft to ongoing collaboration and listening to children and young people, including through the VTY Consultative Council.
- We had a lot of questions about how the Government will work with children and young people over the life of the Strategy, and all of its action plans.
- We really wanted the draft to show how the specific actions we recommended in *Speaking Out* will be responded to.

“...it doesn’t touch on the actions part of our report.”

(VTY Member)





Message 3:

Feeling safe in institutions improves attendance and engagement

"This message matters because when young people do not feel safe in institutions, they do not engage in them and lose out on valuable opportunities to grow as people and learn in the ways they deserve to."

(VTY Member)



In Message 3 we encouraged the Government to focus on the need for schools and other institutions to be and feel safe, welcoming and inclusive for all children and young people.

- We appreciated the Government acknowledging that institutions have not always been places where children and young people feel safe or happy to be. For some of us, feeling unsafe or unhappy in institutional settings is still our day-to-day experience.
- We are happy that the Government is making changes to improve safety for children and young people in institutions. We really wanted to hear more from the Government about specific actions being taken.
- One example is the lack of privacy we experience in school bathrooms, where doors may not lock, or people look over the top of stalls (sometimes this is even teachers if they suspect someone is vaping). One of us talked about how this experience means they try to avoid bathroom visits by restricting the amount of water they drink during the day.
- Making specific changes to improve the day-to-day experiences of children and young people in institutions (like fixing the bathroom facilities) would help us feel safer. These sorts of actions would have positive and long-term impacts on our wellbeing.

"...easy things they could have mentioned in this [draft] could be like...we're gonna make sure that children feel safe playing outside in open areas... as we will have teachers standing at access points."

(VTY Member)

- We understand it is important to have procedures and policies that promote actual safety, but we also need to feel safe.

- Part of helping us feel safe is communicating clearly with us about the tangible actions that are being taken to make us safer.

"...I think it's just as important to feel safe as it is to be safe."

(VTY Member)

- We also feel safer in Government institutions when the staff seem relaxed and approachable, and we are made to feel welcome. Things like lighting and design are important. Feeling safe is also about being able to understand signage, forms and other written information so that we can find our way around and make sense of what we are reading or being asked to do.



Message 4:


Improve reporting systems to make them safer and more accessible

“This message matters because when reporting systems are unsafe or inaccessible young people do not access them and abuse that should be reported is allowed to go unchecked and continue; and young people cannot receive the support they may need.”
(VTY Member)



In Message 4 we encouraged the Government to build a system where all children and young people have ready access to someone independent to talk to about concerns and abuse. Our vision is for a system where we are confident about how to report concerns, and when we do so, we are kept informed about how our report is being addressed.

- Reporting abuse is complicated, scary and confusing. It doesn't always feel okay to report to teachers or principals as they might be a workmate or friend of the person who has made us worried or who has abused us. Because of this we may not report abuse that happens in schools.
- We were happy to learn about the new school Safeguarding Leads, but as we said in *Speaking Out*, we would still like students to have access to an independent person in schools who is there just for us.




"...[Safeguarding Leads are] actually quite important because mandatory reporting laws are really confusing."
(VTY Member)

- When we do report, we want to be involved and receive updates on what is going on. We understand that any updates we get might need to protect the privacy of other people, but there should be a way to give us general updates on the progress of the process. One of us said this could maybe be something a bit like the delivery updates you get when you buy a package online.
- One of us also suggested that children and young peoples' reporting experiences and their satisfaction with the process should be evaluated by someone independent so that the system is always getting better.

The rights of children and young people

- We continued to find that the language and the structure of the draft made it harder to understand. Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, children and young people have the right to genuine participation in matters that affect them (Article 12) and the right to receive information that is accessible to them (Article 13). We would like to see the Government make sure that the final draft and Action Plan, and future action plans, uphold these rights. We also think that a way to do this is through interactive videos that give us more detail in accessible ways.



"...and it's like all very wishy-washy, like it's a little bit vague."
(VTY Member)

- We liked the graphics on page 11 of the draft.⁸ We thought that they powerfully captured the kinds of changes we would like to see. We particularly liked the parts that said: I did not have to repeatedly share my story to get help, I was responded to quickly and with care, I am believed when I share my experiences. One of us suggested adding words to reflect that abuse is not the fault of the child or young person, and that they will be treated with respect 'and empathy'.

⁸ On page 11 of the draft, diagrams show the Government's aspirations about the experiences of a child or young person, and a victim-survivor.

- We really wanted to see more details about how actions are going to happen and when. One of us suggested that the images on page 11 of the draft could be expanded to show examples of the actions that will be taken.

"...you need to have, like an example... 'cause otherwise you're just saying words."

(VTY Member)

- Another one of us reflected that the planned actions 'seem really impactful', but they stressed the need for more action now. They suggested finding ways to raise awareness about sexual abuse and the support that is available, and that 'even having a free dress day at schools each year to spread awareness of sexual assault may help'.

"...we need more support now, children are still being abused every day now."

(VTY Member)





Message 5:

A greater focus on prevention and rehabilitation will improve safety

"This message matters because when young people experience punishment instead of rehabilitation, they are incredibly likely to continue doing the behaviours that got them the punishment...it also matters because young people who hurt people are very likely to have been hurt themselves, so a further traumatising approach is terrible for them."

(VTY Member)



In Message 5 we encouraged the Government to develop a clear and proactive approach to preventing violence by supporting children and young people, and their families. It also encourages a strong focus on responding to those who do engage in harmful behaviours in ways that are not about punishment, but are instead, about rehabilitation.

- We thought that Message 5 was reflected quite well in the draft. We were happy to see that some support services have received extra funding to support and respond to people who need help. One of us talked about being happy this action has happened relatively quickly, as they felt that this demonstrates that the Government is serious about making change.
- We liked the reference to 'A changed future', as referred to on page 5 of the draft and thought that it reflected the aim and intention of Message 5. As one of us said, 'I like the changed future one...yeah. Like I feel like that is what we're talking about'.

A stronger focus on prevention

- We were pleased to see a focus on a therapeutic approach to young people with harmful behaviours.

"...priority number one should always be prevention."

(VTY Member)

- We were concerned that the draft did not present a strong enough focus on supporting young people before they engage in harmful behaviours.

"...[a therapeutic response] is good once they start doing [abuse]. Yeah, but it doesn't really do anything before they [abuse others]."

(VTY Member)

Further feedback on the draft

We have continued to share general feedback about the draft.

- Several of us felt the graphics were dull and unappealing and did not make a young person want to read it. However, another member really liked the Australian native plant theme and said 'if I were to say something good about it, my positives would be the graphics'.
- One member said that the part of the draft they were most happy about was the closing of the Ashley Youth Detention Centre. They also said they were pleased that there were 'many different watchdogs that [the Government] has created' to respond to the problem of child sexual abuse.
- Another one of us shared that they think 'the Government has actually finally started listening to victim-survivors...and understanding that [victim-survivors] do in fact know more than a person in a government office knows about their own experience'. They went on to say, 'but some parts of this document prove to me that [the Government doesn't] always do that'.

"...I think that should be a strong message from us, this document...isn't a strategy...there's no strategy in this...and what they call their action plan, I've looked through schools' action plans and stuff. Action plans are meant to also show how they intend to do it."

(VTY Member)

Creating and sharing information for children and young people

As well as looking at the draft, we also looked at 2 separate documents from the Government written for children and young people about the reform work.⁹

9. We looked at 2 of the 'easy read' documents available, a 'Children version' and a 'Young Person version'. You can find them here: <https://keepingchildrensafe.tas.gov.au/government-response-easy-read-resources/>



An insight from a VTY member - why good communication matters and what can help

When preparing child-friendly information, it is essential for the Government to consult with children and young people. Engaging with them ensures that their unique perspectives are taken into account, allowing the information to be tailored to their level of understanding and specific needs. This process promotes inclusivity, making young people feel heard and valued. Additionally, involving children and youth in the creation of such materials helps build trust in government institutions and ensures that the information is effective, accessible, and relevant to its intended audience.

To communicate effectively with children and young people, the Government can use a variety of strategies. Digital platforms like social media, apps, and websites are excellent tools, as many young people are already active on these platforms. Interactive content such as quizzes, games, and polls can make information more engaging, while visuals and simple language help ensure clarity. Involving youth ambassadors or influencers can make the message more relatable, and delivering information through schools or educational programs allows for structured engagement in a familiar environment.

Looking at the resources

Make the message and the language clear


- It is really important that the Government provides information to children and young people in language they can understand.
- Despite the intent to support children and young people's understanding, we thought these resources were vague and didn't clearly explain what they were about.
- Some of us felt that the documents should use a lot more pictures and brighter colours so that they look like they are for children and young people.



"...I don't really understand what I'm looking at."
(VTY Member)


Say what you mean, because otherwise we don't know

- Several of us noticed the documents talk about victim survivors being 'hurt' instead of sexually abused. Some of us thought this would make it harder for children and young people to know what the documents are about.
- Some of us said that by not talking more directly about sexual abuse, the Government were "dumbing down" the message too much.



"...I love the idea, but it feels very, you know, belittling..."
(VTY Member)

- Several of us said that being 'hurt' could mean a lot of things that have nothing to do with sexual abuse. For example, one of us commented 'some people could have been hurt by stubbing their toe...for all I know this could be about prevention of toe-stubbing'.
- To reduce stigma and encourage children and young people to ask for help, adults need to use the correct terminology.




"...when you make it such a taboo topic, no wonder people don't come forward about the abuse, because they feel like they shouldn't talk about it."

(VTY Member)

Give us the information we need the most

- We all agreed that the documents did not contain the sorts of information that is helpful to children and young people.
- One of us said the documents should answer questions like 'Who is a safe adult? How can I decide if someone is a safe adult? Where can I get help? Who can I talk to?'



"...you have to make it more specific...is it information just about what the Government will do [in the reform] or is that information actually information that can help me?"

(VTY Member)

- The documents mention that the Government made a 'promise to do more to make sure children and young people are safe'. Reflecting the need to make information more specific, one of us said that the documents should state 'when this promise starts, and how long it will go for'.

Give us the information in a variety of ways that we can understand

- The documents both have links to ‘a website with lots of information,’ but we don’t think the website is child-friendly at all. As one of us said ‘a lot of children wouldn’t fully understand where or how to navigate that website or how to find what they’re looking for’. This could be very confusing for a child or young person.
- We think there should be a QR code that takes the reader to a child-friendly webpage.
- Some of us suggested that creating interactive videos that target specific age groups and topics would be an effective way to share important information with children and young people.
- We want communication and education to be specific, and to tell us exactly what you mean so that we don’t have to try and guess. If adults want us to be brave about this, they need to be brave too.



A message from the Acting Commissioner for Children and Young People

Thank you for reading the second report from the Voices for Tasmanian Youth. The council was established by Commissioner McLean so that young Tasmanians could provide valuable and influential input into the Tasmanian Government's 10-year Strategy for upholding children's rights by preventing, identifying, and responding to child sexual abuse.

In their first report, *Speaking Out*, the Voices for Tasmanian Youth outlined 5 key messages, reflecting their perspectives, aspirations, and recommendations for how the Government can better prevent and respond to child sexual abuse, particularly in institutional settings.

Building on this important work, 7 members of the Voices for Tasmanian Youth reviewed the Government's draft *Change for Children* and *Collaborating for Change*. This report, *Messages for Change*, is organised around the 5 key messages from their first report. The report captures the young people's views on the draft, and how the Government has responded to their input. It also provides their views about how effectively the Government has communicated with children and young people to ensure their voices are heard and their participatory rights are upheld. The Voices for Tasmanian Youth have been frank and fearless in their feedback.

The Office of the CCYP assisted the Voices for Tasmanian Youth in this work, through workshop facilitation, analysis of written feedback and

transcripts, and preparation of Mini Reports to the Department of Premier and Cabinet. This report reflects the words, written contributions, feedback, and "vibe" of the young people.

I commend the Tasmanian Government for its support of the work of the Voices for Tasmanian Youth and for welcoming the input of those it seeks to protect - children and young people.

It is my strong hope that the Government listens and acts upon the views and ideas of children and young people, who are experts in their own lives and experiences. This requires change to be embedded into every level of the Government. This change must reflect a lasting commitment, across the Government, to upholding the rights of children and young people, including the right to meaningful participation. The Voices for Tasmanian Youth now look to the Government to deliver on this change.

Importantly, I extend my heartfelt thanks to the young people whose passion, commitment, and insights have created this report. I continue to admire their tenacity and compassion.

When we take the time and make the commitment to listen, respond, and act on the views of children and young people, we uphold their rights, support their future, and create a better Tasmania for everyone.

Isabelle Crompton

Acting Commissioner for Children and Young People

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