

**INQUIRY INTO FOUNDATIONAL AND DISABILITY  
SUPPORTS AVAILABLE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG  
PEOPLE IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Organisation:** Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People  
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16 April 2025

The Hon. Natasha Maclaren-Jones, MLC  
Chair, Select Committee on Foundational and Disability Supports Available for Children and Young  
People In New South Wales, NSW Parliament

Via email: [disabilitysupports@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:disabilitysupports@parliament.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Chair,

As the NSW Advocate for Children and Young People, I commend the committee for establishing the inquiry into Foundational and Disability Supports Available for Children and Young People and welcome the opportunity to provide insights that I have heard from children and young people with disability regarding their experiences.

Established under the *Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014*, the Advocate for Children and Young People is an independent statutory appointment overseen by the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Children and Young People. The Advocate promotes the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and young people aged 0-24 years and their participation in decisions that affect their lives. The Act requires the Advocate to 'give priority to the interests and needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people' and to 'focus on systemic issues affecting children and young people.' Further information about the Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People's (ACYP) work can be found at: [www.acyp.nsw.gov.au](http://www.acyp.nsw.gov.au).

Children and young people with disability are the experts in their own lives and experiences. ACYP recognises and supports the work being done across government to listen to children and young people with diverse lived experience when developing policies, programs and services. Throughout their work, the Advocate speaks with many children and young people with disability of all ages. This submission shares key messages and themes from these children and young people, reflecting what they have shared with the Advocate and the work of ACYP in supporting them. These insights are sourced from:

- [\*The Voices of Children and Young People with Disability\* report](#) (Disability Report): Released in 2020, this report is informed by the voices of children and young people who live with disability that participated in face-to-face consultations with ACYP.
- The [Strategic Plan for Children and Young People 2022-2024](#) (Strategic Plan): ACYP conducted polling among children and young people in NSW to identify priority areas and baseline information.

During the consultation for [The Voices of Children and Young People with Disability report](#), ACYP conducted face-to-face consultations from 2019 to 2020 with more than 370 children and young people with disability aged eight to 24. The children and young people who participated in consultations shared their opinions on what is working well for them, what is not working well for them and what changes they would like to see to make NSW a better place for all children and young people. They also emphasised the importance of ensuring all children and young people have the opportunity to directly participate in decision making on matters impacting them. Some responses included:

*“We just need a chance like everyone else”,*

*“Nobody has ever asked us before”,*

*“We need to have a voice because we have to live through it...”, and*

*“We will be the next generation so we should get a say not just you”.*

These quotes exemplify that children and young people with disability want opportunities to share their experiences. Without hearing the voices of children and young people, we risk continuing to overlook the things that impact their lives and missing the opportunity to address any issues for future generations. Listening to children and young people with disability is a vital step in creating person-centred and inclusive systems for everyone.

During consultations for the Disability Report, a reoccurring theme raised by children and young people was education, suggesting the majority of children and young people with disability considered education as a significant factor in enabling or prohibiting inclusion in their lives. Some practical changes that were suggested included an increase in resourcing, disability awareness training for both school staff and students, and buildings that are designed for people with physical disability.

Children and young people spoke about the value of early intervention education and awareness from a very young age, including counselling, case management, specialist appointments and crisis intervention services. One young person explained:

*“Kids need to get support before things get too bad, support should be available to everyone.”*

This highlights the critical importance of ensuring that foundational supports are delivered during the early years, to support a successful transition to school.

Children and young people who participated in consultations also shared the impact of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) on their lives. In particular, children and young people valued the

NDIS for supporting them to access and participate in community activities, and highlighted the dedication and skill of their support, respite and case workers.

Being able to guide the type of support and guidance they needed gave children and young people a voice and made them feel as though services were relevant for their specific needs.

However, children and young people also spoke about the difficulties they faced in accessing appropriate services and supports, including relying on their families to “fight” for support even if it was featured in their NDIS plan, navigating a complex system, and facing challenges with service delays, quality and access. In particular, children and young people with a diagnosis of mental illness and disability faced exacerbated challenges in being excluded from accessing some support services.

*“It is appalling to see the amount of young people with disability who have a dual diagnosis of a mental illness and a disability and they fall through every community service gap and are not getting the support that they need to live let alone be well.”*

*“Young people are either too disabled or not disabled enough.”*

*“(There is) not enough support some supports are available for mild to moderate conditions... but no support for (young people) with complex mental health needs.”*

Children and young people called for more equitable access to services for people in rural and regional areas of NSW, and for systems that enabled more efficient plan approval that did not repeatedly require them to provide evidence of permanent disabilities.

The value of choice was a key theme, with young people highlighting challenges around a “one size fits all” approach. Where children and young people felt their needs were being met, they spoke positively of both Schools for Specific Purposes and mainstream schools.

Children and young people with disability, who participated in this work, expressed that the main barriers to their inclusion are caused by societal stereotypes about their capabilities, misunderstandings, and a general lack of community awareness and education. They expressed feeling helpless, angry and frustrated when they are not given the opportunity to express themselves, or not listened to when they wanted to voice their opinion. This report presented 30 recommendations from children and young people, and 26 from ACYP, based on the feedback gathered during the consultations.

ACYP is of the view that children and young people should have the opportunity to directly participate in decision making on matters that impact them, and encourages the committee to consider the perspectives of children and young people where possible throughout the inquiry.

In 2021, ACYP developed the *Strategic Plan*, in accordance with our Act, to reflect what children and young people have said is important and matters to them. In the 2024 Strategic Plan tracking report, children and young people with physical disability self-reported experiencing poor physical health outcomes; with only 48% rating their experiences from 7+ out of 10, significantly lower than most of their peers. Further, when asked about their experiences of discrimination in the last 12 months, of those that reported experiencing discrimination, 57% identified as having a physical disability, 51% were neurodivergent and 44% had a mental condition.

Finally, I note the ongoing work of ACYP in relation to supporting young people in custody, many of whom have additional needs that have not been met. The 2019 ACYP Report [\*What Children and Young People in Juvenile Justice Centres Have to Say\*](#) highlighted challenges that young people in custody faced with having their learning needs met throughout their lives. The report recommended that all children and young people should be screened for disability and health issues from early childhood and routinely thereafter in health, educational and justice settings and connected with appropriate support to address their needs and potential risk factors for coming into conflict with the law.

Ensuring that each child in NSW has access to early childhood intervention services and other foundational disability supports is critical to supporting the development, health and wellbeing of the next generation.

Thank you once more for the opportunity to provide a submission to this inquiry. ACYP would be happy to work with the committee to explore these topics further, and trust that this information has been of some assistance. Should you wish to discuss these matters, please do not hesitate to contact my office via: [acyp@acyp.nsw.gov.au](mailto:acyp@acyp.nsw.gov.au) or ph: (02) 9248 0970.

Yours Sincerely,

**Zoë Robinson**

Advocate for Children and Young People  
Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People