



Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People

Annual Report
1 July 2022 – 30 June 2023

The Hon. Benjamin Franklin, MLC
President
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

The Hon. Greg Piper, MP
Speaker
Legislative Assembly
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr President and Mr Speaker,

In accordance with Section 32 of the Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014 (the Act) I am pleased to present the Advocate for Children and Young People's Annual Report for 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023.

The report includes: a description of the Advocate's activities during the year in relation to each of the Advocate's functions, an evaluation of the response of relevant authorities to the recommendations of the Advocate; and any recommendations for changes in the laws of the State, or for administrative action, that the Advocate considers should be made as a result of the exercise of the Advocate's functions.

As provided by Section 35 of the Act, I ask that you now make this report publicly available at the determined time.

Yours sincerely

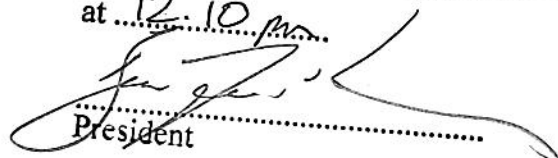


Zoë Robinson
Advocate for Children and Young People
30 October 2023

Received by me and authorised
to be made public forthwith on

Monday 30 October 2023

at 12:10 pm



President

The Hon. Benjamin Franklin, MLC
President
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

The Hon. Greg Piper, MP
Speaker
Legislative Assembly
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr President and Mr Speaker,

In accordance with Section 32 of the Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014 (the Act) I am pleased to present the Advocate for Children and Young People's Annual Report for 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023.

The report includes: a description of the Advocate's activities during the year in relation to each of the Advocate's functions, an evaluation of the response of relevant authorities to the recommendations of the Advocate; and any recommendations for changes in the laws of the State, or for administrative action, that the Advocate considers should be made as a result of the exercise of the Advocate's functions.

As provided by Section 35 of the Act, I ask that you now make this report publicly available at the determined time.

Yours sincerely



Zoë Robinson
Advocate for Children and Young People
30 October 2023

Received by me and authorised
to be made public forthwith on

30 October 2023
at 12:10



Speaker



We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to lands, waters and cultures. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

We would also like to acknowledge the important role of Aboriginal people and culture within the NSW community.

Contents

10. Consultations

15. Submissions

Advocate's Foreword	07
About the Office	08
The Voices of LGBTQIA+ Young People in NSW	11
The Experiences of Children and Young People in Youth Justice	12
It Should be Easier to Just Exist – Cost of Living Project	13
The Experiences of Young People with Alcohol and Other Drugs	13
<i>Vaping Consultations</i>	13
<i>Alcohol and Other Drugs Consultations</i>	14
Inquiry into Teacher Shortages in NSW	16
Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs – Missing and Murdered First Nations Women and Children	16
Religious Educational Institutions and Anti-Discrimination Laws	17
Select Committee on Cost of Living	17
NSW Law Reform Commission – Review of Serious Road Crime Offences	18
NSW Sentencing Council – Firearms, Knives and other Weapons Offences	18
Senate Committee on Education and Employment - The Issue of Increasing Disruption in Australian School Classrooms	18
Department of Social Services – Early Years Strategy	19

20. Response to Recommendations

NSW Inquiry on Options to Improve Access to Existing and Alternative Accommodation to Address the Social Housing Shortage	21
Support for Rural and Regional Learning Drivers	21
Recommendations for Changes in the Laws of the State, or for Administrative Action	22
Special Inquiries	22

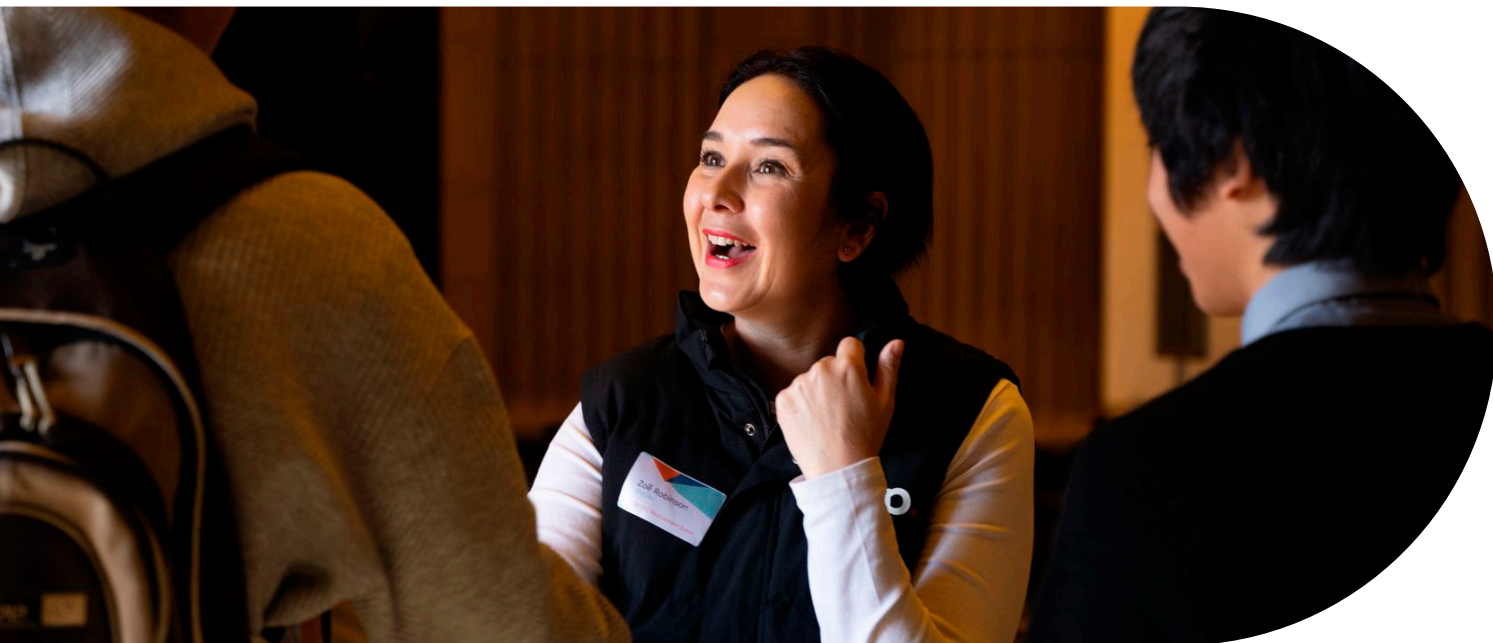
NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People 2022-2024 **23**

25. Initiatives

State of the State Event	26
NAIDOC Family Fun Day	27
Nations of Origin 2022	28
Children's Week 2022	29
<i>NSW Children's Week Event</i>	29
<i>NSW Children's Week Activity Booklet</i>	31
<i>NSW Children's Week Art Competition</i>	32
<i>Postcards to the Advocate</i>	34
Voices of Change	35
One to Watch Award – NSW Women of the Year Award	38
Youth Week 2023	41
<i>Youth Week Poll 2023</i>	41
<i>Youth Week Events</i>	42
Netball NSW 2023	45
Northern Rivers – Recovery Youth Supports Service	46
Central West Region – Disaster Consultations	49
NSW Youth Advisory Council	50
<i>Youth Advisory Council</i>	50
<i>Recruitment for the Youth Advisory Council 2023-2024</i>	51
<i>Youth Advisory Council Project</i>	52

25. Initiatives (cont.)	Breathe Workshops	53
55. Report Launches	Memorandum of Understanding with the NSW Department of Education	54
57. Training and Internships	The Voices of Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care	56
60. Engaging with Stakeholders	Child Rights eLearning Modules	58
62. Research Projects	Advocacy Training	58
64. Promote the Provision of Information and Advice to Assist Young People	Facilitation Training	59
69. Office Structure and Governance	Work Experience and Student Placements	59
	Committees and Advisory Boards	61
	School is for Everyone (SIFE)	63
	Website Engagement	65
	ACYP's Network	66
	Digital Lunchbreak	67
	Requests for information under Section 13 AA of the <i>Ombudsman's Act 1974</i>	68
	Requests for information under the <i>Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009</i>	68
	Parliamentary Oversight	70
	Statutory Review of the <i>Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014</i>	70
	Staffing	71
	Budget	71
	Principal Officers	71

Advocate's Foreword



Here we are reflecting on another year as the Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People (ACYP) and on how we have supported children and young people across the State of New South Wales.

We always hold central to our work voice, safety, welfare, wellbeing and inclusion of all children and young people. This means that we adjust our work according to the needs of the children and young people we engage with and include. It also means that all our work starts with what children and young people say is important to them and then we design our work around what we hear.

We must always meet children and young people where they are, be that in terms of development, space or community. It means ensuring that we have strong relationships across government, business and community to facilitate our work with and for all children and young people in NSW.

You will see that this year has been another huge year for the team at ACYP, with over 10,000 children and young people engaged with. Which means that it has been a powerful year for children and young people because they have shared their voices. You will have an opportunity to read in detail the work we have done, but as always I want to acknowledge the amazing children and young people who participated in our consultations and informed our reports. Those in the LGBTQIA+ community who boldly shared their experiences. The children and young people in out-of-home care who shared their experiences with us about everything from entering into care and any advice they had to government, as examples.

The young men and women in youth justice who continue to guide our work. We have also worked with our government colleagues on focus areas such as cost of living and vaping, and took that to children and young people to ensure that government's response was informed by children and young people. All of this work aligns with the NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People 2022-2024.

We provided a number of submissions to both NSW and federal inquiries to ensure the voices of children and young people were included. For one particular hearing we appeared with a young person who shared their own experiences of teacher shortages in their school and community. Where possible, it is important to ACYP that young people have an opportunity to be heard at Inquiries and in Parliament.

Excitingly we continue to develop and deliver initiatives that benefit children and young people including the Voices of Change event, Postcards to the Advocate, Children's Week activities and our continued support of the One to Watch Award – NSW Women of the Year Awards. We developed a partnership with Netball NSW to work with and engage with young women around matters concerning them. We continued to reach out to communities who had been impacted by disaster, including working with organisations like KYUP! and Thread Together to provide support to flood affected areas.

We provided support to the social enterprise Breath, which provides public speaking and communication workshops to young people. Together, with the founder Jahin Tanvir, ACYP supported 10 workshops for young people in metropolitan and regional NSW.

At ACYP the team continued to grow and we welcomed the Recovery Youth Support Service team at ACYP. We also welcomed our Lived Experience Advisor who has a particular focus on youth justice.

Thank you to every member of the ACYP team for your never-ending commitment to children and young people, and consistently delivering a high standard of work that reflects their voices and opinions in everything we do.

I am grateful to the Youth Advisory Council who continued to provide me incredible advice, guidance and support through this year. This year we travelled to Albury together to ensure we went to community and gave back. As always, the YAC, were thoughtful, engaged and trusted advisors to ACYP.

To all our colleagues and peers across government, business and community who create space for and engage with young people. This work matters. The space you create matters. Thank you to Department of Education for drafting and entering into the Memorandum of Understanding – this reflects how vital the work is that Education and ACYP do together to ensure children and young people are central to education policy and planning.

What a year. So many children and young people supported us and engaged with our work. I am grateful to the children and young people across the state, wherever we met with them, who shared their voice and their story. Only through that engagement, and that work, can we ensure NSW is the best place for children and young people to live in.



Zoë Robinson

The NSW Advocate for Children and Young People

About the Office

The Advocate for Children and Young People (ACYP) is established under the *Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014 (the Act)*.

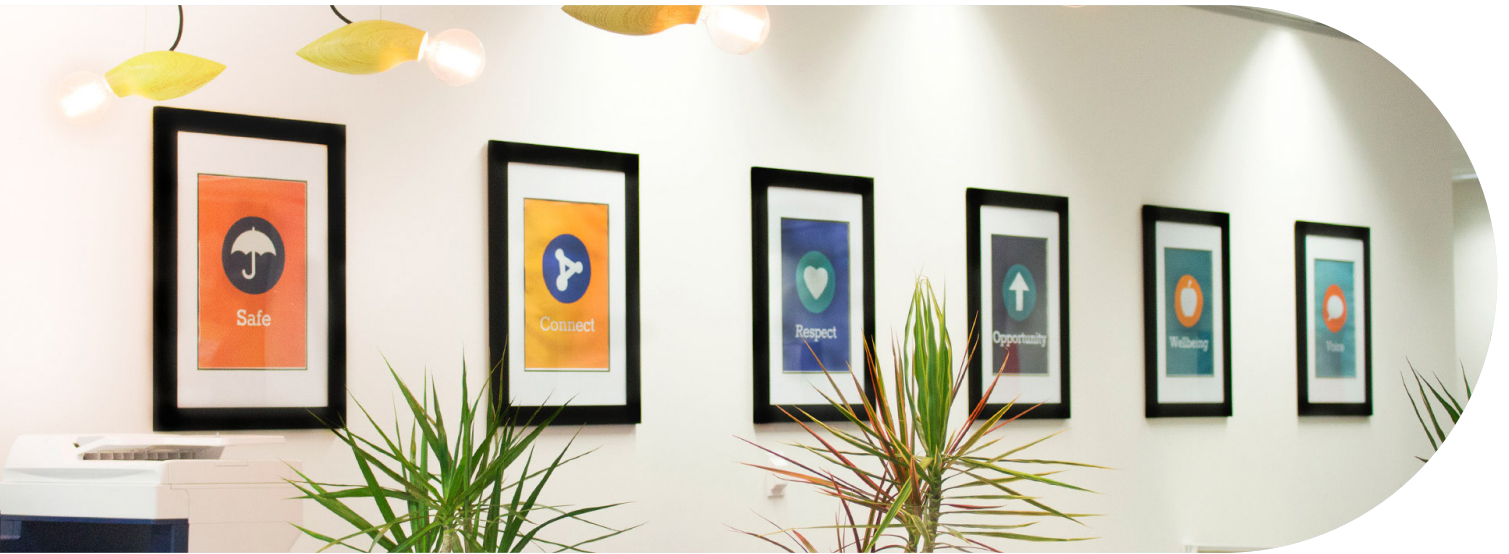
The Advocate is an independent statutory appointment overseen by the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Children and Young People.

The work of the Advocate is governed by the following principles, as described in Part 3 Section 14 of the Act:

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| a. | b. | c. |
| The safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and young people are the paramount considerations. | The views of children and young people are to be given serious consideration and taken into account. | A co-operative relationship between children and young people and their families and communities is important for the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and young people. |

The functions of the Advocate as set out in Part 3 Section 15 of the Act are:

- | | | | |
|-----------|--|-----------|--|
| a. | To advocate for and promote the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and young people aged 0-24 years. | d. | To make recommendations to government and non-government agencies on legislation, reports, policies, practices, procedures and services affecting children and young people. |
| b. | To promote the participation of children and young people in the making of decisions that affect their lives and to encourage government and non-government agencies to seek the participation of children and young people appropriate to their age and maturity. | e. | To conduct, promote and monitor research into issues affecting children and young people. |
| c. | To conduct special inquiries into issues affecting children and young people. | f. | To promote the provision of information and advice to assist children and young people. |
| | | g. | To prepare, in consultation with the Minister, a three-year strategic plan for children and young people in the State. |



In exercising functions under the Act, the Advocate must do the following:



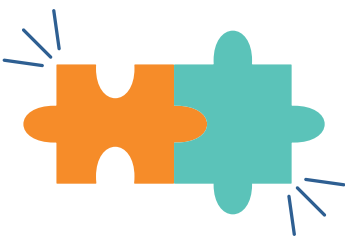
a. Focus on systemic issues affecting children and young people.



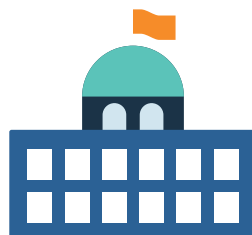
b. Give priority to the interests and needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people.



c. Consult with children and young people from a broad range of backgrounds and age groups throughout the State.



d. Work co-operatively with other organisations that provide services to or represent the interests of children and young people.



e. Work co-operatively with the Council.

The Act requires the Advocate to prepare an Annual Report to Parliament on the Advocate's activities during that year in relation to each of the Advocate's functions.

Consultations

The Voices of LGBTQIA+ Young People in NSW

ACYP's mandate, under the [Advocate for Children and Young People Act \(2014\)](#) is to consult with children and young people from a broad range of backgrounds and experiences, as well as to give priority to the interests and needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people.

Throughout ACYP's ongoing consultations with children and young people, it became clear that young people who identify as LGBTQIA+ experience particular vulnerabilities, and ACYP's research into the development of the [NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People 2022-2024](#) revealed this group experienced poorer outcomes across a variety of measures.

As a result, in 2022 ACYP conducted face-to-face and online consultations with 233 LGBTQIA+ identifying young people over a six month period.

They were asked a series of questions about;

- education;
- work;
- health and mental health services;
- their 'coming out' experiences;
- whether they had experienced stigma, discrimination and violence; and
- what advice they had for NSW Government to improve the lives of LGBTQIA+ young people.

In December 2022, the Advocate released their consultation report, [The Voices of LGBTQIA+ Young People in NSW](#). This report is an important read for all members of our society.

The findings in this report are confronting.

Although many young people who identify as LGBTQIA+ were great supports to one another and sought out opportunities to celebrate their identity, they also faced difficulties in navigating communities that did not always accept them.

While they have seen positive changes in recent years, LGBTQIA+ young people continue to face bullying, homophobia, and in some cases violence.

The Experiences of Children and Young People in Youth Justice

Others spoke about lack of access to information and health care.

Based on these findings, the Advocate developed a number of guides to support those who work or interact with LGBTQIA+ young people to create a safe and supportive environment.

These guides focus on how to support LGBTQIA+ young people in education, health services, community and workplaces.

Concluding work that the Advocate commenced in the previous reporting period, the Advocate and their team continued to support the Inspector of Custodial Services with their inspection of youth justice centres in NSW.

Within this reporting period, the Advocate's team and the Inspector visited Orana, Reiby, Riverina and Acmena Youth Justice Centres.

At the close of the reporting period, the Inspector of Custodial Services was finalising their report for release.

Independently of the project with the Inspector of Custodial Services project, the Advocate has continued to spend at least one day a month in different youth justice centres. As of 30 June 2023, the Advocate had visited Cobham, Frank Baxter, Reiby, Riverina and Orana Youth Justice Centres over 20 times within the reporting period.

Both of these projects allow the Advocate and their team to continually hear from those in youth justice and to observe the everyday practice within these centres. This helps with their work to identify systemic issues and in working to create meaningful change between visits.

Using these learnings, the Advocate continues to collaborate with Youth Justice in the programs and reforms they are leading within centres.

“It Should be Easier to Just Exist.”
Cost of Living Project

In recent years, children and young people have told the Advocate that managing the cost of living or finding housing they can afford are some of the top issues they face.

As a result, ACYP has committed to explore the issue in more detail, aligning with the commitment in the [NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People 2022-2024](#) to build a State where children and young people have a good standard of living.

Drawing on the findings from their Youth Week 2023 Survey, the Advocate released an interim quantitative report, [‘It should be easier to just exist’: How children and young people are impacted by and responding to the rising cost of living in NSW](#).

At a high level, the findings found that young people are working more, eating less, avoiding medical expenses and borrowing money to cope with the rising cost of living.

This interim report forms part of a larger consultation project with the final report due to be released in late 2023.

The Experiences of Young People with Alcohol and Other Drugs

Vaping Consultations

In their [2022 review of the annual reports and other matters of the Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People](#), the Committee on Children and Young People recommended the Advocate undertake consultations to collect information about how students are using e-cigarettes and vapes.

In response to this recommendation, the Advocate has undertaken a consultation project with 25 focus groups of approximately 261 students across 9 regional and metropolitan schools.

These consultations focused on;

- young people's perception of vaping;
- why young people choose to vape or choose not to vape; and
- the different cessation supports young people need.

Young people raised that there was a lack of understanding of the impacts of vaping and that the ease of access made it possible. For those young people who said they vaped, some of the reasons why they choose to was as a way to fit in and to relieve stress.

For those who choose not to vape, the potential harm of vapes and fear of getting in trouble were some of the reasons why they choose not to vape. These young people also raised the graphic images they have seen about the consequences of vaping, similar to those on cigarette packages which had impacted on their choices.

When young people were asked what would help them to stop, the most important factors were someone they could talk to who has accurate information, presenting alternative tools and ensuring their anonymity was protected. This information and tools must be co-designed, tested and evaluated with young people.

The Advocate is currently in the process of collating these findings into a consultation report, which is due to be released in late 2023.

Alcohol and Other Drugs Consultations

To support the development of the whole-of-government Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) Strategy, the Advocate conducted focus groups with 11 young people to hear their insights and ideas around the perception of AOD in the community, what supports, services and interventions may be required and how to prevent or divert young people away from harmful AOD use.

The young people focused on the importance of early intervention and increased education and awareness around the harms of prolonged AOD use.

These findings were collated and provided to the Department of Premier and Cabinet to inform the development of the Strategy.

Submissions

Inquiry into Teacher Shortages in NSW

In July 2022, the Advocate made a submission into the Teacher Shortages in NSW Inquiry led by the Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education.

The Advocate made a [joint submission](#) with Campbell Quintrell who was a Youth Advisory Council member in 2020/2021 and who had undertaken advocacy on this issue.

The submission opened with Campbell recounting his experiences of how teacher shortages in regional NSW had impacted upon his education.

Using this lived experience and the broader research of the Office, the submission made recommendations around difficulties retaining quality teachers, especially in rural and regional NSW. Part of these challenges were based around teachers being placed under pressure due to excess workloads and limited supports.

The submission then considered the challenges of retaining teachers when having to strike a balance between ensuring quality competent teachers with high entry standards into university courses.

To discuss his experiences and the findings and recommendations of the submission, Campbell and the Advocate appeared before the Committee in September 2022.

Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs – Missing and Murdered First Nations Women and Children

In December 2022, the Advocate and Deputy Children’s Guardian made a [joint submission](#) to the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs Missing and Murdered First Nations Women and Children.

The submission drew on research literature highlighting the high rates of violence that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children face, and the over-representation they face in other social domains.

The submission noted that these figures should not be considered in isolation, but have a direct correlation of complex and intersecting structural and systemic failures. It acknowledges the work that is currently being done through government reforms to address these failures and calls for appropriate levels of investment to continue this critical work, especially wherever possible for Aboriginal Owned and Controlled Organisations.

The submission concludes by recommitting each Office to continue to work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to progress this work.

Religious Educational Institutions and Anti-Discrimination Laws

In February 2023, the Advocate made a submission into the Australian Law Reform Commission inquiry into Religious Educational Institutions and Anti-Discrimination Laws.

Drawing on their findings from their *Voices of LGBTQIA+ Young People in NSW Report*, the Advocate broadly supported the goal of protecting students' rights at schools, specifically reforms being proposed to prevent the expulsion or denied application of enrolment of a student based on their gender or sexual orientation.

Using the lived experiences of those who participated in the consultations, the submission speaks to their experience of expulsion, homophobic and/or transphobic bullying and harassment due to limited teacher interventions, and the experiences these students in religious schools faced when the school's beliefs were being taught.

At the close of the reporting period, the Australian Law Reform Commission was yet to release their final report.

Select Committee on Cost of Living

In March 2023, the Advocate made a [submission](#) into the Senate Committee on Cost of Living.

Using the findings from their [NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People: Tracking Report 01](#), the Advocate spoke about the importance of young people having a good standard of living.

The Tracking Report found that measures related to the commitment, A Good Standard of Living, saw negative changes in 2022.

Children and young people independently identified the cost of living or financial pressure as a key issue that children and young people face in NSW. When given the opportunity to share their advice about how the NSW Government can support young people like them, financial support remained a key recommendation.

The submission also drew attention to the Cost of Living Project that was currently being undertaken by the Advocate, both through its qualitative interim report which would be released in June 2023, and a broader consultation report, due for release in late 2023.

In April 2023, the Advocate was invited to appear before the Committee to discuss their submission and the ongoing work the Office was doing in the area.

NSW Law Reform Commission – Review of Serious Road Crime Offences

In March 2023, the Advocate made a [submission](#) into the NSW Law Reform Commission Review of Serious Road Crime Offences.

While acknowledging the significant community concern around dangerous and unsafe driving, drawing on the broad findings of the Office, the Advocate urges caution in a punitive approach to serious road crime which has the potential to criminalise young people.

It is imperative that reforms support initiatives and approaches which increase road safety awareness. The Advocate proposed that these reforms can be achieved through increasing investment in driver education and safety courses for young people and ensuring that any reform embed the voice of young people.

NSW Sentencing Council – Firearms, Knives and Other Weapons

In March 2023, the Advocate made a [submission](#) into the NSW Sentencing Council review of Firearms, Knives and Weapons Offences.

The submission highlighted the need for ongoing focus on evidence-based early intervention, prevention and diversion approaches, rather than more punitive responses, such as increased minimum sentences, which have been shown to be ineffective in preventing crime and risk criminalising young people at an early point.

The submission identified best practice programs and initiatives that are currently being run in NSW, and reinforced the importance of hearing and understanding the perspectives of young people in regards to their experiences and potential solutions and interventions.

At the end of the reporting period, the Advocate was continuing to collaborate closely with the Sentencing Council on these reforms.

Senate Committee on Education and Employment – the Issue of Increasing Disruption in Australian School Classrooms

In April 2023, the Advocate made a [submission](#) into the Senate Committee on Education and Employment Inquiry into the Issues of Disruption in Australian School Classrooms.

Drawing on the broad findings of the Office, the submission called on any focus on disruption or discipline within the classroom being investigated with a child rights lens, which considers the often hidden impact of disability and trauma on behaviour.

The submission noted from their consultation report *Voices of Children and Young People with Disability*, that some students felt their teachers and support staff were helpful and supportive, others felt their teacher did not always understand their needs and therefore dismissed them.

The submission also noted that classroom disruption and discipline is often resolved through school exclusion and suspensions.

From their consultation report, *What Children and Young People in Juvenile Justice Have to Say*, the Advocate noted the children and young people interviewed in this report spoke about the significant impact school suspension had on their subsequent interactions with the justice system.

The submission recommended the Committee should consider the expansion of alternatives to long suspensions, which could include alternatives such as in-school suspensions, suspension centres and individual student supports to address learning and behavioural needs.

Department of Social Services – Early Years Strategy

In May 2023, the Advocate made a *submission* into the Department of Social Services – Early Years Strategy.

The submission noted the Department's focus on ensuring the Strategy was child and family centred, strengths based, and considerate of child rights, including their right to participate in strategies that affect them.

The submission noted there were opportunities for the Department to lead greater collaboration between the Commonwealth and State Governments around bringing together different data sources and filling data gaps to measure and improve performance of students in the early years. This is critically important for specific cohorts who are disadvantaged by multiple factors, including developmental delays, disaster impacts and interaction with the out-of-home care system.

The submission concluded by reinforcing the important role that parents and guardians play in supporting the early years, and the need for the Strategy to align with other Government strategies which include mechanisms for children and young people to participate in the consultation process.

The Advocate also made submissions into the:

- NSW Sexual Violence Plan;
- NSW Domestic and Family Violence Plan;
- Statutory Review of the *Terrorism (Police Powers) Act 2002*;
- Australian Human Rights Commission – Youth Justice and Child Wellbeing Consultation; and
- Statutory Review of the *Child Protection (Offenders Register) Act 2000*.

Response to Recommendations

During this reporting period, the Advocate has developed a tracking mechanism with which they can monitor the recommendations they have made in their submissions and reports as they continue to work with Departments and agencies to implement these recommendations.

This tool will increase transparency around how the Government responds to the Advocate's recommendations.

NSW Inquiry on Options to Improve Access to Existing and Alternative Accommodation to Address the Social Housing Shortage

The Advocate's [submission](#) focused on increasing the supply and variety of social housing that is available to young people, including incorporating wherever possible, the provision of meanwhile use housing.

The Committee recommended that the NSW Government continue to increase investment in the provision of public and social housing, and that in this supply, consideration is given to the provision of meanwhile use housing.

The Government was supportive of these recommendations.

Support For Regional and Rural Learning Drivers

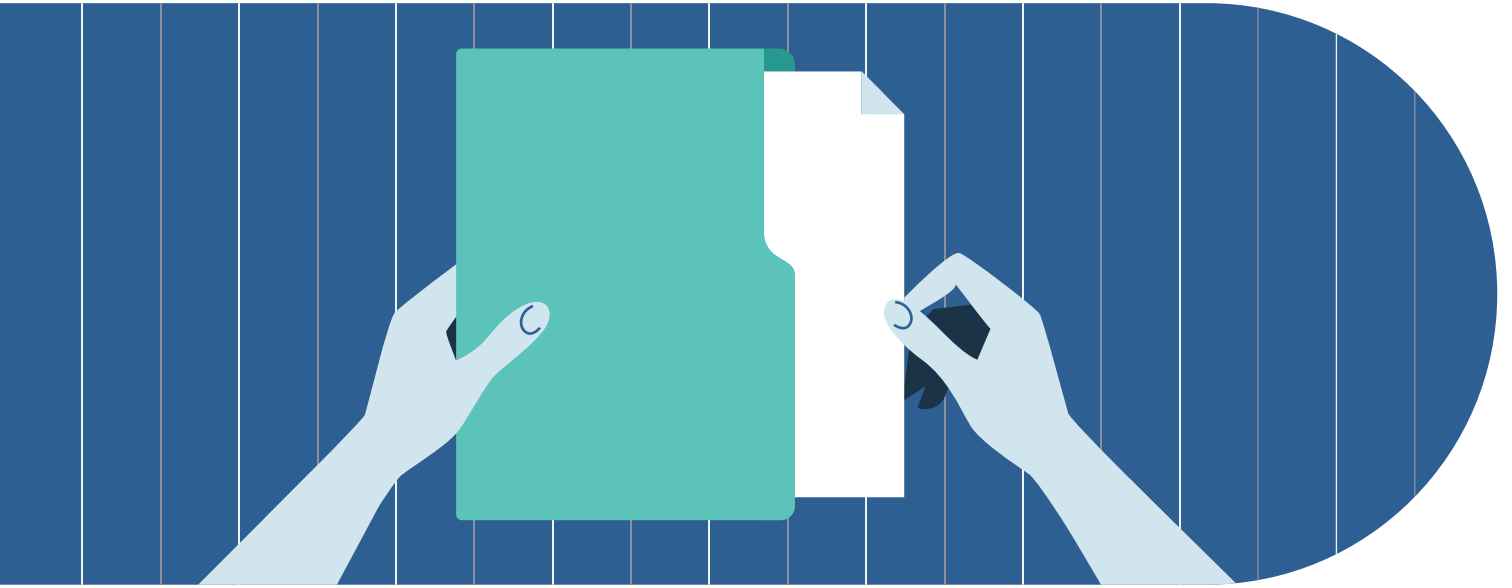
The Advocate's [submission](#) and appearance focused on the challenges regional and rural learning drivers faced accessing the 100 points of identification required to get a licence, the availability of safe driver courses and the literacy challenges with the learner's test.

In response to the Advocate's submission, the Committee recommended that the Department of Customer Service and Service NSW review how access to identification documentation can be improved and streamlined, and that the Department consider waiving the cost of obtaining these documents.

The report recommended Transport for NSW review the Driver Knowledge test to ensure it is accessible for people who experience literacy and numeracy difficulties.

The report also had a number of recommendations which sought to increase access and participation in a number of Safe Driver Courses.

The Government was supportive of these recommendations.



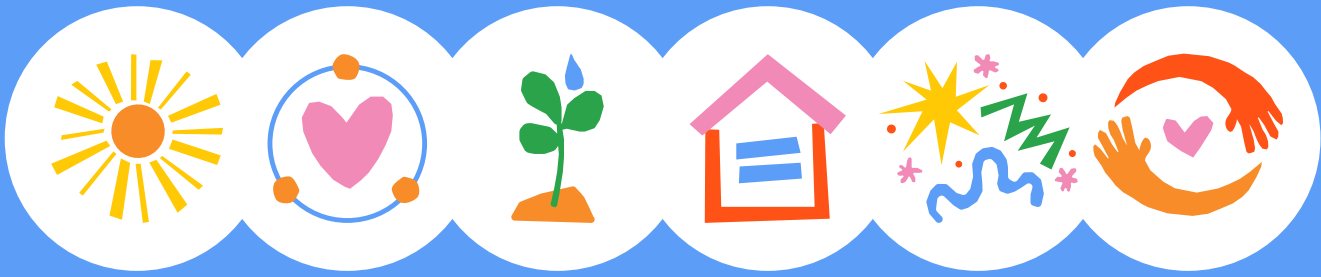
Recommendations for Changes in the Laws of the State, or for Administrative Action

During this reporting period, the Advocate was part of the Australian and New Zealand Children's Commissioners and Guardian's Network advocating for the State and Federal Government to raise the age of criminal responsibility.

Special Inquiries

Part 5 of their Act, empowers the Advocate to establish a special inquiry into a specific matter affecting children or young people, after having received approval from their Ministers or on the Minister's own initiative. During the reporting period, neither the Advocate nor their Ministers requested any special inquiry be undertaken.

NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People 2022-2024



The *NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People 2022-2024* continued to drive the activities of the Advocate in this reporting period.

In March 2023, the Advocate released the [*NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People: Tracking Report 01*](#).

This tracking report outlines the key findings from the 2022 tracking survey and compares these with the 2021 benchmark results, which were included in the Strategic Plan.

At a high level, most measures did not see a significant shift between 2021 and 2022, however, there were a couple of noticeable changes.

Areas that saw improvement included children and young people's feelings of positivity, as well as their ability to engage in fun activities.

The proportion of children and young people who were positive about life these days increased in 2022 – 64% gave a positive rating up from 39% in 2021. Those reporting feeling happy in a point-in-time measure also increased – 65% up from 59%.

There were also positive increases in children and young people's ability to participate in fun activities – 71% up from 62%, and the quality of activities they have access to – 63% up from 48%.

There are a few issues of concern to note in this data set, including mental health, financial insecurity, and increased frequency of bullying and discrimination.

While the number of children and young people who reported positive scores for their mental health improved marginally over the year – 57% giving a positive rating up from 55% – it remains the lowest scoring measure across the six commitment areas of the Plan.

Financial insecurity is a key issue of concern, with 32% of young people reporting some difficulty making ends meet, up from 25% in 2021. While most young people report being able to access basic needs and services, there has been a slight decrease in the number of young people reporting being able to eat a healthy, balanced diet – 81% down from 85% in 2021.

The number of young people who said they had a friend they could confide in dropped from 62% in 2021 down to 56% in 2022. At the same time, the frequency of bullying has increased with 40% of those who had been bullied saying they experienced it weekly, up from 23% in 2021. The frequency of discrimination has also increased with 24% saying they experienced it weekly, up from 19% in 2021.

At the close of the reporting period, the Advocate was in the process of preparing the second tracking survey, with the results to be published in early 2024.

Initiatives

How Does the NSW Budget Impact Children and Young People?

State of the State Event

On 26 July 2022, the Advocate and Macquarie University co-hosted the State of the State Event.

Modelled on the CEDA State of the State Forum, the purpose of the event was to explore the impacts of the recently announced NSW Budget on children and young people.

The format of the event featured a Q&A between the Hon. Matt Kean, Treasurer of NSW and Sam Koslowski, Co-Founder of the Daily Aus.

This was an opportunity to highlight the positive impact the budget has on young people and highlight the specific measures that are aimed at supporting them.

It was also an opportunity for the treasurer and young people to have a discussion around the key issues impacting them.

Participants included local university students and students from local schools.

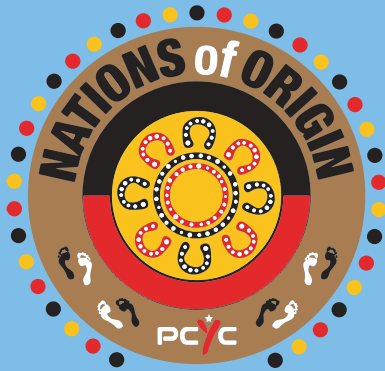


NAIDOC Family Fun Day

The Advocate and their team attended the NAIDOC Family Fun Day on 27 September, where they heard from over 180 children and young people.

At this event, the Advocate invited participants to take part in their Postcards to the Advocate initiative where they were asked to write or draw what they liked most about their culture and community?

The Advocate received an array of responses and drawings which are being incorporated into the broader Postcards to the Advocate Initiative Report expected for release in late 2023.



NATIONS OF ORIGIN

Nations of Origin 2022

On 5 October the Advocate and their team attended the Nations of Origin Tournament where they held small group consultations with 156 children and young people.

The small group discussions covered the consultations questions of:

- what do you like most about your cultural background or community?
- what can schools do better to stop bullying, racism and discrimination?

'Connection' underpinned every response when asked about what participants liked most about their cultural background and community. Whether this was connection to family, connection to place and space, and connection to culture.

When responding to how schools can be improved, children and young people raised the importance of education around bullying, racism and discrimination. They also raised that it was critical for those who are experiencing bullying to have opportunities to develop connection and understanding across a diverse cohort, and that they had supportive adults in their lives who would educate them and stand up for their rights.



Children’s Week 2022

For NSW Children’s Week 2022 the Advocate undertook four core initiatives to support the celebrations of children’s rights and to increase opportunities for them to share their voice with decision makers in NSW.

■ NSW Children’s Week Event

ACYP held a NSW Children’s Week event at The Sydney Mint on Tuesday 25 October.

More than 80 children in years four and five, from four schools in the Sydney area attended the Sydney location, with an additional three regional schools participating via online video conferencing. The areas participating in the event included:

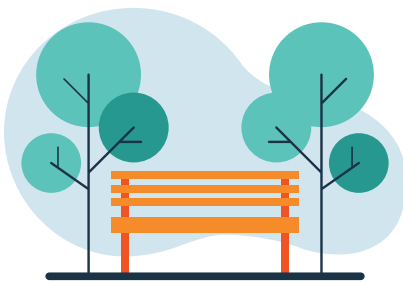
- Camden
- Canterbury
- Lismore
- Menindee
- Moruya
- Summer Hill
- Redfern

The youngest member of the 2022/23 NSW Youth Advisory Council, 12-year-old Billy Bofinger, acted as the MC for ACYP’s NSW Children’s Week event.

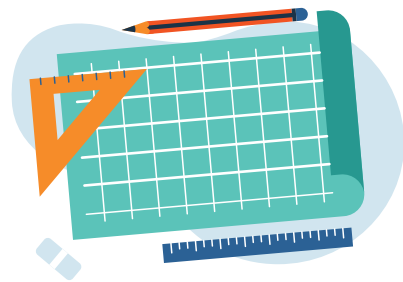
The event commenced with a Welcome to Country from Uncle Allan Murray, then introductions from the Advocate for Children and Young People, Ms Zoë Robinson and NSW Children's Week Council President, Ms Robyn Monro Miller. The Minister of Tourism, Aboriginal Affairs, Arts and Regional Youth, The Hon. Ben Franklin, MLC spoke to the children and young people about his role and the importance of children's feedback in the discussion making process.

In groups, the children and young people participated in a consultation which involved questions about their thoughts on public open spaces in the community. They provided their views on what they like and would change about open spaces.

Questions included:



What are the good things about open spaces and how do they make you feel?



If you could, what would you change about these places?

During this consultation the children were also asked to individually think about those questions and provide feedback through a post-it note activity.

All the feedback ACYP received from the children has been recorded and shared with the NSW Department of Planning and Environment to help inform their work to create safe and fun environments for children.

Following this, the children participated in a comic drawing workshop run by popular children's book author, Mick Elliot. The children followed along as Mick taught them how he draws faces and characters for his books.

To finish off the day, the children in Sydney made their way to PCYC Woolloomooloo to participate in activities such as, a Ninja Warrior course, shadow boxing, basketball and writing postcards to the Advocate. These activities gave the children an opportunity to engage in physical activity, as well as share with the Advocate their hopes for the future through the postcards.

The children who joined the celebration from regional NSW also participated in fun activities in their schools, activities included colour runs and face painting.

■ NSW Children’s Week Activity Booklet



The Advocate developed a Children’s Week Activity Booklet containing a range of fun activities and child-friendly information about the *Strategic Plan for Children and Young People 2022-2024*.

The activity booklet included a range of activities that reflected the Children’s Week theme. This was done through colouring-in pages, a find-a-word, drawing pages and others.

The activity booklet also included information about the six core commitments of the Strategic Plan. The Plan was developed in response to what children and young people told ACYP was important to them.

The Children’s Week activity booklet was a great opportunity for children and young people to learn in a child-friendly way about the core commitments of the plan.

The booklet and solutions were available for download on ACYP’s website. The activity booklets were also shared through social media, EDMs to stakeholder lists and distributed to ministers and other influential people in the community to encourage them to share the booklets with children in their lives.

ACYP supported the participation of newly arrived children to NSW in Children’s Week by distributing 250 copies of the Children’s Week Activity booklet along with boxes of colouring pencils to Settlement Services International (SSI) for distribution through their network.

■ NSW Children's Week Art Competition

The Advocate and the NSW Children's Week Council invited children and young people up to the age of 18, to submit an artwork they had created, based on the prompt provided surrounding the theme of Children's Week.

The brief was to create an artwork of them doing something fun and/or of them doing something that keeps them feeling happy and healthy. This could be demonstrated through artworks, drawings, paintings, photographs, digital illustrations, or videos.

The competition was divided into three age groups, under 5, 6-11 and 12-18. The entries closed on 7 October 2022 with more than 550 submissions from children and young people from all over NSW.

Each age group had a shortlist of entries that were judged by the Advocate, the NSW Youth Advisory Council, and the members of the NSW Children's Week council. Three winners from each age group were selected, with each winner receiving The Iconic gift vouchers.

0-5 Category Winners:



First Place
Abigail Jo



Second Place
Matthew Zhu



Third Place
Milo Dandie

6-11 Category Winners:



First Place
Pamela Richards

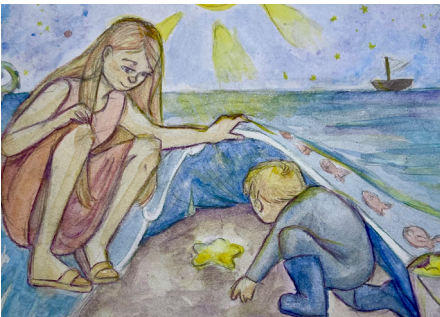


Second Place
Adhm Magid



Third Place
Willa Conrick

12-18 Category Winners:



First Place
Elizaveta Nikitenko



Second Place
Noor Ghanam



Third Place
Chloe Zheng

■ Postcards to the Advocate



POSTCARDS — TO THE — ADVOCATE

During Children’s Week, the Advocate for Children and Young People announced a new engagement initiative called ‘Postcards to the Advocate’.

This initiative is designed to facilitate the participation of more children and young people in ACYP’s work, as well as giving them an opportunity to share their hopes for the future.

Adults who work with children and young people were invited to participate in this free initiative through filling out the order form on ACYP’s website, then the reply-paid postcards were sent out for completion by children and young people. The children are able to express their hopes for the future through drawing or writing.

There was an immediate show of interest, with many schools, NGOs and councils placing orders for postcards for the children in their community.

After only a few days of the initiative being live, 15,000 postcards were ordered.

The information children and young people share with the Advocate on the postcards will be collated and shared with relevant government departments and agencies to continue to share the voices of children and young people with key decision makers so that their voice can influence positive outcomes.

Due to the initial success of the initiative, the Advocate transitioned this project to an online version in late June 2023. At the conclusion of the reporting period, the Advocate had received 17 E-Postcards.

The Advocate is currently preparing a report which details the key messages of this initiative.



VOICES OF CHANGE

Voices of Change 2022

The Voices of Change breakfast was held at Botanic House, in the Botanic Gardens on 23 November 2022, with the event theme being ‘getting it done’. We were joined by 150 government and non-government stakeholders and students.

The event featured six incredible young people as speakers, who are using their voice and lived experiences to shape positive change for children and young people in NSW.

The event commenced with a Welcome to Country by Uncle Allen Murray, followed by the MC of the event, Kyzar Jing, sharing part of his story. Kyzar spent four and a half years in youth justice, where he witnessed injustices and faults in the system. He is living a life free of crime with a goal of working with young people and contributing to decisions affecting them and to improving outcomes.

Next was an address from the Hon. Victor Dominello Minister for Customer Service and Digital Government, followed by the opening address from the Advocate for Children and Young People, Zoë Robinson.

The panel discussion hosted by Ruby Riethmuller followed. Ruby is the founder and director of Womn-Kind – a female-led youth mental health organisation on a mission to close the gap in effective wellbeing education and support for adolescent girls. Womn-Kind has recently launched its social wellbeing app, sells merchandise and produces a podcast, Dear Sister: A Womn-Kind podcast.

The members of this panel included:



**Nedd
Brockman**

Nedd Brockmann is an Australian tradie from Forbes, New South Wales who completed a mammoth 3,844km run across Australia from Perth to Bondi Beach, Sydney in 47 days. Nedd completed his run to raise money for We Are Mobilise, an Australian charity that helps people experiencing homelessness. After moving to Sydney, Nedd was struck by the number of homeless people living on the city's streets and touched by their stories. While he tried to help those he encountered in the small ways he could via donations of food, money or clothing, Nedd was looking for a way to make a bigger impact on the quality of their lives.



**Marlee
Silva**

Marlee Silva is a young Aboriginal woman from the Gamilaroi and Dunghutti nations. She is the best-selling author of 'My Tidda, My Sister: Stories of strength and resilience from Australia's first women' and the Program Director for Aboriginal youth suicide prevention charity, Cultural Choice Association. She is also a NRL commentator and radio host with ABC Sport. Starting her career in the non-profit sector, Marlee's path was shifted toward a more public profile when she was employed as the Co-CEO of Aboriginal education charity AIME Mentoring.



**Gabby
Kanizay**

Gabby Kanizay is a young adventurer who, on 14 May 2022, became the youngest Australian to summit Everest. While Everest alone is quite literally the highest point for many adventurers to aim for, it wasn't quite enough for Gabby, who went on to summit the adjacent Lhotse (the world's fourth highest peak) the very next day. Prior to Everest, Gabby was also the youngest woman to ever summit Cho Oyu, the world's sixth highest peak, meaning at only 19, she has summited three peaks over 8,000 metres. All these incredible achievements have been with the support of her family, friends and global community, but importantly Gabby pays this forward, forever encouraging others to go to greater heights.



**Ben
Tudhope**

Ben Tudhope became Australia's youngest ever Winter Paralympian when he was selected for Sochi 2014 at the age of just 14. In fact, Ben was the youngest competitor from any nation at those Games. He competed in para-snowboard cross at three Winter Paralympics 2014 to 2022. Ben was born with cerebral palsy due to a lack of oxygen to the brain during his birth and damage caused to the white matter in his brain, which caused hemiplegia to the left side of his body and damage connecting nerve tissue vital for movement.



The panel members discussed their experiences and spoke specifically about determination, sacrifice and commitment. All panelists spoke of their journey to achieving great things and inspiring others to follow their dreams. Panelists talked about leadership, resilience and overcoming obstacles (both physical and emotional). The panel shared ideas on ways that individuals, organisations and communities can better understand and represent young people, particularly when making decisions that impact them.



The Advocate and Haniya Saed, winner of the 2023 One to Watch Award

One to Watch Award – NSW Women of the Year Awards

The Advocate sponsored the 2023 One to Watch Award at the NSW Women of the Year Awards.

The award recognises girls and young women aged seven to seventeen, who demonstrate a single act or ongoing acts of courage, strength, determination and/ or kindness to help and support those around them.

The award ceremony was held on Wednesday 8 March at the Museum of Contemporary Art.

The 2023 winner of the One to Watch was Haniya Syed.

Haniya is an emerging artist and technology enthusiast. She conveys her feelings through sketching, painting and photography, and has participated in various competitions where her work has been admired. Haniya is also a robotics team member and has represented Australia in national and international championships. Haniya volunteers her time in charitable and community activities and wishes to use her skills to create awareness and help ease the lives of the needy.

The Advocate also acknowledged the incredible achievements and contributions of the 2023 finalists.



Abbie (12)

Abbie is the creator of HER WAY, an online media platform dedicated to elevating women’s sport. Abbie regularly interviews female athletes, is invited to report at events and is widely recognised as an influential women’s sports journalist. By encouraging people to watch women’s sport, she hopes female athletes get greater recognition and more girls see sport as a viable career path. Additionally, Abbie has raised over \$10,000 for UNICEF Australia’s Empower Girls Through Cricket campaign.



Matilda Gibson

Matilda is a champion for multiple causes and was named 2022 NSW Fred Hollows Junior Ambassador of the Year for NSW in recognition of her generosity and compassion. Matilda has raised money for Ronald McDonald House, sent backpacks filled with essential items to students affected by floods in Lismore, and sends heart-warming Christmas cards to residents in an aged care home in Newcastle.



Jorja O’Brien

Jorja is highly motivated and hardworking. She was one of 20 high-performing students from across Australia to receive a Mathspace Transformative 20 award in 2021, was a NSW winner of Country to Canberra’s prestigious Leadership Competition in 2021, was selected as one of 20 NSW Premier’s Anzac Memorial Scholarship recipients in 2022 and was runner up in Lions Club Youth of the Year for her district in 2022. Jorja is actively involved in her community and gives every initiative her full devotion.



Penelope Towney

Penelope is a Dyiramadilinya (proud) Wiradjuri and Palawa girl, whose short film ‘The Land We’re On with Penelope Towney’, has earned her the title of the youngest First Nations filmmaker. She is spreading the message of the importance of First Nations language and culture as an ambassador of the Indigenous Literacy Foundation, through podcasts and as a founding member of the ‘Young Change Makers’. Penelope advocates strongly about the importance of First Nations languages and culture being taught in all schools by First Nations educators.



Lucy Trease

Lucy has turned her love of baking into a successful micro-bakery. What began as a delicious afternoon activity during COVID-19 restrictions has become the TALLN Bakehouse, selling more than 100 loaves a week to local customers. During the 2022 floods, Lucy baked an extra 24 to 36 loaves a day to deliver to the local evacuation centre to support families in need.



Grace Salkeld

As a leader in numerous sporting clubs, Grace role models compassion, caring and community spirit to those around her. Grace ensures that the wellbeing of both animals and children is at the centre of all she does. As President of the Environmental Council at her school, Grace leads the school community to ensure that environmental impacts are minimised while raising awareness of current environmental issues, providing opportunities for others to become involved and help make a difference.



Jasmine Seidel

Jasmine is an avid and dedicated fundraiser. Over the last six years, she has raised more than \$10,000 for children's and health charities in her local Newcastle/Lake Macquarie community. Jasmine raises money doing odd jobs and coordinating birthday fundraisers instead of asking for birthday presents. She had been recognised with multiple awards including the 2021 Lake Macquarie Young Citizen of the Year Award.



Coralie Smith

Coralie is the driving force behind the Little Free Food Pantry in Ulladulla. Coralie designed and built the garden to reduce food wastage and assist local people suffering the pressure of rises in cost of living. Among her many achievements, Coralie was a top four finalist in the 2022 NSW Scout of the Year awards and has been named an Australian Ambassador for the World Scout Jamboree in South Korea later this year.



Audrey Wood

Audrey is doing everything she can to rid the world of blood cancer. After signing up to the World's Greatest Shave, Audrey worked tirelessly sewing scrunchies, recycling thousands of bottles and cans with Return and Earn and setting up market stalls to help reach her fundraising goal of \$10,000. In fact, she exceeded her goal, raising \$12,500 with magnificent support from her community.



Youth Week

20-30 April 2023



Connect



Participate



Celebrate

Youth Week 2023

■ Youth Week Poll 2023

In the lead up to Youth Week, the Advocate commissioned Sec Newgate Australia to undertake a representative poll of approximately 1,000 children and young people across NSW.

Topics that were covered in the survey included:

- life in NSW for young people;
- cost of living and financial security;
- housing;
- debt;
- experiences of hate speech;
- experiences of discrimination; and
- Indigenous Voice to Parliament.

Some of the high level findings of the survey included:

- overall life sentiment remains positive for most (74%) with no discernible shift since last year.
- that a majority of young people are either very or quite concerned (57%) about the cost of living today, and around a third (34%) reported they were currently having difficulty making ends meet.
- three-quarters (76%) of young people aged 18+ and living independently have experienced an increase in their housing costs over the past year, with 65% now facing housing stress (spending more than a third of their income on housing).
- focusing on debt in the form of credit instruments (i.e. credit cards, buy now pay later accounts, car loans, personal loans and pay day loans), the poll found that more than half (57%) of young people aged 18+ have at least one of these types of debt.
- 82% of young people reported seeing some form of hate speech online at least occasionally and half (52%) encountered it on a weekly basis.
- two-in-five (40%) young people reported being discriminated against in the past year – a slight increase from 2022 (35%).
- young people were strongly supportive of the proposal to establish an Indigenous Voice to Parliament, with two thirds (65%) overall in favour of it. There was a strong appetite for information, with nearly 3 in 5 (58%) interested in learning more.

■ Youth Week Events

High school visits

The Advocate visited two schools in Sydney to discuss advocacy, leadership, and the 2023 Youth Week theme of 'Connect. Participate. Celebrate.' The Advocate spoke to 50 students at Moorebank High School and 600 students at Ascham School.

The Advocate and ACYP's Communications Officer, Ruby, engaged in a fireside chat. Ruby asked the Advocate questions relevant to her role as the Advocate and about her career leading up to becoming the Advocate, such as her personal values, memorable experiences as the Advocate, her leadership style and any advice for young people.

The Advocate then asked the students about the challenges facing them and their peers as well as what they loved about their school and community, and the ways they thought both could be improved.

Following the interactive conversation, students were invited to ask questions. The students were interested to know:

- what work ACYP had completed in the past 12 months;
- why there is a rise in youth crime;
- what the challenges of being the Advocate were;
- how they could get involved with ACYP; and
- what Zoë's highlights have been as the Advocate.

Voices of Change Event

The Advocate hosted a free-to-attend Youth Week event with St Andrew's College, within the University of Sydney. The Voices of Change event provided University students with the opportunity to hear from a panel of speakers, ask questions to the panel and mingle with event guests.

The Advocate addressed the audience and spoke about the nature of Youth Week and ACYP and also encouraged the young people to use their voice to create positive change.

Lua Pellegrini (Chairperson of the 2022 NSW Youth Advisory Council) was the MC for the evening and the Acknowledgement of Country was delivered by a St Andrew's College student, Abby Vincent.

The panel was hosted by Ruby Riethmuller, founder of WomnKind and involved:



Steve Dresler

Steve Dresler was one of the rising stars of the NRL, ranked alongside the likes of Reed Mahoney and Dylan Brown at the Parramatta Eels. Previous Parramatta Eels NYC and NSW CUP player, Steve, was only 21 when after 14 surgeries and news of another torn ACL, he was instructed by doctors not to pursue rugby. Having faced early retirement through injury, What Ability is the evolution of Steve's innate desire to create a positive impact amongst his peers. Steve was a 20-year-old working as a support worker on weekends in 2019 when he set up an Instagram account - What Ability - showcasing photos of awesome days out. Within two years, the organisation had over 150 support workers and more than 100 participants.



Marlee Silva

Marlee Silva is a young Aboriginal woman from the Gamilaroi and Dunghutti nations. She is the best-selling author of 'My Tidda, My Sister: Stories of strength and resilience from Australia's first women' and the Program Director for Aboriginal youth suicide prevention charity, Cultural Choice Association. She is also a NRL commentator and radio host with ABC Sport. Starting her career in the non-profit sector, Marlee's path was shifted toward a more public profile when she was employed as the Co-CEO of Aboriginal education charity AIME Mentoring. She is also the host of 'Game Changers' a podcast featuring inspiring female athletes with Red Bull Australia.



Angelique Wan

Angelique is the co-founder and CEO of Consent Labs, a youth-led not-for-profit that educates young people on consent and respectful relationships in schools and universities across Australia. Her passion was born out of lived experiences during university, where there was a clear need for greater awareness of sexual violence. To date, Consent Labs has delivered programs to more than 35,000 people nationally. Angelique has been recognised as the 2022 NSW Young Woman of the Year, a 2022 Under 40 Most Influential Asian-Australian, a finalist for the 2021 Women of the Future and listed by Instagram as a Top 25 female entrepreneur.



Rohan Browning

Rohan Browning is an Australian Olympic Athlete. At the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, he ran the fastest 100 metres ever by an Australian at the Olympic Games, winning his heat with a time of 10.01. In 2021, he also ran a time of 9.96, making him the second Australian sprinter ever to break the 10-second barrier. Prior to this, Rohan competed in the 2018 Commonwealth Games trials and missed the final by one-thousandth of a second. After the games he didn't compete again for 9 months due to an injury. In 2019 he ran 10.08, the equal third-fastest Australian ever. He was selected for the 2019 World Championships, Australia's first representative in the event for 12 years.



The panel conversation included questions that were themed around:

- overcoming challenges and adversities;
- elevating the voices of children and young people;
- turning passion into purpose;
- values driven leadership and;
- the importance of collaboration in achieving shared goals.



Netball NSW 2023

Commencing in May, the Advocate partnered with Netball NSW across their tournament to create opportunities to hear from children and young people.

Over the course of the tournament, the Advocate heard from over 150 children and young people. The consultation questions were focused on the Strategic Plan Priority of Respect and Acceptance.

Broadly the questions covered topics such as:

- what does respect and acceptance mean and look like to you at school and in community?
- how do you show respect and acceptance?
- what can communities/schools do to improve respect and acceptance?

These findings will be used in our advocacy and incorporated into the next Tracking Report for the *NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People 2022-2024*.

acyp recovery youth support service.



Northern Rivers – Recovery Youth Support Service

As part of the jointly funded Australian Government and NSW Government Recovery Support Service (RSS) Program, the Advocate was successful in securing funding to build a team of Youth Support Specialists to work in the flood affected areas of Northern NSW. This team, known as the ACYP Recovery Youth Support Service (RYSS), is made up of experienced, trauma informed and passionate specialists.

Funded from September 2022 to June 2024, the RYSS team spent this reporting period focused on developing an understanding of the Northern Rivers and the sector landscape that they had entered. Pivotal to this work was building relationships with key stakeholders and partners including the other Recovery Support Services in the area. This meant significant time and energy was spent socialising ACYP in the region by introducing how the team worked and what role they saw for themselves.

In doing this work, the team identified that while there was significant work being undertaken in community by government and non-government sectors, there was a gap in service delivery and supports for those children and young people living in the pod villages. While it is challenging to track, it is estimated that, at the time of reporting, over 300 children and young people reside in the pod villages.

There are currently pod villages at:

- Ballina
- Brunswick Heads
- Casino
- Coraki
- Evans Head
- Kingscliff
- Lismore
- Mullumbimby
- Pottsville
- Wardell
- Wollongbar

In developing their service, the RYSS has identified four key pillars of their work:



Consultation

Recognising that children and young people have the lived experience and expertise to articulate what they need in disaster recovery and preparation, the RYSS has sought to co-design a service system and structure that responds to their needs.

Since March 2023, the RYSS has spoken with over 450 children and young people to understand their experiences of the recovery, what worked well and what needs to be improved for future service delivery.

Findings from these consultations are synthesised into thematic reports which are provided to the NSW Reconstruction Authority as part of the program governance and used by the Office to inform broader advocacy work and engagement with decision makers and other sectors.



Community Engagement

In recognition that children and young people exist within a broader community, that recovery is a multi-staged process, and the team has been funded for a particular part of the recovery, the second pillar of their work is community engagement.

This engagement often takes the form of the RYSS team partnering with other community organisations who are running events or activities for children and young people. This provides the team with the opportunity to collaborate, share key findings from consultations with stakeholders and to differentiate their service offering.

Some of the activities to date have included engagement with communities in Casino at the Blue Light event and Beef Week, and with broader Northern NSW through the Netball NSW regional tournament.



Capacity Building

Children and young people in recovery are a particularly vulnerable cohort. The RYSS team has also built into their programs offering an element of community capacity building for services that they may be partnering with or for those who may work with children and young people.

These opportunities allow for the team to share their knowledge and experiences in a similar way to a community of practice. The team also conducts training for children, young people and workers around advocacy, child rights and trauma informed practice.



Brief Intervention Support Service

The central pillar of the RYSS team's work will be the facilitation of a Brief Intervention Support Service. This will be a new aspect to the Advocate's work as the team incorporate an element of individual advocacy, whereas previously the Advocate's work was mandated to focus on systemic issues.

For this reason, the RYSS team has spent much of the reporting period establishing the policies and procedures that are needed to ensure their staff and the children and young people with whom they work are operating within a safe environment.

This service will be a short-term brief intervention focused support service of approximately six weeks duration. Referrals are accepted for children and young people aged between 8-24 years living in flood affected areas of the Northern Rivers.

Participation from children and young people will be voluntary in nature and will be focused on a collaborative approach to providing supported referral and coordination with existing services in the region. The goal is to establish a circle of support around a child or young person to develop individual capacity through the provision of psycho-social supports.

At the close of the reporting period, the RYSS team had just launched their Brief Intervention Service.



Central West Region – Disaster Consultations

Recognising that the Northern Rivers was not the only region that has been impacted by significant flooding recently, the RYSS team undertook some consultation work in Eugowra, Molong and Forbes.

Over four days in January, the RYSS team engaged with 260 children and young people focused on experiences in community, schools and disasters.

In these consultations we heard some incredible stories of resilience and bravery amongst community members.

These findings have been integrated into the work of the RYSS and fed into the advocacy work of the Office.

This was an incredible opportunity for the team to foster good connections with schools, councils, community organisations and community members.

Participants also undertook a workshop with KYUP! and participated in some volunteer work with Thread Together.



NSW Youth Advisory Council

■ Youth Advisory Council

Part 4 and Schedule 1 of the *Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014*, establishes the functions and membership of the Youth Advisory Council, of which the Advocate is the ex-officio member and provides secretarial support.

The Council meets regularly throughout the year, to advise government agencies, departments, ministers, and community groups on their work and how the policies, programs, and resources being developed may impact on children and young people and their communities.

Membership of the 2022-2023 Youth Advisory Council, their meeting schedule and details on the programs they were involved with is presented in their annual report, which is available on the Advocate's website.

■ Recruitment for the Youth Advisory Council 2023-2024

Recruited to represent the diversity of children and young people across the State, membership is open to all children and young people, aged 12 to 24, in NSW.

Recruitment for the Youth Advisory Council (YAC) was opened on 6 April 2023 and closed on 21 May 2023, in which time the Advocate received 717 applications from children and young people across the State. The application process was promoted through the Advocate's website and events, social media and a variety of newspapers and community radio.

Each of the applications were read by the Advocate and members of the ACYP team, who shortlisted 80 children and young people to attend a face-to-face recruitment event at the NSW State Library on 29 June 2023.

The event opened with a Welcome to Country from Uncle Allen Madden, followed by an introductory address from the Hon Kate Washington, MP Minister for Families and Communities.

The young people were welcomed to the event by the Advocate who provided an overview of who ACYP is and the role the YAC has in the Office. This was followed by the Advocate running advocacy training with the young people and a Q&A session with the Advocate.

Attendees then had the opportunity to hear from previous and current Youth Advisory members on their experiences and to ask them questions that they wanted to know.

The Panel consisted of:

- Dylan Farr (YAC Member 2022/2023);
- Leila Mangos (YAC Member 2021/2022);
- Melik Ibrahim (YAC Chair (2022/2023); and
- Molly Croft (YAC Member 2020/2021).

The event then divided into two streams. One stream focused on activities that sought to understand how the young people would work together as a team. The other stream was focused on a consultation piece. These streams then swapped halfway through the event.

The first activity asked young people in their groups to present a short-form video focused on the question: *How can NSW be more inclusive for children and young people?*

The young people had to identify an issue in NSW, explain how it was impacting on children and young people and finally recommend a practical solution to the issue.

The second activity featured the children and young people taking part in a Shark Tank Challenge. Each group identified an issue which was impacting on children and young people and then created an activity or program that would benefit children and young people.

Each group would then pitch their proposal to the Advocate, who decided which group would receive the investment.

The consultation stream was focused around the two pillars of the *NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People 2022-2024*, that the Advocate had chosen to focus on for 2023 - Respect and Acceptance and Hope for the Future.

Each of these streams were observed by an ACYP staff member and an external observer who made a shortlist of candidates for the Advocate to consider.

Following this in-person event, the Advocate made recommendations to the Minister for Youth, the Hon Rose Jackson MLC, as to the 12 members to be appointed. The appointments then went through the NSW Cabinet process for endorsement.

■ Youth Advisory Council Project

When the Youth Advisory Council first met in August 2022, the Advocate presented them with the opportunity to collaborate on a project throughout their term that they could then present to the relevant Minister and Department.

By their October meeting, the Youth Advisory Council had decided that they would undertake a project focused on Student Voice in School.

With support from ACYP staff, the Youth Advisory Council developed a survey which was completed by 1,561 students from across NSW.

The findings of this survey have been collated into a report which will be presented to the Minister for Education and published on the ACYP website upon finalisation.

Further information about the project can be found in the Youth Advisory Council Annual Report.





breathe.

Breathe Workshops

During this reporting period, the Advocate had the privilege of meeting young entrepreneur, Jahin Tanvir.

Jahin started the social enterprise Breathe, which provided public speaking and communication workshops to young people. Breathe impacted approximately 16,000 young people before it was acquired by ASE Group in November 2022.

The Advocate worked with Jahin to fund 10 workshops for approximately 500 young people across metropolitan and regional NSW. These workshops sought to upskill and train young people with high quality, relevant and youth-centric public speaking workshops which included learning the importance of non-verbal communication, interviews skills and how to speak with confidence.



Memorandum of Understanding with the NSW Department of Education

On 30 June 2023, the Advocate formally entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Education.

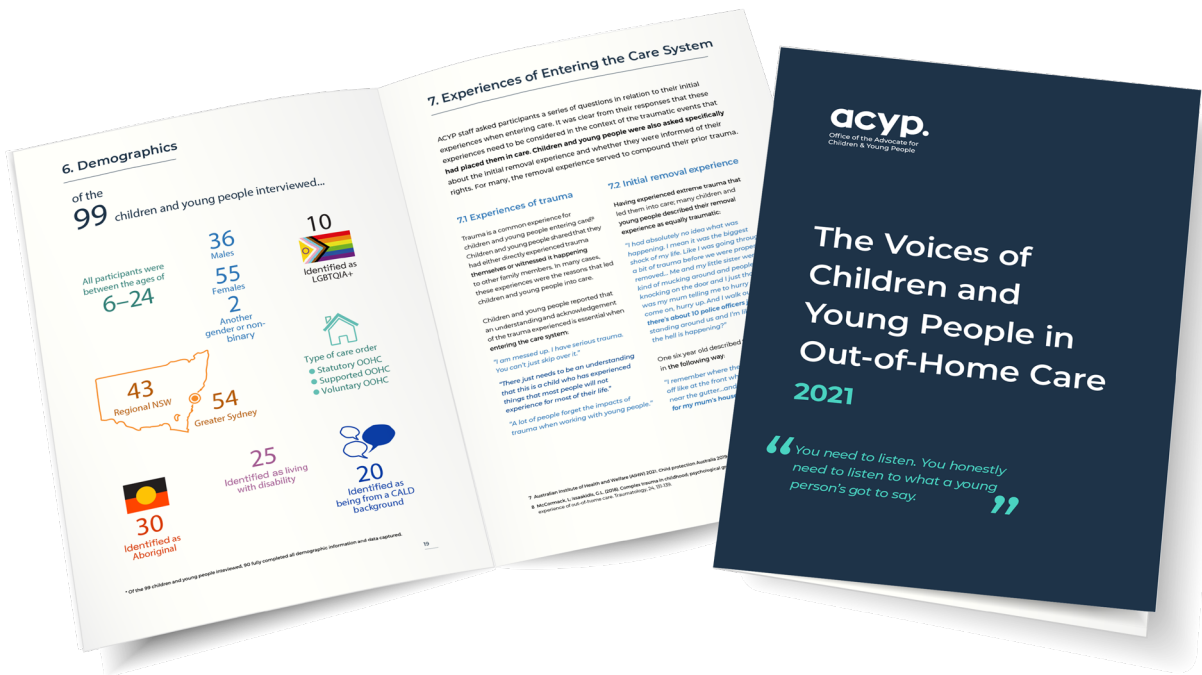
The Memorandum sets out how the Department of Education and the Advocate will work together to elevate the voices of children and young people in public education, from early childhood to post-school learning, so they are active contributors in decision making and have opportunities to thrive at school and in life.

A key aspect of this Memorandum of Understanding will be the establishment of quarterly forums between the Advocate and Department. The main purpose of these forums is to provide a platform for shared insights and learnings between the Advocate and the Department.

At the close of the reporting period, the dates for the quarterly forums had been agreed between the Department and Advocate.

Report Launches

The Voices of Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care



Concluding work that had been undertaken in previous reporting periods, in August 2022, the Advocate released their *The Voices of Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care*.

The project was aimed at providing an opportunity for children and young people to express their views, outline their experiences and suggestions around what needs to change within the system.

Over the course of the project, the Advocate had the privilege of hearing from 99 children and young people across NSW aged 6 to 24 who are currently in out-of-home care (OOHC) or have an experience of living in the OOHC system.

Reflecting the voices and experiences of children and young people during consultations, the report focuses on and makes recommendations on their:

- experiences entering the Care System;
- experiences while in the Care System;
- experiences of education while in the Care System;
- health and wellbeing in the Care System;
- experiences exiting the Care System; and
- advice to government.

During the launch of this report, the Advocate and a young person with out-of-home care experience undertook media appearances with the following outlets: ABC Breakfast and The Drum, Triple J, Ben Fordham and Channel 10 News.

Training and Internships



Child Rights eLearning Course

During this reporting period, the Advocate released an eLearning course focused on Child Rights.

The eLearning course has four modules:

- **Module 1:** Introducing ACYP;
- **Module 2:** Introducing child rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- **Module 3:** General principles in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; and
- **Module 4:** Applying a child rights approach when working with children and young people.

This eLearning course expands the availability and flexibility of ACYP's Child Rights training across the government and non-government sector making it easier for those who work with children and young people to learn about this important subject.

At the close of the reporting period, almost 200 people had completed the eLearning course.



Advocacy Training

This training contains tips on how to improve participants' advocacy skills, including what is advocacy and the advocacy process, how to identify your audience, and how to craft your message so that it emphasises your important points succinctly.

The Advocate conducted Advocacy training with the incoming members of the Regional Youth Taskforce, Youth Advisory Council, members of the St George Youth Advisory Council and participants of the Headspace Program in Nowra.



Facilitation Training

This training runs through the different facilitation methodologies the Advocate uses in their work. It equips participants with the skills to conduct a meaningful and respectful consultation. It covers the ethical matters that need to be considered around consent and gives some case studies and examples of how to use the information gathered in the consultation effectively.

Within the reporting period, the Advocate conducted facilitation training with the incoming members of the Youth Advisory Council and Regional Youth Taskforce.



Work Experience and Student Placements

In 2022, the Advocate hosted one student for a one-week work experience program for year 10 students from Penrith Selective High School.

As committed to, in the previous reporting period, the Advocate continued to partner with Career Trackers to host one young person for a 12-week internship.

Career Trackers is a non-profit organisation that supports Indigenous university students by linking them with employers to participate in a paid internship.

The Advocate also hosted one university student from Sydney University who completed a three-month placement as part of their Social Work Degree.

Engaging with Stakeholders

Committees and Advisory Boards

The Advocate or an ACYP delegate holds membership and/or provides advice to a number of government and non-government committees and advisory boards, some of which are listed below:

- Australian New Zealand Children's Commissioners and Guardians
- Cancer Institute NSW – Vaping Communications Advisory Panel Meeting
- Commonwealth Bank Australia Customer Advocacy Panel
- Department of Communities and Justice – Aboriginal Outcomes Taskforce
- Department of Communities and Justice – Joint Protocol Statewide Steering Committee
- Department of Education – Student and Parent's Experience Advisory Group
- Department of Education – Student and Parents Experience Steering Committee
- Law Society of New South Wales – Children's Legal Issues
- Southern Cross University – School is for Everyone (SIFE) Research Project Advisory Group
- Medical Research Future Fund – Consumer-led Grant Steering Committee
- NSW Children's Week Committee
- NSW Health – Alcohol and Other Drugs and Ice Inquiry Cross Agency Advisory Group
- NSW Health – Child Youth Mental Health Advisory Group
- NSW Health – Children, Young People and Families' Executive Steering Committee
- NSW Health v Disability Youth & Paediatric Health
- NSW Health – Statewide Wellbeing Health in-Reach Nurse Co-ordinator Committee
- Department of Education – Student and Parents Experience Steering Committee
- NSW Health – Whole of NSW Government Working Group on e-Cigarettes and Young People
- NSW Ombudsman – Child Death Review Team
- Transport for NSW – Transport for Vulnerable Youth Steering Committee
- Youth Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Steering Committee
- NSW Reconstruction Authority – Recovery Support Service Steering Committee
- NSW Reconstruction Authority – State Recovery Health and Wellbeing Subcommittee Meeting
- Office of Regional Youth – Regional Youth Steering Committee
- Property Industry Foundation – NSW Beneficiary Review Committee (BRC) Meeting
- Revenue NSW – Hardship Support Program Steering Committee
- Safe Work NSW – At Risk Workers Safety in Action Group Meeting
- School for Life Board meeting
- South Western Sydney Child & Family Leadership Group
- SPARKE – research project on preventing take-up of e-cigarettes led by University of Newcastle
- Youth Justice NSW – Short Term Remand Project Steering Committee
- Youth Week 2023 Reference Group

Research Projects

School is for Everyone (SIFE)



Improving Participation and Wellbeing for Every Student

The SIFE (School is for Everyone) project seeks to identify practices in schools that support students' participation, belonging, wellbeing and safety to help students participate and feel like they belong at school.

The project acknowledges that policy reform over the last decade has focused on fairness and inclusion for all students however, there remains a significant gap in knowledge about everyday routine practices at school that strengthen participation and a felt sense of belonging, especially for students who may otherwise not complete high school. As such, this project seeks to support students of all abilities and backgrounds to remain engaged in education and complete secondary school, by collaborating with young people to understand what helps and does not help them.

The research is funded by the NSW Department of Education's Strategic Research Fund: Priority Projects, and is led by the Centre for Children and Young People at Southern Cross University in conjunction with the NSW Department of Education, Charles Sturt University and the Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People.

At the close of the reporting period, the project had completed an Evidence Review around what students say keeps them at school, what makes students more likely to disengage, and why. The SIFE project seeks to add to this evidence conversation through hearing and acting on what young people say.

The Project has also completed Phase 1: Qualitative Fieldwork with NSW schools, analysed the findings and developed [accessible summaries for schools](#). Related academic outputs are currently being prepared for publication.

The Phase 2 quantitative phase builds on the findings of Phase 1. The online surveys involve a larger sample of staff and students across the 10 NSW high schools involved in the project. The surveys measure participation and belonging practices and identify those positively associated with engagement, wellbeing, safety, engagement and recognition. The survey phase is currently underway in Term 4, 2023. The final phase, planned for early 2024, involves working with young people and staff to design professional learning modules that apply the findings in school and classroom settings.

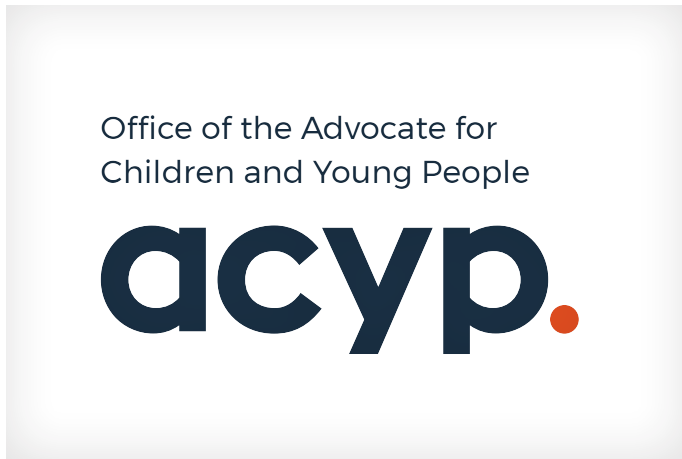
Promote the Provision
of Information and Advice
to Assist Children and
Young People

Website Engagement

Throughout the reporting period, ACYP sought to update and consolidate their website to ensure it was easy to navigate for our networks and stakeholders.

The below table outline the unique views for some of the key content on the ACYP website throughout the reporting period (1 July 2022 – 30 June 2023):

Homepage



18,135 views

Youth Advisory Council



17,883 views

Children's Week



12,443 views

Strategic Plan 2022-24



3,020 views

ACYP's Network

ACYP continues to interact with an engaged network of children and young people, in conjunction with key government and non-government agencies that work with and for children and young people.

We use this network to share newsletters, opportunities to engage with the work of the office, reports, events and upcoming initiatives of the ACYP.

This is a network that seeks to celebrate the diversity of children and young people, to elevate their voice and experiences and champion their accomplishments.

Email Contact List



Social Media



Digital Lunchbreak

Created at the height of the COVID-10 pandemic, the Digital Lunchbreak Platform sought to collate key government information and fun activities for children and young people to access during lockdown.

As we started to return to a degree of normalcy, the engagement with Digital Lunchbreak has reduced.

As a result of this, the ACYP has subsequently placed Digital Lunchbreak in hibernation as they continue to consider how to best use this resource to support the interests and needs of children and young people. This is in acknowledgement that the platform contains a variety of useful support resources, which will be part of the re-purposed platform moving forward.

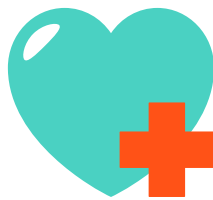
Within the reporting period, the Digital Lunchbreak categories saw the following unique page views:

Arts and Crafts



375
views

Health and Wellbeing



118
views

Education and Learning



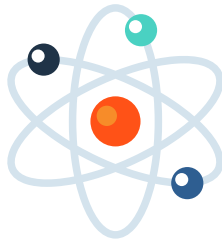
108
views

Music and Performance



84
views

Science and History



82
views

Nature and Environment



64
views

Requests for information under Section 13 AA of the *Ombudsman's Act 1974*

No requests for information under Section 13AA of the *Ombudsmans Act 1974* were received during the reporting period.

Requests for information under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009*

No requests under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* were received during the reporting period.

Office Structure and Governance

Parliamentary Oversight

The Advocate for Children and Young People is overseen by [Committee on Children and Young People](#) as specified by Part 7 and Schedule 2 of the Act.

The Advocate and members of the Youth Advisory Council appeared before the Parliamentary Committee on 24 June 2022 for their annual oversight inquiry.

The [2022 Review of the annual reports and other matters of the Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People and the Office of the Children's Guardian](#) was tabled in Parliament on 25 October 2022.

The report made a number of findings and recommendations to which the Advocate provided a response which were incorporated into the [Government response](#) and tabled in Parliament on 2 May 2023.

Statutory Review of the *Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014*

The [Statutory Review of the Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014](#), was tabled in Parliament on 27 February 2023.

The Review found that the Act was appropriate for securing its objectives and no recommendations for legislative change were proposed.

Staffing

As at 30 June 2023, there were 19 full-time staff and 10 part-time staff employed against a staff establishment of 30 positions.

This establishment does not include the 12 members of the Youth Advisory Council who are employed on a part-time basis for their term.

Budget

The ACYP Budget is allocated each year as part of the Department of Communities and Justice annual budget and incorporated into their financial statements.

In the 2022-2023 reporting period the annual budget of ACYP was \$3.4 million which included \$2.7 million in Employment Related Expenses (ERE) and \$0.7 million in Operating Expenses (OpEx).

Additionally, ACYP entered into a funding agreement between the Commonwealth and State Government under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA) of approximately \$2.2 million to support the work of the Recovery Youth Support Service over the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 financial years.

Principal Officers

- **Ms Zoë Robinson**
B Media, LLB, MHR, GAICD,
Advocate for Children
and Young People
- **Ms Una O'Neill**
B.A (Hons) Marketing,
MA PR, Director
- **Ms Shannon Longhurst**
B Socio-Legal Studies
(Hons), M.A Global Studies,
Grad. Cert. International
Development Policy,
A/Director (20 June –
22 July 2022)

Office of the Advocate for
Children and Young People

acyp.

Office of the Advocate for Children
and Young People

Report:

Annual Report 2023

Date:

October 2023



Contact Us

Ground Floor, 219-241 Cleveland Street
Strawberry Hills NSW 2012

ABN: 36 433 875 185

Phone: (02) 9248 0970

Email: acyp@acyp.nsw.gov.au

Website: acyp.nsw.gov.au