



Social Justice

STOCKTAKE



Opportunities for Children

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Were you surprised by the Stocktake results showing that opportunities for children wasn't a top concern for most people in the community?

The Stocktake survey was open to people identifying as being 18 years old and above. This reflects a broader issue around the participation of children in social policy conversations where children are often 'seen but not heard' members of our society. We will be looking at how we can boost participation of children and young people in any future Stocktakes.

This is not to suggest that people in our communities don't care about children's needs and happiness, rather that many of the factors that support child wellbeing, are wrapped-up in the adult world of stable housing, physical and mental wellbeing, adequate income and access to quality education, protection from violence and neglect, and enjoying safe spaces.

Why do you believe the response was higher in some parts of the country than others?

While the response rates around this issue didn't vary much from state to state (the highest response rate was the Northern Territory at 8 per cent), the highest responses to this issue (between 13 and 16 per cent) came from rural NSW and regional Queensland. Here, some respondents voiced concerns about the lack of spaces and activities for children in the community and keeping children 'out of trouble' as well as lack of local educational opportunities.

Does this suggest that most of us believe that kids already enjoy most opportunities in life? Or does this low response suggest that opportunities for kids aren't particularly front of mind among the concerns of most people in our community? If not, why not?

The evidence shows us that most Australian kids are doing well and enjoy most opportunities in life, but around one in five Australian children are developmentally vulnerable by the time they start school. These kids are overrepresented in the most disadvantaged areas confirming that if you're born into disadvantage, you're already on a trajectory that makes it harder for you to escape disadvantage in later years.

It's the experiences of these kids that can be particularly 'unseen' by the majority of people yet show up in worrying statistics around out-of-home care and child-protection, and kids are falling behind or being disengaged from school and children engaging with the criminal justice system.



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What are the messages we need to be hearing from our young people on the things that matter to them?

An important first step is not to assume that adults always know what matters most to children and young people. So, it starts with listening to children and young people about the things that matter most to them. The Salvation Army Youth Services has a range of ministries and programs tailored around the needs of children and youth, but there's also large-scale annual youth surveys to draw from and the National Children's Commissioner's annual reports on children's rights that reflect the views of children and young people.

What do our young people need to be hearing/seeing from the government?

Children and young people need to be hearing themselves included in government discussions and debate about issues affect them and their families and communities.

What is the long-term impact you predict from limited opportunities being offered to children?

We know there is a strong relationship between poverty in the first thousand days of a child's life and adverse health and wellbeing outcomes in later life including poor educational and employment outcomes.

It's not just 'material poverty' that limits opportunities for children, though that is important, it's also exclusion from participation in activities and play and lack of strong and supportive relationships that affect child development and health. A significant number of young Australians who grow up in poverty find it difficult to engage with formal education; they leave school early or cannot navigate from education to the world of work.¹

How does The Salvation Army help children in need?

The Salvation Army aims to create welcoming and safe spaces for all children and young people. We offer a variety of different activities and programs for young children and families ranging from kids' church, dance, playgroups and music programs.

We also manage Communities for Children Facilitating Partner (CfCFPs) sites in three communities and operate several Children and Parenting programs and three early learning centres which take an early intervention approach to supporting families and children.

The Salvation Army's Youth Services offer an integrated suite of targeted programs engaging with young people across Australia to ensure access to vital resources and opportunities. Services include housing and homelessness, driver training, education, employment and training, social and community activities, specialist therapeutic responses and youth justice programs.

¹ [Child Poverty in Australia Fast Fact 2020. https://antipovertyweek.org.au.](https://antipovertyweek.org.au)