

CHILDREN'S VOICES PROJECT

NAPCAN would like to invite local communities around Australia to be part of our Children's Voices Project.

As the primary organisation for the prevention of child abuse and neglect in Australia, NAPCAN recognises the importance of listening to children and recognising that everyone has a part to play in keeping children safe. Community groups, individuals, families, local agencies, schools, local councils and educators can all work together to build communities that are strong and safe for children.

The Children's Voices Project is inspired by research by Sharon Bessell which highlights the importance of including children in community consultation and actually *acting* on this feedback. Bessell's *Children, Communities and Social Capital in Australia* research project highlights two (2) very strong messages:

1. Children want to be involved in discussions about how to make communities good places for people of all ages to live.
2. Children have a lot to say and have great ideas.

Bessell's research also highlights the key reasons for having conversations with children about their local communities:

- Children experience the world differently from adults.
- Adults cannot guess what is important for children without asking them and listening to the answer.
- Children may have priorities that adults prefer not to think about.
- Children use community facilities in ways that are different from adults.

However, while we know that listening to children is important, we also know that engaging children in community consultation can be challenging.

The aim of this project is to provide a simple tool to help community organisations to start listening to, and acting on, the views of young people.

A critical part of this project is to make sure that this feedback is actually used to inform decisions in the local community, primarily through local council.

Importantly, it's not just about listening, but actually doing something!

How can I get involved in the Children's Voices Project?

The Children's Voices Project is a simple tool to support collecting, and responding to, the views of children in their local area.

The activity sheets are designed to be used by any organisation or individual that engages with children, including schools, early childhood learning centres, parents and carers, clubs and youth groups, as well as councils themselves.

1. Read through this information.
2. Download the Children's Voices Project activity sheets. Print as many as you need. We have two sheets: one asks children about their favourite things in their community, and the other asks what they would like to change in their community.
3. Use the activity sheets to facilitate a conversation with the children about their community. This can be as a whole class, smaller groups or even individually (for older children).
4. An important part of the process is to make sure that the feedback from the children gets back to the decision-makers and is incorporated into policy making. In most cases this will be via your local council. Typically the person to talk to would be the Community Development Officer, but you may have to ask around to find the person who is most involved with engaging with children and young people. If you get stuck, you can always try your local elected Councillor.
5. Talk to the Council person to get a commitment about how they will use the Children's Voices feedback to inform their decisions, and how they will report back to young people about their ideas.

Please see NAPCAN as your partner in this project. Feel free to email us on how this resource has worked in your community or if you have any queries.

Kind regards

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