

# COMMISSIONER'S REGIONAL WRAP UP

## Port Pirie

Over the next five years, I will visit regional communities across South Australia to ensure young regional voices inform and contribute to my work.

I will ensure that local decision makers and service providers receive my regional wrap-up as a record of some of the views and opinions of local children and young people.

I encourage community leaders who are able to create opportunities to engage children and young people in ongoing dialogue as a tangible way of building community participation.

The regional city of Port Pirie has been in the news over recent years, often about the availability of future economic opportunities for the local population. The city has experienced a range of social and economic changes that have put pressure on the community. These changes have in many ways highlighted the impact of transitioning economies on regional communities and was evident during my visit.

During my visit the changing nature of work, the future world of jobs and the competencies and skills that will be required by young people were also highlighted.

These trends and opportunities are global challenges facing all young people, they create aspirations and hopes for many. But equally our children and young people are not immune to the concerns caused by economic uncertainty or from the challenges experienced in the here and now by families doing it tough. For young people already feeling marginalised, it can be daunting. These topics underpinned my conversations in Port Pirie.

### What I did...

I was particularly grateful for the warm and generous support received from the Australian Red Cross, Uniting Care Wesley Country SA and Yourtown. They all hosted special activities to coincide with my visit and support their participants to engage. I was also really pleased to be able to connect with some young people who were taking a very proactive stance to generate a more inclusive community for all young people through awareness raising activities supported by Australian Red Cross.

### Who I saw

For those young people in smaller regional centres, the future of their community is a key concern as they often express a want to stay in their region but understand the reality that this may not be possible. For those struggling

with issues related to homelessness, family breakdown and unemployment the challenge is even greater and the choices are limited.



Image courtesy of Port Pirie The Recorder

Helen Connolly with Indi Ervine, 3, left, and Imogen Cunningham, 8.

In 2017 I commenced as South Australia's Commissioner for Children and Young People. My role is to position the needs, interests and well-being of children and young people front and centre in policy, practice and services affecting them.

- In fulfilling my role I am committed to being a Commissioner who:
- engages in two-way discussions with children and young people
- connects to children and young people in both metro and rural areas
- meets children and young people in their spaces and in their time, and this includes at early learning centres, schools and community centres
- liaises with services and advocates alongside children and young people
- demonstrates respect and valuing of children through active involvement in all that I do.

# Port Pirie

For this reason I chose to connect with children and young people in Port Pirie who were experiencing personal circumstances that were impacting on their ability to make the most of their opportunities. This group are most likely to be unprepared for the impact of changing social and economic conditions. They are also the group least likely to be asked about their views and ideas.

It is only the service providers they connect with who truly appreciate the impact on them and advocate on their behalf. These agencies were particularly welcoming of the opportunity to support young people to speak with me and tell me first-hand what life was like for them.

## What I heard...

My sessions in Port Pirie occurred during school holidays so no school sites were visited, I did, however, visit the Australian Red Cross office for a school holiday activity program, had afternoon tea in Jubilee Park with young people living in residential care and attended Yourtown transition to work program, Penrose Families Program and the Amity Homeless Youth Accommodation service for a scrumptious shared lunch. I heard that young people in the region are looking for more, positive, recreational activities and more opportunities to learn new skills including IT. I also heard about how important it is when you don't live with your family that regular contact happens, especially with your brothers and sisters.

## What I was asked to share...

I heard how difficult it is for young people in small towns to get a second chance or break free from the stereotypes that have been attributed to them or their family. Some young people spoke about how they see this being behind a lot of the attention they get from police both at home and on the streets. They also talked

about it impacting on their ability to get work and their experiences of exclusions from school.

For those who had paid work, they spoke about the difficulties of fluctuating hours, the impact this has on their income and budget and therefore their stability in terms of things such as housing. For those accessing Centrelink payments, this was a cause of stress as they found it difficult to communicate with different staff, they felt a dedicated person in the local Centrelink office, skilled in working with young people would be a benefit.

The lack of affordable leisure options was raised, particularly for the 12-15-year-olds, and the lack of places where they could go to socialise and still feel safe was discussed at length. The library was mentioned as a clean, warm place with free wifi but it was felt it could be made more youth friendly, suggestions to assist this included the addition of a dedicated youth space and a café.

Other ideas included:

- live music at the skate park
- community events
- young people creating street art to build participation but also protect against graffiti
- Build relationships between the schools in town to promote more harmony between young people and stronger learning opportunities.

### What we heard?

“...there needs to be  
“more ways to  
help the less  
fortunate youths””

