



commission for
children and young people
and child guardian

30 May 2008

Response to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations' Australian Youth Forum submission form are provided below.

The Queensland Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian (the Commission) can only provide comment on issues facing young people in Queensland.

In summary, the Commission's views on the Australian Youth Forum are that:

- its prime role is to ensure the views of Australian young people are effectively considered by government
- it provides an opportunity to engage children and young people to hear their views on significant issues that affect them. Central to this process is a commitment for policy makers and service delivery organisations to value young people's engagement and their views and ideas, and
- it acts as a formal communication body that universally improves engagement with children and young people, particularly for those most vulnerable.

Q 1. What should be the role (or roles) of the Australian Youth Forum?

e.g. to advocate for young people, to represent young people or the youth sector as a whole, to advise government on youth issues, to be the voice of youth, to improve the portrayal of young people in the media and the general community.

CCYPCG response:

The primary role of the Australian Youth Forum should be to ensure the views of Australian young people are effectively considered by government.

In initiating the Australian Youth Forum as a mechanism for engaging with children and young people the Federal Government has a responsibility to ensure that it is not a tokenistic gesture of engagement. The Commission believes that genuine engagement values both the process and outcomes of engaging with children and young people.

Therefore, the Federal Government needs to:

- ensure all Federal agencies are committed to the principles of youth engagement and value the views of children and young people on issues within their portfolios
- ensure relevant agencies effectively respond to key issues identified by young people, and
- promote across all relevant government departments and service providers a strong focus on and build capabilities for, effective engagement with children and young people.



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Q 2. What functions should the Australian Youth Forum undertake?

e.g. research capacity and tasks (either itself or in cooperation with other relevant bodies), development opportunities for young people (e.g. leadership), on-going and ad hoc consultations (perhaps utilising new communications technologies), training workshops, policy conferences, media or social commentary and/or analysis.

CCYPCG response:

The Australian Youth Forum should take on the following functions:

- consult with Australian young people to identify effective engagement strategies to obtain their views on issues affecting them
- set the agenda of youth issues for discussion and advocacy to government each year, and
- be able to identify key issues affecting vulnerability or resilience and prioritise these issues for attention at both the state and national level.

Q 3. How will the Australian Youth Forum consult?

e.g. with young people direct, through youth organisations, how regularly should the consultations be held, face to face, using new media.

CCYPCG response:

The Australian Youth Forum should consult directly with children and young people.

The following approaches are suggested:

- an initial forum with young people to discuss the best ways to engage with young people, and
- consultation methods that use a range of innovative techniques and tools (including technology) to reach a diverse cross-section of young people to set the agenda for each year's work, and to gauge their responses on a broad range of issues (e.g. upholding rights; fostering safety and wellbeing from policy programs and service access perspectives).

The Commission has found that its Community Visitor Program has been particularly effective for engaging with vulnerable children and young people in urban, rural and remote environments, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young peoples.

Q 4. Who will the Australian Youth Forum 'represent'?

e.g. young people directly, youth organisations, young members of other organisations, young people not affiliated with any organisation, or a mix of all these.

CCYPCG response:

The Australian Youth Forum should be representative of all the young people of Australia, including those who are most vulnerable such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young peoples, young people living in detention centres or out-of-home care, and those who are disadvantaged because of a disability, geographic isolation, homelessness or poverty.

The Australian Youth Forum should have strategies which aim to:

- engage the diverse population of young people in Australia
- ensure consultation reflects as much as possible the population of young



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<p>people in Australia, and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promote effective engagement with children and young people (see question 9 below for possible strategies).
<p>Q 5. What type of organisation should the Australian Youth Forum be? <i>e.g. Board/Committee directed, membership-based, peak body, representational, advocacy, outside of government.</i></p>
<p>CCYPCG response: The Australian Youth Forum should be an advocacy organisation which is independent of government and represents the views of children and young people. The Australian Youth Forum should use this information to influence action by government, in particular shaping engagement strategies and the promotion of key issues and their resolution.</p>
<p>Q 6. Who would the Australian Youth Forum include? <i>e.g. young people; other individuals with knowledge and understanding of youth issues and the youth sector, including youth workers; organisations with an interest, services and expertise in youth affairs; or a mix of all of these.</i></p>
<p>CCYPCG response: The Australian Youth Forum's primary focus initially should be to represent the views of young people to government.</p> <p>It should have clear processes to use the information gathered through consultation to influence government, to link with other forums at the state and national level and have strategies to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify key issues affecting vulnerability or resilience of children and young people • prioritise these issues for attention at both the state and national level, and • identify gaps or overarching themes across all jurisdictions which highlight inconsistencies in approach or areas of special needs.
<p>Q 7. What capacity should the Australian Youth Forum have? <i>e.g. provide secretariat and/or consultation functions using in-house resources, ability to purchase and manage external services and suppliers, flexible and scaleable structure and staff to undertake significant one-off or annual activities.</i></p>
<p>CCYPCG response: The Australian Youth Forum should be supported:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to undertake consultation functions and/or provide secretariat responsibilities using in-house resources, and • with flexible staffing to undertake significant one-off or annual activities.
<p>Q 8. What role would young people have in the Australian Youth Forum? <i>e.g. direct involvement as decision makers, members of management structures, individuals on committees, advocates in the media and/or broader community.</i></p>
<p>CCYPCG response: Young people should take on the following roles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • individuals on committees • representing the Australian Youth Forum's findings or views about issues affecting youth directly to government, including relevant Ministers by its



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members or by adult employees of the Forum

- to be able to voice an opinion about the way the Australian Youth Forum operates as well as voicing an opinion on issues important to them
- advocate in the media and broader community, and
- form collaborative partnerships with the community sector.

Q.9 How can the Australian Youth Forum ensure all young people have the opportunity to be heard?

e.g. different strategies to engage people at different ages (15-17years, 18-20 years, 21-24years etc), Indigenous-specific options.

CCYPCG response:

A variety of targeted engagement strategies, that draws on existing expertise and networks need to be adopted to engage effectively with diverse groups to gauge and understand their views (e.g. age groups, cultural groups, young people with a disability).

The Australian Youth Forum should focus particularly on taking steps to engage directly with vulnerable children and young people, including by:

- asking and following advice from vulnerable young people about the best ways to engage with them
- using organisations and networks at the state level who have established connections with vulnerable young people as a conduit to the young people, including youth shelters to engage with homeless young people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young peoples, and
- using Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander schools as a conduit for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young peoples.

Q.10 What role would youth organisations have in the Australian Youth Forum?

e.g. direct involvement as decision makers, members of management structures, represented on committees.

CCYPCG response:

The Australian Youth Forum should represent the views of young people and of youth organisations, thus making it a unique youth forum in Australia.

Priority youth issues

The first task for the newly formed Australian Youth Forum would be to develop a work plan based on key youth issues. Please let us know (in priority order) what you feel are the top 5 issues facing young people, particularly those issues that might be addressed nationally.

1. Young people in foster care

The Commission has recently conducted a survey of children and young people in foster care. While most children and young people indicated positive experiences about being in out-of-home care (most indicated they felt safe and were better off since coming into care), there were some who reported negative experiences.



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Many children and young indicated, for instance, that they:

- have experienced several placement changes
- would like more contact with their family
- are not able to do the sorts of things that their friends not in care can do
- do not have confidence that, if the Department of Child Safety promises them something, it will happen
- are not able to get permission from the department in time to do things
- do not think that they are listened to
- do not have a say in decisions that affect them, and
- do not have good transition from care support.

The Commission has published the full results of this survey in the *Views of Children and Young People in Foster Care, Queensland 2008*. This report is available on the Commission's website at:

<http://www.ccypcg.qld.gov.au/about/publications/ViewsChildrenYoungPeopleInCare.html>

2. Young people in youth detention centres

In addition to conducting a survey of children and young people in foster care, the Commission surveyed young people residing in youth detention centres. The vast majority of young people surveyed reported feeling safe in their detention centre. More than half feel that the programs at their centre are helpful in preventing re-offending – the programs mentioned most often as being helpful are schooling, counselling and sport.

Issues arising from the survey findings that warrant further exploration include:

- preventative and diversionary programs available prior to detention
- the reasons that high numbers of young people on remand are held in detention centres
- the availability of, and young people's engagement with, legal services, and
- the supports and services available to assist with young people's transition from detention and life after detention.

Full results of this survey will be published in the *Views of Children and Young People in Detention Centres, Queensland 2008* in July 2008. The report will be available on the Commission's website at:

<http://www.ccypcg.qld.gov.au/about/publications/>

3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people

The Commission publishes the *Children and Young People in Queensland: A Snapshot* report annually which draws together a range of data that collectively demonstrate population-level status and changes in the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in Queensland.

In 2007, the Commission reported that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander



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populations of Queensland continue to experience high levels of socio-economic disadvantage, family and community violence and alcohol abuse, while safety, health, education and social outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young peoples remain poor.

The evidence for these findings are as follows:

- the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teenage birth rates were three times higher than the Queensland average
- the suicide rates among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young peoples are three to five times higher than that of their non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peers
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are significantly over-represented in the child protection system
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are less likely to meet national literacy and numeracy benchmarks and generally perform at a level two years below that of non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young peoples are over-represented in the juvenile justice system, and
- the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth detention rates are almost nine times that of Queensland youth generally.

A copy of the *Children and Young People in Queensland: A Snapshot 2007* is available online at: <http://www.ccypcg.qld.gov.au/about/publications/snapShot07.html>

4. Deaths of young people

As reported in the Commission's *Deaths of Children and Young people Annual Report 2006-07*, young people aged between 15-17yrs recorded the second-highest number of all deaths in Queensland (of children and young people aged 0-17yrs), accounting for 13.0% of deaths (66 deaths). Thirty-eight per cent of these were the result of transport incidents (25 deaths), while 16.7% were the result of suicide (11 deaths).

A copy of the *Deaths of Children and Young People Annual Report 2006-07* is available on the Commission's website at:

<http://www.ccypcg.qld.gov.au/about/publications/dcyp07.html>

The Commission is developing a research report on youth suicide in Queensland, to be publicly released in two parts in 2008. The purpose of this project is to conduct an in-depth study analysing the demographics, risk factors and circumstances of all cases of suicide and suspected suicide of children and young people under 18 years in Queensland over a three-year period (1 January 2004 to 31 December 2006). This project also aims to identify and examine suicide prevention and intervention strategies that target children and young people in Queensland, and identify opportunities that may exist to strengthen current delivery of these services with a view to reducing the likelihood of these deaths occurring.



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5. Young people's access to critical support services

A major issue for young people is being unable to access support services at critical times in their lives. This is consistently identified in any interactions with young people as a significant problem for them. Ready access to critical support services in times of stress or crisis can have a profound impact on the subsequent trajectory of young people's lives. The absence of such services can mean that their lives unnecessarily spiral out of control. Critical support services include services that support young people:

- to maintain engagement in school
- to find and remain in appropriate accommodation
- when their families are experiencing crisis or dysfunction, and
- who have substance abuse or mental health problems.

Please note: The Commission can only provide comment on issues facing young people in Queensland

If you have any questions in relation to this submission could you please contact Ms Vicki Hall, A/Manager Policy, Strategic Policy and Research Program on (07) 30088985.

The fine print – confidentiality

Unless you request that your submission be treated confidentially, submissions may be made publicly available on the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) website as part of the consultation process. In addition, you may wish to note that, because DEEWR may be required to release your submission by the operation of law, judicial or Parliamentary body or government agency, the Department can give no undertaking that your submission will never be made publicly available.

If you would like your submission to be kept confidential, please indicate clearly at the top of your document or in a covering note. If only part of your response is confidential, please put that part on a separate page.