

*Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People — Fifth Report —
Report review 2022: Examination of selected reports by the Commissioner for Children and Young People —
Motion*

Resumed from 15 November on the following motion moved by Hon Ayor Makur Chuot —

That the report be noted.

Hon KLARA ANDRIC: I rise today for what will be the last committee report that I will speak on in 2023. This is probably one of my favourite committees that I have ever had the opportunity to be on—not that I have been on many! However, it was a delight to be a member of the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People in 2021, albeit for a very short period. As a former member, I know the committee does incredible work to ensure that children and young people here in Western Australia are well looked after, and any concerns that we might have are addressed through the great work of the commission and the committee.

Before us today is the fifth report, titled *Report review 2022: Examination of selected reports by the Commissioner for Children and Young People*. This report entails the committee's consideration and review of the Commissioner for Children and Young People's *Annual report 2021–22*, and several other reports are noted here. Most of the reports that were considered were published after January 2022 when Commissioner Jacqueline McGowan-Jones took over the role from former Commissioner Colin Pettit. I had the privilege of meeting both commissioners during the transition period back in 2021–22, and I take this opportunity to congratulate both the former commissioner and the current commissioner in her role today. In saying that, because it was a transition period from one commissioner to another, some of the work referenced in this report was commenced by former Commissioner Pettit. One of those pieces of work was the Speaking Out Survey that was conducted in early 2021. It was the second Speaking Out Survey because, from my understanding, the initial survey was conducted in 2019. In 2022, the commissioner's office further explored the survey's data concerning the findings around our children's views of their own personal safety. The committee held a hearing with the commissioner on 18 October 2022 to discuss the annual report. It has three key areas. I will focus on one of them, and depending on the time possibly another one.

The commissioner's annual work plan supports the *Strategic directions 2022–2026*, as outlined in the fifth report. The work completed for this is outlined in the annual report under the strategic plans of those three key platforms—one or possibly two of which I will be able to go into in some detail today. I will use some of my time today to consider the first of these platforms—that being, promoting the rights, voices and contributions of children and young people—and view some of the trends from the regional listening tour reports that were conducted. One of the most recent listening tours took place in March 2022, with the current commissioner. She engaged with Western Australia's youth and other key community members about what our children and young people need in the pursuit of positive health outcomes and in reaching their full potential. During the tour, the commissioner visited several regions, including the south west, Peel, midwest, West Kimberley, goldfields and the remote Ngaanyatjarra lands—apologies for my pronunciation!—as well as metropolitan schools and organisations. I understand that the former commissioner, Colin Pettit, also did listening tours to the West Kimberley, Gascoyne, Peel and great southern regions, which were held in the second half of 2021. This was a good and widespread tour across the regional areas of our state.

Following the listening tours, a report was published for each of the regions that I listed. I will outline some of the trends from the south west region's report from what the commissioner heard directly from youth. The trends included, but were not limited to, first, students appreciating a sense of community and the ability to know and interact with everyone in town; second, students expressing enjoyment in spending time with friends, supportive teachers and engaging with challenging activities at school; third, students expressing a desire for more education about Aboriginal culture; and fourth, students showed concerns around issues such as bullying, homelessness, food insecurity, the impact of substance abuse in their communities and the difficulties in understanding course work. The final note brought up by the students who took part in this tour was that affordability was a recurring issue. Some of the examples that they used included affordable housing, sports options and transportation. To get a better understanding of the challenges that children and young people face, they must be engaged with directly. It was really pleasing to see that both commissioners carried out the practice through a listening tour, which very clearly outlines in its title what it does. We all know that children in the age group between nine and 16 years, through both of the Speaking Out Surveys, have said that being listened to, not only in the environment of their homes but also in schools, is a really important factor in their lives. It plays a big part in them feeling that they are understood.

The information provided by the youth and other members in these listening tours, as I said, can prove to be quite valuable in drafting various policies and legislation, which in turn can impact children and young people. It can certainly assist us as government and community to better understand some of the areas where we can improve. I am pleased to read from the report that the commissioner established the Girls' Wellbeing Project and has released insights from the Speaking Out Survey on girls' wellbeing. They were the three key points I wanted to speak about today. I will leave the opportunity to do that at another time. The 2021 survey really highlighted some key areas

and the disadvantages that girls face in their wellbeing across our state. The commissioner has done some great work to make sure we outline this and find out how we can do better in that area.

Hon DAN CADDY: This is the first time I have spoken on this report, the fifth report of the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People, *Examination of selected reports by the Commissioner for Children and Young People*. Given it is the first time, I will briefly recognise the chair, Robyn Clarke, MLA, the member for Murray–Wellington; the deputy chair, my good friend Hon Neil Thomson, MLC; and the other members of the committee, Rebecca Stephens, MLA, the member for Albany; and Hon Ayor Makur Chuot, MLC. I also recognise the staff for the job they have done.

It is interesting to look at the chair’s foreword —

The Committee has reviewed the Commissioner for Children and Young People’s annual report ... and considered several other reports published by her office in the past year.

I will get to one of those reports shortly. Another paragraph in the chair’s foreword stuck out to me, which I will read in —

The Commissioner also received Lotterywest funding to extend the Speaking Out Survey to several groups that the mainstream survey could not cater for. These were students who are home-schooled, students with special educational needs and students in remote communities. It is important to capture the views of these minority populations to provide the best possible understanding of what children and young people in this state are experiencing. Hopefully funding will be available to do this in future years.

The funding was provided by Lotterywest, which I have spoken about in this place before. In fact, the very first time I spoke in this place, other than my inaugural speech, was a contribution on Lotterywest, as I think was the second, third and fourth times I spoke. It was because of the way it happened; I was having an ongoing conversation over several days with my good friend Hon Peter Collier. Lotterywest is an incredible institution. This year marks the ninetieth anniversary of Lotterywest. In that time, I am reliably informed that it has given back over \$17 billion. It has given literally billions of dollars to the community, community groups, not-for-profits and a host of other small organisations. Lotterywest remains the only state run and operated lottery in Australia. It is one of the few in the world where all profits made go back to the community.

Looking at the chapters, I will address each of them in the report but, before I do, I want to acknowledge the commissioner, Jacqueline McGowan-Jones, and congratulate her not just for the important job she is doing, but also the way she is doing it—the way she is going about it. I have not had the opportunity to speak to any report of the Commissioner for Children and Young People since just after her appointment, which, from memory, was in February 2022. I note, as did my colleague who spoke prior, Hon Klara Andric, with particular interest the paragraphs in the report dedicated to the commissioner’s listening tour —

Commissioner McGowan-Jones visited the South West, Peel, Mid-West, West Kimberley and Goldfields regions and the remote Ngaanyatjarra Lands, as well as metropolitan schools and organisations.

The title of this section is what gets me: “Promoting the rights, voices and contributions of children and young people”. That essentially sums up exactly what drives the commissioner and what this tour was all about. With those areas, it was a genuinely statewide tour. She absolutely made sure she got to all corners of this state. In looking at what has come out of that, one of the key concerns for the kids was safety. They talk about safety, including food insecurity and safety in the home. I reflect on my childhood and I am not sure they were common things that children in my era worried about. That is important to note and I once again commend the commissioner on everything she has done. The other thing I commend the commissioner on is the paragraph that reads —

Monitoring and advocacy to strengthen the wellbeing of all WA children and young people

...

The extension project enabled another 327 Aboriginal children in remote locations to participate, bringing the total to 987. Given the lack of data on the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal children, the Committee commends the Commissioner for reaching out to these remote children ...

The committee commends the commissioner and so do I. Reaching out to all is important when we seek to improve the lives of our children. There are many people who do that in many different ways. There are many what I would call local heroes in our community and I think, as members of Parliament, we know not all of them because many of them are unsung but we know who a lot of our local heroes are. They are the ones who take the initiative in making the lives of children better and that is part of their commitment. There are many in my local area, if I can digress. One of them is the principal of a local primary school in the Wanneroo district. Interestingly, I was reading the *Profile of children and young people in WA 2022*. If I look at the break-up of vulnerability in the Perth metropolitan area, Wanneroo is at 9.1, which is sort of in the middle, but it is still at the high end. It says 9.1 per cent

of children are developmentally vulnerable. The school that I am talking about is in the Wanneroo district. There has been an improvement in the figures in that district from 2015 and a significant improvement, which is encouraging. I will name her. She is the principal of one of the local primary schools in Yanchep and her name is Helen Demiris. She makes a difference because not only is she an outstanding principal at a day-to-day level, but also she has put programs in place to absolutely improve the wellbeing—and I would say the future—of some of her students. She has put programs in place to improve attendance rates to the extent that, as a school principal, she has access to a bus and she drives the bus in the mornings to collect some of the students who have what we might call high truancy rates, who do not always turn up to school. It is not that the kids are up to mischief. They stay home; they do not come to school. She has had fantastic results from doing this. She goes above and beyond in that area. She also goes above and beyond at her school when it comes to cultural awareness, which is absolutely fantastic.

Even though her day-to-day job is teaching—although she is now a principal and has been for some time—it is people like her who make a massive difference to the lives of young people with whom they come into contact. I would label her a hero, but I am sure many of her colleagues and many educators in Western Australia also go above and beyond simply doing their job. They take what they do incredibly seriously and do everything they can, not just in the classroom and the school environment, to better the lives of so many young people. I could name others as well and I could even name some of Helen’s colleagues, whom I know, who ensure that someone will fill in if for some reason she cannot be there as principal. There is an absolute commitment from the teaching crew at this school to get the best results and outcomes they can for their students and young people in the area. Helen has also implemented other programs at the school and invited students from nearby schools so that they can benefit from the stuff she does.

I will finish there, talking about Helen Demiris, but I also finish by shouting out to all teachers and educators for what they do for our young people.

Hon SHELLEY PAYNE: It gives me great pleasure to speak again on the fifth report of the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People, *Report review 2022: Examination of selected reports by the Commissioner for Children and Young People*.

A lot of members today have talked about the Speaking Out Survey and the fact that it has identified a gender wellbeing gap between young girls and young boys. A lot of members have commended the commissioner for her continued investigation into the issue and how we can reverse and close the gender wellbeing gap. I also commend the commissioner for her ongoing work and comment on the report that was tabled today, which followed on from the work of the Speaking Out Survey. Another survey has been run by the commissioner and her team on the issue of the gender wellbeing gap.

As a lot of members have talked about, the Speaking Out Surveys conducted in 2019 and 2021 showed female young people rated their wellbeing less favourably than male young people. I commend the commissioner for her girls’ wellbeing survey to further explore this issue, which surveyed girls aged from 12 to 24 years. I would like to say a few words on this report and particularly the girls’ wellbeing survey, which was done last year, which invited anyone in WA aged 12 to 24 to answer questions about their self-esteem, the transition from primary school to high school, belonging and gender inequality. There were 938 participants in the survey. The report that was tabled today, *Speaking out about girls’ wellbeing*, gives some of the key findings from the survey, which I want to go through quickly.

The first area is self-esteem. It looked at four areas —

- The opinions of others
- Social comparisons
- Social media use
- Performance in school and sport

The report states —

Self-esteem is shaped by multiple, often intersecting influences in a young person’s life ... there were two key interrelated processes that shape their self-esteem: receiving external validation from others and comparing themselves to others.

We all know that with the advent of social media that is really becoming a bit of an issue. People are getting validation from social media and also girls are using it as a way to compare themselves with each other.

The second issue is the transition from primary school to high school. The report states —

The transition from primary to high school is a critical time that coincides with the onset of puberty when young people undergo ... physical and neurological maturation. It is also a period of identity formation ...

It was interesting to look at what the respondents said about their transition from primary school. The analysis of the responses revealed five key areas that students felt would be most helpful for the transition, including —

- Transition programs in primary school —

I commend the work of the Clontarf Academy on that —

- Secondary school programs to support them once at high school
- Feeling supported by teachers, school staff, and other students
- More respect and kindness from others, more self-confidence and being taught coping skills
- Accepting that some challenges are normal

These are some really good points that are coming from the students themselves.

The third area is belonging. The survey looked at whether students were —

Feeling socially and culturally connected helps young people build healthy relationships and assists with identity formation, yet research shows that significantly fewer female than male young people feel a sense of community connection and belonging.

The survey found —

Three key barriers to girls feeling like they belong to a community include:

- Girls being subject to different social and behavioural standards than boys —

Which I think we can all relate to —

- Social interactions and relationships being more intense for girls than boys
- Gender bias in community-based activities and opportunities

The fourth part of the survey looked at gender equality and noted —

Although gender equality has improved significantly in Australia over the last 50 years, a majority of female and gender-diverse young people told us they feel gender inequality still impacts many aspects of their everyday lives and is seen as a barrier to them leading a full and happy life.

The results coming out of the survey area dealing with gender inequality showed —

For girls and gender-diverse young people, these experiences included:

- Gender inequality through stereotypes
- Boys getting more opportunities and freedom than girls
- Sexism
- Feeling unsafe

I urge members to look at this report and the great work that the Commissioner for Children and Young People has done following on from the Speaking Out Survey. *Speaking out about girls' wellbeing* reports on the new survey that was completed. I again commend the committee for its great work and also commend the commissioner.

Question put and passed.