

# Childrens Rights Are Human Rights F+E Con

## 2024 Video.m4a

[ 00:00:00 ] We might get started. Welcome everybody, thanks for finding your way down into the bowels of the building today. My name's Anne Hollands, I'm Australia's National Children's Commissioner and I'd like to warmly welcome you to this panel which is about children's rights and human rights, part of the Free and Equal Conference. So first of all, I'd like to also acknowledge that we're on the lands of the Gadigal people of the Eora nations and I pay my respects present and emerging and all the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are joining us here today. So, as you would imagine, this morning, the Free and Equal Conference is kind of luckily timed with the release of the report from the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights.

[ 00:00:47 ] The report came out last week, really looking at a number of recommendations on how we can strengthen our understanding and our protection of the human rights of all Australians. While Australia has laws that focus on discrimination such as race, age, gender, and disability discrimination, there are many human rights that are not supported by legislation today. And there's no, for example, no requirement to consult with people who might be affected, for example, children. Thank you. The panel and you in the audience might be interested to discuss some of this today in terms of your views on whether we need legislation. This has been a recommendation by the Parliamentary Committee. And whether you might have views on whether a general Human Rights Act will be enough to protect the rights of children.

[ 00:01:48 ] These are some of the issues that still need to be investigated. Thank you. As National Children's Commissioner, I've noticed that often we lean towards the concerns of adults in our policy. And the unique needs of children are often overlooked. As National Children's Commissioner, it's been my observation that in Australia we lack an understanding of what is meant by children's rights. We seem to feel awkward and uncomfortable with the concept of children's rights in this country. I'm so pleased there are many people here, because clearly you don't feel as awkward about children's rights. But it is, and I'm sure that my fellow commissioners who are here would agree, that it's not a concept that really rolls off the tongue easily in Australia.

[ 00:02:42 ] And that's in contrast to, you know, if you listen to Question Time in Parliament, which I nerdily often do, you hear about women's rights, consumers', and so on. Rights, you hear about consumer rights, workers' rights. You know, it's not that Australia doesn't like rights, it's just you never hear them talk about children's rights. And you'll never hear a newsreader, even on the ABC, a newsreader will never, you'll never hear them say 'children's rights.' So I've just really noticed that sort of disparity culturally in this country. Unlike many other countries, Australia lacks a cultural comfort with the concept of children's rights. And so we seem to somehow defer to the belief that there'll always be an adult who's able to meet a child's needs. An adult who will prioritise the child's needs.

[ 00:03:35 ] And of course, we know that for many children, the reality is that they don't have an adult looking out for them and prioritising their needs. In fact, these most vulnerable children in

Australia also don't have governments looking out for their needs. And these are some of the things that will be, you know, a big challenge for them. And I think that's something that we're touching on here on this panel discussion today. Welcome to those who've just walked in, and thank you very much for joining the session on children's rights. Of course, because children don't vote, as we know, they have no say in what governments will or will not do for them. Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have all the same human rights as adults.

[ 00:04:24 ] Children have all the same human rights as adults. And they also have additional human rights because of their unique situation as children. One of these, of course, is Article 12, the right to have their views considered in matters that affect them. And it's our responsibility as adults to ensure that children's voices are heard safely and taken seriously. We, as the adults, are indeed the duty bearers. Today we have a fantastic panel and a fantastic opportunity to explore the status of human rights of children in Australia with an eminently qualified group of people up here. But I know there are also a lot of people in the audience who have very strong views about these issues, and it would be terrific to make this as interactive as possible.

[ 00:05:10 ] So we're going to hear a bit from the panelists, but also then open up so that you can get to have your say or ask the panelists questions that you might have. So let me now introduce you to our panel here. So, starting at that end, we've got Professor John Tobin, who is the Francine White Chair of Children and Families Law. McNiff Chair in International Human Rights Law at the Melbourne Law School, where he coordinates the Human Rights Program. Welcome, John. Next to John, we've got Natalie Lewis, who's a Gamilaraay woman and the Commissioner of the Queensland Family and Child Commission. Thank you. Natalie is fiercely committed to progressing a transformational reform agenda to strengthen Queensland's focus on children's rights.

[ 00:06:01 ] Her passion for children's rights is inspired by the experiences of children and young people disadvantaged by systems that are meant to be helping them, especially those in statutory child and youth justice systems. Welcome, Nat. Then we have Selina. Selina Blackley is a First Nations member. She's a First Nations Youth Advocate. Selina is a proud Kalkatoonga woman who's committed to nurturing the potential of First Nations youth in Mount Isa. And I had the great honour of meeting Selina during my consultations for a youth justice report that's going to Parliament in a few months. Selina was there; I met her in Mount Isa, which is a visit that I will never forget. It was a very, very powerful experience. Thank you. Selina, through her roles as a youth specialist and cultural facilitator, she champions cultural resilience and educational empowerment.

[ 00:07:03 ] Welcome, Selina. And Kupa, who I call you Kupa, but perhaps you could pronounce your full name for us so we know. So my name is Kupa Kwa-Shee-Ma-Tangira. Okay. That was better done by Kupa. Kupa is a youth empowerment activist and social entrepreneur. Her goal is to ensure all young people enjoy a lived experience of their rights, and she's connected with hundreds of young people to decision-makers to ensure their voices inform climate policy and youth justice reform at every level of government. And she's represented Australian youth on a number of international, international forums and so forth. We're very, very pleased to have you here as well, and then last but not least, Anjali Sharma, who you may have seen on the news over the last couple

of years.

[ 00:08:03 ] Anjali is – are you still only 19? 20. You're 20 now. As of last week. Okay, as of last week. And Anjali, I'm sure she will share with you some of her experiences of campaigning for a duty of care owed by governments to young people to protect their health and wellbeing in the face of climate change. So welcome all, let's get started. So my first question to each of the panelists is, I think the audience would be quite interested to hear a bit about how you got into the work that you're doing on the Human Rights of children and future generations. Anjali. And I mean what, what led you into doing this work, and also what you think about the work that you're doing on the human rights of children and future generations.

[ 00:08:50 ] think are the biggest human rights issues for children in Australia today and why? So we might start from here now, Anjali. Yeah, sure I'll kick off. So I was born in India which is a country that has long been hit by climate disaster which has been shown particularly in recent weeks with Delhi hitting 52 degrees breaking records that should not have never have been touched only last week and so that's something that my family has had to go through for years and years whereas I migrated to Australia I was lucky enough to do so at the age of only 10 months so I've spent the entirety of my life minus obviously the occasional visit

[ 00:09:32 ] in Australia and living on the other side of the world I've really seen that the difference in what is being experienced in a country that is on the front lines of the climate crisis with limited resources to safeguard its population and to protect its people and to protect its people and to protect its people from climate change to rebuild after climate disaster to prepare for the next climate disaster And also understanding the greater ability that I have here in Australia to engage with the political system in a way that people in India cannot. I've really, it's really come to the forefront of my mind then, the way that the needs of marginalized populations are really left by the wayside in high-level political discussions.

[ 00:10:15 ] One of those marginalized populations, obviously, is people of color, and that's the perspective that I've really gotten from seeing what my family in India have had to go through. But another one of those is young people, and it's very clear with the wealth of scientific evidence that we have right now that young people will be disproportionately impacted by climate change because it's our futures that are being intrinsically shaped by the decisions being made today. And if we know that, if we're all in consensus about climate change, then we're going to be able to make decisions about the So I think, if we think about that, then my belief is that that should be reflected in legislation. And so that's been I guess the crux of my campaigning for the last few years.

[ 00:10:53 ] And as we go on, I'd love to hear from you later about how you think that's gone and what some of the barriers are in dealing with government and getting getting that recognized in legislation. Thanks. So Cooper, what led you into doing the work that you do? And what do you think are the biggest human rights challenges facing children in Australia? So for me, my passion for human rights was born out of seeing the impact a deprivation of rights has on families and communities, but also seeing the impact that human rights have and the justice that they bring when they're fully realised. So I come from a country - I'm Zimbabwean, where if you speak out

against the government, you can pay for it with your life.

[ 00:11:41 ] And so, unfortunately, some of my family members who've done something as small as going to a peaceful protest have been beaten, thrown into jail, and so much worse, just because they exercised their rights to protest. And like that. But then, also at the same time, my grandfather was legendary for his generation. He was a real standout because he really believed in the power of girls' education, and he sacrificed all that he had, and I mean everything, to ensure that my mum and all of her sisters were educated. And the impact of that was they were able to achieve their dreams. And because of that, I am here today. So, seeing this complex interplay between rights for some and no rights for others really piqued my interest in human rights and made me feel like they're worth fighting for.

[ 00:12:30 ] And being a youth worker with Save the Children in some of the hardest hit communities by different natural disasters, I saw that in order for adults to defend their own rights and protect the rights of others, they need to have a full experience of their rights in childhood. So because of that, I'm a youth empowerment activist, and my goal is for all young people to fully realize and experience their rights, and I think that one of the biggest issues facing young people in Australia today is an inability to have a meaningful say on all policy that impacts them. Mm-hmm. Wow. Thanks, Cooper. Thank you. Selina, what about you? Yeah, so, well, before I begin, as a Kalkatoonga woman, I'd also like to pay my respects to the traditional custodians of the land on which we gathered here today.

[ 00:13:25 ] And in that same sentiment, I - that is my passion as First Nations people. I am a proud Kalkatoonga and Wani woman. I also have connections to the Torres Strait Islands on Moa Island from Kuban Village. So, yeah, that representing First Nations peoples, our children, our young people, ensuring that continuity for our people, for our tribes, and ensuring that young people are educated today on the matters that relate to us and affect us, and the policies that are handed down through government; making sure that we're all educated on that, so that when they take their place at the table in 10 years, 20 years' time, that they are able to come across with their own ideas and be ready for the future.

[ 00:14:10 ] And I'm really grateful for that handing of the baton from our elders because, you know, a lot of our elders are tired now; they've fought the good fight for many, many years. And I've been privileged to work alongside of them in Queensland on the, back in 2022, I was appointed to the interim Truth and Treaty body, so Queensland's commitment to the Path to Treaty. And then fortunate enough to carry on through the Treaty Institute most recently with my appointment. So working alongside a lot of elders, Aunty Cheryl Buchanan and Uncle Mick Gooda, who have championed for the rights of First Nations people for their whole lives. So, you know, I want to make sure that there are more First Nations young people that know their rights as First Nations people and are able to take over that fight.

[ 00:15:01 ] And I feel like I wear many hats. I'm a youth worker, as well. And I work for Save the Children or 54 Reasons. And I'm also a cultural facilitator for my family's cultural business, Malkari. But, yeah, it's working with mob and seeing firsthand, you know, what intergenerational trauma

has manifested into in today's society is my driver. You know, both sides of my family were firsthand impacted by the Stolen Generations. Both my great-grandmothers on both sides were taken from Kalkatoonga country. They were then put on Palm Island in the 1950s. Sorry, prior to that. My grandparents were born in the 1950s on Palm Island. So it's, yeah, that's a really big driver. And I think for First Nations young people, we need to be educated to ensure that things like that don't happen again.

[ 00:15:59 ] You know, that we are able to stand staunch and advocate for that. Thanks, Selina. Yama Malia. I'm Naya Nathalie Lewis. Naya Gomera Yuna. And as a guest on Country, I just want to pay my respects to the traditional owners and to the elders of the Gadigal people. But also, you know, it's really important. We're talking about children's rights, and that's so central in many of our cultures. And so it's really my hope today that our words are spoken and then heard in a way that honours the legacy of all of our ancestors. So the work that I've - I'm almost coming up to 30 years ago, my first real job was working for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service in the Deaths in Custody Monitoring Unit.

[ 00:16:45 ] And I haven't really moved too far away from that space of justice. So I've worked a lot in youth justice and child protection in Queensland and in the US. I'm working in gang prevention. But I think the thing that keeps driving me is the importance of rights as an equaliser. You know, in reality, the ability to pursue equity in a way where, you know, there's recognition of, yes, the rights that people have, but the obligations that our country has to people. And so, in the work that we do, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are disproportionately represented in statutory systems, in child protection, and in youth justice. And when we flip it, and we look at the equitable enjoyment of their rights, they are severely underrepresented.

[ 00:17:37 ] And so I think that for us, that's why it's critical to centre children and to pursue a rights-based agenda in Queensland that is really – yeah, that doesn't conveniently overlook children. Well, and the way you put it that way, Nat, it's like what's happening to children really is the lightning rod, isn't it? It says a lot about the country when we know that children are missing out on that way. Yeah, so we'll come back to hopefully to those issues. Yeah, yeah. Thanks, Natalie. John? Thanks, Nat. And thanks so much for coming. As someone who's worked in this space for a long time, I'm always anxious if anyone actually cares about children's rights, to be brutally honest. So can I just interrupt you there? I was going to say in a minute, I'm going to take a photo.

[ 00:18:21 ] Yeah. But I'm blown away how many of you have come. Yeah. Because we do experience that there's just not that amount of interest in – when we're talking about children. Yeah. Right? And so, congratulations for coming. Go, keep going. It's great. Can I also ask you to look around and see if you can observe anything about the major issues that you're talking about? I can't see a makeup of the room as well because it's kind of important to observe. We have not enough blokes working this space as well. So, I just want to highlight that quite seriously in terms of issues around power and imbalances in our society as well. Very briefly, I didn't think much of children's rights when I was at law school.

[ 00:18:57 ] I'm just amazed by these young people, young adults, just so much more thoughtful than I was. Probably white and privileged probably explains part of that as well. But when I first discovered the Convention on the Rights of the Child, I thought it wasn't much. I had no interest in it to be honest. I thought it was unenforceable, overly ambitious, wasn't really relevant to what was happening in Melbourne at the time, and I sort of disengaged with it to be honest. But then I worked at Legal Aid with young people, and I discovered that the same children, the same families kept coming back into the court system. I thought, something's not quite right here. And so I finished working there in search for - a master's degree, where I could discover some more tools to help me make sense of what was happening in the world in which I was working.

[ 00:19:42 ] And I discovered the idea of human rights and particularly children's rights as well. So for the last 30 years or so, I've been using this idea as a concept to try and inform both my research, my parenting, which I fail at miserably with four children, and any sort of issue I engage with in terms of young people's self. And I should also say I'm reflecting back now. I was a product - and I probably will. This is a bit - this is raw, but I was a product of a private school education, but - and privileged in that sense. But we were also abused. All of us were abused. And not sexually, it wasn't my fault, but we were all physically abused and emotionally abused for a long period of time.

[ 00:20:18 ] And the reason I say that is because I look back now and say, gee whiz, I didn't know what was happening was wrong to us. No one did. And so when I speak to my students, I say, look, right now the language of rights gives us a lens to start saying, 'What are the things happening today that aren't right? That are causing harm? That are making children invisible?' And it taught me this this week at footy training. I coached 16 boys, and they're running around like, you know, kids as they should do. They were really quiet. I said, 'What can't I hear?' And they said, 'My voice.' I said, 'Why can't I hear you?' And they said, 'Are you tired?' No answer. Is it, you know, you're bored? No answer.

[ 00:20:52 ] Is it because you don't know how to use your voice? And I said, 'Yeah.' I was like, 'Geez, that's an awareness for me as someone who's been in this space for 30 years and I'm training, have been for 10, 12 years.' I haven't taught my own - footballers and cricketers how to express their views when I'm teaching them as well. So now, every part of my life now is adorning most days of the week about what I'm not doing. But I do find the idea of rights is a really useful tool to inform both my research, my teaching, but also the things we engage with in our lives as well. Yeah. Well, that's a really good segue to where I was thinking we might go next, and that is, what is the value of human rights?

[ 00:21:30 ] But I'll just reflect. John was telling us before that when he started out, there were no children's commissioners in Australia. And so now, you know, there are quite a few in this room actually. And so, you know, it's good to sort of acknowledge that things are moving. But the question is, you know, have we moved enough and where do we go to next? And so, on the issue of - you mentioned apologies. So my background is not in human rights, but it's in working in child and family wellbeing for my whole career. And I've been part of having to do lots of apologies. Even as a chief executive of large organisations, I've had to publicly apologise for past practices.

And I often think, well, what is it that someone will be apologising for in 25, 30 years from now?

[ 00:22:20 ] What is it that we're doing now? So my question back to you as the panel is, you know, what do you think are the barriers to policy reform based on evidence? We have a lot of evidence about children's needs and, you know, what we need to be doing in society. And, you know, that's one of the things Australia's done well is we do a lot of good research, right? So we have a lot of evidence. But there are barriers to reforming our policies on the back of that evidence. What do you think those barriers are? And do you think legislation would help and how? You know, is legislation something that will help and how will it help? So whoever would like to go on that, just jump in. The three-year election cycle.

[ 00:23:04 ] I think is a barrier. A big barrier. I think the fact that as soon as politicians are brought into office, they're thinking about the next time they'll be at the ballot boxes and how they can make sure that the actions that they put into place then will return them in the next three-year election cycle. And that's a real barrier to thinking long-term, to thinking about the needs of children and the needs of future generations, especially with the voting age sitting at 18. I was only just able to vote in the last election, even though I've been campaigning for the rights of children since 14, 15 years old. How old were you when you took that case to? 16. Do you want to tell everyone what that was about very briefly? Yeah.

[ 00:23:42 ] So I was 16 years old when myself and eight of my friends who were 16, 17, or younger sued the former Federal Environment Minister, Susan Lee, and we argued that she owed and was breaching a duty of care to young people to protect us from the impacts of climate change. It's very similar to the work I'm doing now, but it was before the courts, not the parliament. And it led directly into the bill now because at first the Federal Court found in our favour and they found that that duty was owed, which was novel and groundbreaking. Unfortunately, the government then appealed to that decision and the Federal Court on appeal ruled with them and overturned that duty of care. But in doing so, they said something very interesting.

[ 00:24:25 ] They said that it wasn't necessarily true that this duty didn't exist, but that if it did exist, it was the job of parliament to legislate it, not the courts. So that was honestly shirking responsibility from them. But luckily, the duty of care concept now has been taken to parliament. But I think with the voting age sitting at 18, students and young people are left with very few avenues with which to make their voices heard. You've got protesting for the people who have access to amazing pro bono lawyers and high-level legal representation, which isn't a lot. There's, I guess, class actions. There's political campaigns. But really, how many young people can actually engage in that alongside school, alongside just being a young person?

[ 00:25:12 ] And I think that's a big barrier to doing what we do because politicians look at you and they think, 'My decisions aren't going to impact whether you vote for me or not because you can't vote. Yeah, that's right.' I'm just going to duck across here and get water before I go. Go ahead. Who'd like to go next? Yeah, Alina? I think I'll just jump in there. From like, a First Nations perspective and point of view, I think a real barrier is, you know, these already preconceived ideas and misconceptions that are placed upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. So, you know,

a little bit more about my youth worker role. I work with disengaged young people. That's how I met Anne. She came out to Mount Isa last year.

[ 00:25:55 ] And we spoke about, you know, what are the barriers they're actually facing for my young people. So in my program, I work with young people. I work with a really broad range, so 8 to 21 young people, First Nations young people as the majority, who have experienced youth justice matters, have been incarcerated. And I think it's already clear that when we start talking about the rights of children and, you know, the hot topic of lowering the age and all these sorts of things, it's these preconceived ideas and misconceptions that, you know, we're looking for handouts and that we're looking for those that, you know, these rights that will be put in place will just get these kids off of their charges and, you know, things like that.

[ 00:26:39 ] And I think that's a real big barrier when we don't actually look further deep into why, you know, why are these kids actually in the youth justice system? Why are they in care? They're all manifestations of intergenerational trauma. And I don't think that's addressed enough. And, you know, if we were to have legislation, I think that's putting that accountability back. I think that's putting that accountability back onto, you know, youth justice, child safety, detention centers to uphold and respect, you know, not only the rights of First Nations young people, but all young people who go through those systems. I'm glad you've raised youth justice. Some of us were hoping it wouldn't be raised. Because I think, you know, that is the area where often, I mean, I think child protection and youth justice are both the areas where the most egregious breaches of human rights of children are occurring.

[ 00:27:32 ] And for some reason, despite all the evidence, we're really lagging in our reform. And so I've been really interested in what are the barriers to reform. Yeah. Nat, do you want to go? I think, you know, we are fortunate in Queensland that we have a Human Rights Act and we have a very staunch Human Rights Commissioner. But we do have also, you know, some pretty disgraceful recent changes. And I think it's really important that we think about the history, about just how seriously we take the rights, human rights of children when it comes to votes. Let's just, you know, be honest. I think in terms of some of the really populist decisions that have been made more recently.

[ 00:28:18 ] And I think without having that explicit process where we have to think about what are the unintended consequences that can emerge as a result of particular reforms. Yeah. And now we have the compatibility process around the Human Rights Act. But last night, Rosalyn was talking about that intersection, you know, of rights rather than competing rights. And so at that intersection, though, when we're talking about the rights of children and then, you know, the rights of, let's say, victims or in, you know, teachers. Like when we're talking about student disciplinary absences, those things are always inevitably resolved in favour of the person with power. So whether that's the adult who has represented interest or if it is an adult who happens to be voting in October, those are the types of default positions that we continue to take.

[ 00:29:14 ] So I think there needs to be a more explicit focus and a more sort of futuristic focus around the types of impacts that are not even unintended. And I wish we could actually just drop



that language from our vernacular. Because these are not mistakes. We're not mowing. We're not idiots. We know these things. And so, when we think about that, and decisions are made to proceed anyway, the absence of accountability becomes more apparent. Well, that's a good point that you make about a lot of this is known. And a lot of the harms to children we now know are preventable. They're preventable. And we're not acting as a country to do what will prevent those harms. Mm. Who else would like to have a go? John? Pam Cooper? Yeah.

[ 00:30:03 ] I think a big barrier when it comes to child rights is young people not being viewed as stakeholders and as decision-makers in their own right. A lot of the time when we think about young people, we almost view them as passive receivers of authority or the status quo. And we never really see them as agents of change. And we always hear this language of young people: 'Young people are the future. They're the future leaders.' But in reality, young people are the present. They are today's catalysts of change. And decision-makers need to work with young people because the research shows that if stakeholders actually inform policy that impacts them, it will be made way more effective. But for some reason, young people just aren't seen as agentic. They aren't seen as stakeholders.

[ 00:30:53 ] But the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child makes clear that young people have a right to inform all policies. They have a right to inform policy that impacts them. So, I think legislation is important in advancing child rights, absolutely. But what is also important is having a mandated and entrenched youth voice and youth collaboration and co-design with government because with collaboration, we can really address the issues. And do you have a view on what that would look like in Australia? Yes, oh yeah! I have lots of views. Do you want to hear them briefly? I think it looks like more meaningful youth advisory councils. I love youth advisory councils. I think they have a role to play. My worry is that they can be a little bit tokenistic.

[ 00:31:43 ] Really? Yes. If not done well. And so for me, I think: one, it's having youth advisory councils that actually inform policy in meaningful ways where decision makers are accountable to young people and come back and say you've informed everything. And then the other thing is I think decision makers need to put in the work and actually go into communities where young people are, particularly marginalized communities who are not always represented at the decision-making table. They need to go into those communities, hear the voices of children and young people, and then work together to create change. Okay. Well, there's a few decision-makers in the room, I think. And I won't single them out, but I hope they're listening, right? John?

[ 00:32:30 ] I mean, it's just in terms of legislation, with the gold standards - what's happened in Scotland, so you probably all know that this year Scotland decided to embark on, not this year but actually seven years ago, embark on a child rights revolution. And I think that's an important point to make. Their political leaders in conjunction with youth leaders said, 'We're going to transform the way we deal with young people.' Through a few hiccups, they have now adopted the UNCRC incorporation act. That basically means that every right in that international treaty, which I disregarded when I was a student, is now going to be part of the law in Scotland. And every decision maker must give consideration to how they think about children's rights and individuals that affects them.

[ 00:33:08 ] Now, that's setting the bar at a really high standard. It's sort of what we want to think about what's possible. What we've actually got is a long way short of that as well. Now, our human rights act, we can talk about that as well. But the idea of legislation becomes, sets the accountability point in place. Then we create the systems to actually ensure that on the ground there's transformation in how we actually engage young people as well. So in Victoria, we've got child safety standards. As you all hopefully know, the new standards actually include a requirement that we actually give children a voice in everything we do with them – so, yes, youth advisory councils. But when I'm coaching the football team, you know, there's no education about that.

[ 00:33:41 ] I'm responsible as the coaching coordinator; I'm not doing that. Now, that's not because I don't want to; I just get distracted. You forget. And so there's this need to sort of link up with the revolution through legislation. And then also make sure on the ground, we're actually creating systems and processes. That allow for people who might be tired or stretched or lacking understanding, to actually create the systems that you talked about, to actually empower young people as well. And I just want to add in that part as well. We've amended a couple of pieces of legislation this year in Australia. The Family Law Act is one. And we've now decided we will include children's views as being part of the assessment of a child's best interests. There's a problem with that.

[ 00:34:21 ] Because it doesn't say and take them into account in light of their age and maturity. So we still give all that. We give all the power back to the adults to make decisions in what they decide is the child's best interest. And we say to young people, still, you're too young to know what's actually best for you as well. So we're still falling short in that space. The other thing, as well, in relation to the case you so courageously brought. We're creating legislation to impose a duty on policymakers to think about the impact on children both now and in the future. But there's no explicit requirement to actually consider their views. So we still aren't getting it. So we're still not getting it.

[ 00:34:57 ] We're still adopting what I call a welfareist model, where you say we'll care for kids, but we'll decide the conditions under which we care. We won't actually allow for young people themselves and their insights and agency expertise to actually shape and inform those decisions as well. So there's a lot of work to be done. But there are standards that can inspire us. And as we might want to talk about, the Commission's report has got a procedural duty as well, which I think is really important for us to think about as well. So having said at the outset that we've come a long way in Australia, these are some of the things that you're – you guys are pointing to now. We still have got quite a long way to go when it comes to children.

[ 00:35:32 ] Just on the point about the Scottish Act, John, so a question from me: So is it correct that Scotland also has under the – has a Human Rights Act, a general Human Rights Act, but it has this special act that focuses on incorporating the Convention on the Rights of the Child? And what do you think about that? Yeah, well, as someone who now does believe in children's rights, I like the idea. It's a really interesting question. So we often talk about – we talk about human rights being interdependent and visible for everyone. So why do we need specialist rights for specialist

cohorts? And that's an important conversation. In the context of Scotland, I said, look, we see children as being a cohort that is particularly marginalized, disenfranchised. They need an additional level of protection.

[ 00:36:15 ] And then advocates, importantly, is what drove that. So in any area, change in law will be the result of activism. And so from my perspective, there's clearly a gap in the generalist human rights instruments. They don't address the specific needs of young people. And they rarely, rarely do they cover all international standards as well. So what's happened in Scotland is quite unique. It's taking an entire human rights treaty, not just a few articles, and embedding the entire practice into public policy for young people. It's really watch and see. But from my perspective, it's sort of a no-brainer. You made the point. When we actually develop policy that involves the people affected, in this case children, the outcomes are actually better. So the question is, why? Why aren't we doing that?

[ 00:36:57 ] It's because of the power, right? Who holds it and who controls it? So the Scottish model will shift the way decision-making takes place. And we can learn a lot from that as well. And as you say, that's the gold standard. But there are a number of countries that do have a Human Rights Act and some form of National Children's Act. It might not be full incorporation, correct? Yeah. So I think there are interesting things for us to be exploring, especially now with the Parliamentary Committee's report available to us. I think there's also really good examples where we obviously don't have a perfect system, right? But I think that there are jurisdictions where you work with what you have, and that can produce really great outcomes for children and young people.

[ 00:37:44 ] But I think that in the absence of having full incorporation of the UNCRC into domestic law, we're just going to continue to view children and young people through a prism of vulnerability and risk, right? Not as distinct rights holders. And so that's, I think, the usefulness of statute and bringing that in. I think that's really important. But at the same time, as organisations and as a Commission, we've got probably the most pathetic powers across the jurisdictions. But I know that in our work we make an absolute commitment that if we're going to take a position on an issue that's going to impact children and young people, then we're going to do it. And we start with the children who are most impacted. And so quite often that's not advisory councils, unfortunately.

[ 00:38:34 ] However, if we're doing a piece on youth justice, then we're talking to kids who are sitting in isolation 23 hours a day in a watch house. So, we have to understand that we can introduce that intent and that integrity of what's imagined through the UNCRC into our daily practice because, you know, in the absence of political leadership, that's not an excuse for our inaction. Yeah. So, that's a really good example of where you are putting it into practice, where in fact, you know, the human rights of children using that lens has practical value, which I think is often missed by policymakers, that they think it's quite sort of esoteric or somehow out of reach, the sort of purview of people like you, John, you know, who live in your academic ivory tower, where it actually, in many ways, I see it as a compass that can help us guide, you know, and make better decisions for, you know, for people.

[ 00:39:36 ] Can I use that as well? So Natalie makes a really good point in that legislation is great. It becomes a stick sometimes. But you don't have to have it. So Natalie doesn't necessarily have all the powers she'd like. But I know her work. She said, 'I'm going to embrace a rights-based approach.' And we're going to just do it, right? So for those who work in this space, you don't have to wait for government to say, 'Here's a mandate. Here's the incentive.' You can still be creative in thinking about what power you might have to start adopting what a child rights-based approach might look like as well. Yeah, that's a good point. I think I want to honour all the people in the room and give you a good chance to grill these people up here.

[ 00:40:14 ] But before I do that, was there anything that you were burning to say, anyone else, before we go to the audience? And I'll give you guys another chance at the end to do some wrapping up. But anything else you want to say right now? Can I just make one? I think it's worth reflecting on what the Commission and the Committee are recommending about children and the procedural duties. So I imagine you're all familiar with what's been suggested. Why don't you just explain it? Yeah, great. No, you explain it. Okay, so sort of two parts to it. So, a binding duty; it says every public authority essentially must consult with children who are directly or disproportionately affected by a decision being made. So that's an important part.

[ 00:40:53 ] And then the second part is about when you're developing policies, legislation, there's an obligation. It's not binding, but legislators should still be thinking about how they engage with young people as well. So that's a step up from what we've got now, and clearly it will transform decision making within government as well. There are challenges around implementation, but I think that's worth thinking about as a cohort in terms of moving forward. This will be a challenge. So upstairs we talked about who will challenge the human rights proposals. There will be many parent groups. There will be many religious groups who will not like the idea of giving a strong voice to children in a whole range of contexts. Think gender affirmation services. Think around identity, relationships, very controversial issues.

[ 00:41:38 ] But this requirement, if enacted, will shift the dial, I think, when it comes to decision making as well. So thoughts, observations around that would be, I think, important to hear too. Well, and I'm sure there are people in the audience who have those thoughts. So we have a microphone. Thank you, Georgia. So, who would like to have a go at grilling the panel or making a comment? Right down here. And perhaps if you could say your name and where you're from when you start. Thank you. Thank you. My name is Dawn Blanche and I'm from Moora in New South Wales. My question is, you know, working with young children around the law, is I don't think they have a right. Because when we go into and sit before the judges or before the solicitor, is that they're concerned about the age.

[ 00:42:33 ] They're getting younger and younger. And they are incarcerated whether we like it or not. And I think the sad part about that is that we sit here and we speak about rights, but they don't think they have any rights. They don't believe they have any rights. The other example of that, that is when they're picked up by police as well. And you will do, as I say, not what I think you should be doing. And they're fairly strong in the local, you know, like remote areas, which may be fair enough. But what I don't understand, we're all professionals. It costs us nothing to be good to

a child or anyone for that matter. But we are just in a state where we even got people within our own communities and our own families.

[ 00:43:20 ] So I'm not racist by any means. But non-Aboriginal people, let's incarcerate them and push them to the extent of the age of 10. And that's a real concern. And that's why I'm here today because, you know, like they're already traumatized for whatever reason. And, of course, we're not going to solve everything. But we have to have a system in building relationships. And I feel, even as an adult, we don't do that enough. Yeah. Now, did you have a question as well, Dawn? Or do you want to ask the panel anything? Yeah, about as we spoke about the system, the juvenile system and those who have worked with those, because they are the ones that for our area we're most concerned about, because they're the ones obviously in trouble. And being sent.

[ 00:44:21 ] And when they are, the distance for, and most of them are like single parents, have to like travel a full day to get to visit their child. But they were unaware there is now support available to help them to reach their children. The other thing is, is working with children. I don't believe you've got to be a brain surgeon to shovel dirt. And we're trying to encourage parents, do you be a part, say they've got, you know, more than one child involved in the justice system, so that they can react and build that rapport again with their own parent or with their own family member. So there's something good that is coming out of it. And it's not no disrespect to anyone else that they are.

[ 00:45:11 ] But did we ever stop and think that's who they want? Yeah. Because too often we're making decisions for young children we know nothing about. Yeah, that's right. So thanks very much for those observations, Dawn. And I'll just reflect that as part of the project that we've been working on actually travelling to around Australia, meeting with kids in prisons and in communities, it's the kids, you don't have to be a brain surgeon to know how to do this. The kids themselves know what they need, right? They know exactly what would make a difference to help them not get into trouble with police, right? If you just bother to ask them, they will tell you and they will say that it's preventable, right?

[ 00:45:57 ] And we just need someone to listen, someone to listen and to get over the politics which was raised about, you know, the next election coming up, and to actually look at what is it that will help these kids to not end up in that situation? Can I just add to that? I just want to share, so thank you for sharing that. But just, you know, like where you come from in your community, like I come from Mount Isa which is far northwest Queensland, you know, we share the same troubles and, you know, I'm sure a lot of communities, remote communities, smaller communities, Indigenous communities share in the same thing and it comes back to that, you know, you don't have to wait for government and in the service that I work in, people that I work with, they don't even work in the same way

[ 00:46:48 ] that I do, like you have to lead from a trauma-informed practice, you have to, you know, hold yourself accountable for making sure that these young people, that you're asking them, you know, what do you actually need? Is this, you know, how can we help you and your mob to be able to understand, you know, what your charges are? And we see the same thing back home, you

know, mob coming into Children's Court every Tuesday and they don't even know what they're there for, you know, or people are under the impression that they're bringing up old charges to, you know, to send these kids off to youth detention. So, you know, having that, you know, that, I guess, that accountability on yourself when you work in these spaces to try and do your best to help, you know.

[ 00:47:32 ] And treating everyone with respect, like, that's just a pure lack of respect you're describing there, isn't it? And then it's also where, you know, we've - I've gotten to a point over the three years that I've been a youth worker where I've empowered families. I've empowered families and children to know about their rights. And then that same, that same thing; I had one specific young person. He was very staunch on what his rights were and he knew what the police, you know, could and can't do to him. And then, you know, they picked him up alongside the road and then it's just listen to me. And he, you know, retaliated. And then it's that conflict and, you know, how do we support them, you know, when this child is trying to advocate for their rights?

[ 00:48:16 ] You know, where is that backup support for? Yeah. Cooper? And to your point, Anne, when you were saying we just need to listen to children and young people, particularly those in or in contact with the justice system, I worked on a policy, a youth justice reform policy in New South Wales government and I suggested going into youth justice facilities and talking to children and young people. And for some reason, this was considered as being a really novel idea. And so, anyway, we did that and the outcome of that, I think, was really rich. So we spoke to children and young people. We were like, 'Tell us, what's your story?' Tell us, what do you wish was in place to have prevented you from getting in here?

[ 00:49:06 ] And the insights from that shifted the lens of youth crime. It shifted from being a behavioural issue to being seen as a social policy in justice. So now, people weren't looking at tackling youth crime because it's bad behaviour. They're looking at how do you address intergenerational trauma? How do you address persistent and entrenched poverty? How do you address access, poor access to education and poor access to transport, fundamental human rights that we all take for granted? And I think, as you said, when we listen to young people, young people know the answers. They know what they need. What we need to do as adults, although I'm a mother, I'm under 25, so I'm not sure if I'm an adult just yet, but what decision-makers need to do is to listen meaningfully and let these voices inform policy. Great, great points. OK, I think we have some people around the other side. Lady in blue, maybe?

[ 00:50:10 ] Thank you, panel. Yvette Vignando from Mary's House Services. We're a domestic and family violence service and we work on Cammeraygal land. I'm just interested, there's a fairly recent new national plan to eliminate violence against women and children. And the last plan, as far as I can recall, was the first time there was more of a focus on children. What do you think would be the sort of upstream effect of having a Human Rights Act on the obligation of lawmakers when it comes to taking action on the really national emergency of violence against women and, of course, their children? Great question. I mean, I think that was incredible. Like, in terms of seeing the recognition of children as victims in their own right, I think, you know, that's step one.

[ 00:50:57 ] But then, if you look at a lot of the decisions that have been made to supplement that or to resource that commitment, at least in Queensland, how many domestic and family violence specialist services for children and young people do you think we have? Zero. So I think, you know, that you can recognise the status or, you know, of a child in a domestic and family violence situation, but if you're not prepared to shift the service response so that we actually can see, and recognise, and responsibly respond to their trauma, then literally, we'll end up sitting back and waiting for that generation of children to become adult victims or perpetrators of violence. Yeah. And so there's a real urgency required around investment and responses that are specific to children and young people.

[ 00:51:51 ] Yeah. Anyone else like to comment on that? Can I just add as well, I mean, having a national framework's a great start, but every state and territory still allows for every parent to hit their children every day. So if we want to end violence, let's start in the home, right? Let's make a statement. We're one of the few countries in the world that is not even having that conversation. Why, you know? So I've got four kids. I count the two oldest because they're now 18, but the other two, it's reasonable chastisement. So, you know, there's an issue about how so it doesn't see the connection between practices happening in the homes around violence that then we wait.

[ 00:52:29 ] We wonder why, if we legitimate it as a form of discipline and correction, is it any surprise we start seeing, it's a clear, very complex issue, any surprise that we start seeing these things happening later on as well. So we have to be, again, listening to children. Every child who's spoken to about being disciplined by their parents says it doesn't work and they don't like it, right? So, but that's all pushed to the side because it's a parental right, which is a really significant point to sort of highlight because children's rights and parents' rights are often seen as being oppositional. There's clearly a conflict there, but a child rights-based approach says, we'll respect parents' rights and duties around how they engage with their children, but there are limits to what they can do.

[ 00:53:09 ] And until we control those limits, we create situations where there is harm taking place and it shouldn't be as well. So, you know, if you speak to any health practitioner, they're sort of pulling their hair out and saying, 'Why is this allowed to happen?' But if you put on the agenda for politically, there's complete pushback, which is really frustrating as well. Can I just make a quick comment as well? I think that's a really important question. We've, of course, now seen National Cabinet really take on women and women's safety as a key priority issue. And, you know, well, I think it's, well, it's good, right? Maybe not enough. You might not think enough, but at least, you know, children are not a priority for National Cabinet or children's safety. Not there, right?

[ 00:53:52 ] And so, again, that's a gap, right? From a policy perspective, the governance of the Federation, we're living with the Federation. We, you know, we have to all work together on these things that are national crises. We're doing it for women, but we've got to do it for children as well. And I think so we've gone part the way there. And I often say that if we're serious about ending violence against women, against adult women, we have to get serious about violence in childhood, of any kind, violence experienced in childhood, because we know the trajectory now. The evidence is clear: if you experience harm in childhood. I'll just quickly add on to that as well. That waiting

game is detrimental, but it's also happening right now.

[ 00:54:34 ] Like, with my young people that I work with, you know, I've seen domestic violence relationships as young as 12 years old. You know that domestic violence being perpetrated at such a young age because that's the, you know, might be the normality back home in, you know, within their household or their environment that they've grown up in. So, you know, it's yes, like it is that for some people it's that waiting game but for others it's already happening and it's a reality like right now. So, yeah. Thanks. So there's a persistent hand back there who's trying really hard and has been holding her hand up for a while. So just wait for the mic. But just while we go up there, just that's one of the comments that really stood out in our consultations with kids for our project is that concept of 'we wait.' We wait and we wait and we wait until something bad happens and then we react often in a way that's not helpful, right?

[ 00:55:31 ] That, that is what we seem to be doing. Go ahead. Hello. I'm Susannah Scurry. I'm a midwife and lactation consultant, and I've been for 50 years. I retired on Friday. Oh, congratulations! And I'm here because I can. Now, I'm not working, but I'm here because I'm really interested in prevention. We were just all talking about that intergenerational trauma, violence against parents hitting kids, et cetera. But basically, Australia has got the lowest breastfeeding rates, is well below the Sustainable Development Goal targets. We don't support breastfeeding because breast milk isn't part of the economic equation, and we have got the formula and pharmaceutical companies supporting political parties. And I'm wondering, like I'm sure the human rights thing is going to help, but somehow we need to get the breastfeeding on the agenda because, you know, it's those hormones that protect and promote caring and protective behaviors and it does, you know, like every day, every day I see trauma with parents being separated from their baby because it's in the neonatal nursery, et cetera.

[ 00:56:54 ] Thanks for your comment, Susannah. And I think, you know, certainly, you know, if we take the Convention on the Rights of the Child seriously, it is the obligation of governments to create that environment for families to care for their children well. And I should acknowledge the government's new early years strategy. We certainly will be trying to do that, particularly in those early years of life. Yes. Do you want to wait for the mic? I'm counting down the clock. So if you're going to have a go. Oh, just in the middle there, Georgia. Thank you. Hi. Yes. Children's rights, they're ours. Say who you are and where you're from. So I'm Loretta. And I'm from Justice Action, which is an advocacy organisation. So we're interested in youth justice as well as adult.

[ 00:57:47 ] And I was at an adult, sorry, an Australian youth justice conference, which left me feeling even more concerned about our future. One of the things I'd like to focus on we haven't talked about. We've certainly focused on poverty. We've certainly focused on the emotional problems of not respecting children's rights. But we have another one coming up, which is education. Because with the latest Australian Education Accord, what we're being told is within 10 to 20 years, every kid now is going to need to be between 60% and 80% going to have to be undertaking some kind of tertiary skills training. Now, that means that as a society, we can't afford to let anyone not feel confident as learners and have every opportunity for learning.



[ 00:58:45 ] And as someone who had largely free education to two postgraduate levels, I am appalled by the things that even my kids that are white and privileged - struggle with. So, if we're going to break the poverty cycle, we have to be very concerned that young kids now, in primary school, they have to see themselves as good learners, as capable, because they will severely suffer a double disadvantage. Now, specifically, Justice Action is talking about computers in cells in the youth justice space as well, to maximize those opportunities for education. But I'm calling out to everyone - alarm bells - that this accord is really significant because the kids we're struggling with now, not only will they have a double, triple, multiple disadvantage, they won't get out of poverty if they don't feel they can learn and that they can find their own way through our education systems, but we will lose out too.

[ 00:59:51 ] The altruism - a little selfish bit in there too. So the good point you make about education is a right of children. And someone made the comment to me that we have a universal education system, but it's only universal. It's universal if you're in there. And the kids that are not in there because of either they're struggling to learn or there's behavioural problems and they get suspended, whose job is it to look after them? Who is accountable for those children who dip out of the universal system? So we've got to do some thinking about that. And, of course, we know if kids aren't at school, where are they going to be likely to get into trouble? Panel, who would like to comment on education?

[ 01:00:33 ] Well, I just want to say that quite often it's not because kids are dropping out, it's that they're not being given an alternative or an option. Not fit for purpose. And so when we look at the rates of student disciplinary absences and we talk about youth justice, it is the most reliable indicator of a child's involvement in the youth justice system, is when they've been suspended and excluded from school, and when that happens early. And so I think this is where it's useful in terms of using a rights-based approach, is that the child is the rightsholder. They are owed a quality education. And we need to reposition the system to understand itself as a duty-bearer. And it's just because I think at the moment we're able to discard children when it's inconvenient, you know?

[ 01:01:24 ] And so I think there's a lot to be done there. I know there's always the argument about, you know, but, you know, kids getting real cheeky or they're getting violent in class or there's things happening. And I don't expect that teachers have to become social workers and police and every other thing. And God knows not where body-worn cameras, which have been suggested in Queensland lately. But I think that what's really important to realise in that is that we're not asking them to provide a response to the behaviour, but you also have to understand the behaviour in its context. And what sits behind that is intergenerational experiences of poverty, is being unsafe at home, is struggling in terms of housing stability and homelessness.

[ 01:02:06 ] So they're the types of things that in order for our children to be able to access a quality education, they have to be safe and well in the environment that they live in. So much of that work needs to be done outside of the education system. But I do think that there is a role for the education system. Oh, yeah, for sure. So often when we talk about kids not being at school, we talk about how do we get them to school. But, you know, what kids say is they don't feel they belong there. No, no. It's not fit for purpose for them. And what work is being done to make schools

fit for purpose for the kids who have complex needs? Can I add? Yeah.

[ 01:02:42 ] In New South Wales, can I say, in the Mental Health Inquiry, there was a Bronwyn Taylor online discussion about nurses, clinical nurses going into hospitals. What are they doing? Those clinical nurses, it sounds like, I can't say for sure, but I've been observing what they're describing, is that there's more monitoring. But who's giving the help? Oh, we're waitlisting people and checking whether they're, whether they're actually getting into the GP whose services aren't there, kind of services in the local area. So what is it? More monitoring? More coercion? More selection? Or who's actually helping? Thank you. I'm going to move on. Because we're running out of time. Anjali? Just one reflection on what you said about disciplinary action. I think it's also really important to think about who our institutions actually work for.

[ 01:03:39 ] And I'm talking about one specific incident that has happened yesterday. And that is that some of you may have seen that a student was expelled from the Australian National University over comments made in an ABC interview in relation to the Gaza solidarity encampment at ANU. Now, obviously, there's a lot to be said about the nuance that this person conducted themselves with, about their actual comment, about the merits of their comment. But if you read the ABC article about the expulsion of this person, Beatrice Tucker, who has been named and now will probably sacrifice a lot of her university education and her career because of regurgitating what she has learned in her international relations and politics classes, the ABC article acknowledges that Australian National University was under pressure from the Jewish lobby, from Jewish organisations, from people around the country calling for the expulsion of this one person, Beatrice Tucker, for the comments that she made in an ABC Canberra radio article.

[ 01:04:34 ] And the ANU succumbed to that and expelled this one person who now has had a lot of her career thwarted because of that. This is part of a systemic pattern of who our institutions listen to, who they work for. It's the people with the power, the people who they're not the people who these institutions are meant to serve. Thank you. Look, we are running out of time. I'm going to just, I think, take one more. You did have your hand up for quite a while so I will give it to you. It's a terrible position to be in at this point. I just wanted to acknowledge the educational thing first, that we live in a very colonial system and until the colony is dismantled there is no way for our children to actually engage in positive education experiences.

[ 01:05:26 ] We need applied learning for our mob. We need applied learning mostly for all young people because they are doers. They are kinesthetic learners and they need to be on the ground getting their hands dirty and actually learning through that way. You can attach it to a curriculum, I promise you I know that because I worked in a flexi education for 12 months. Anyway, I'm passionate about that. Sorry, triggered me. Thank you. Sorry, did you say your name and your affiliation? My name is Tulane. I'm from the Fred Hollows Foundation. I work in the social justice and regional engagement team. Thank you. And as a youth worker, for 15 years before stepping into this role, I know that I have to hold the 10 child safety standards to account every day in my practice.

[ 01:06:05 ] But my question to the panel is: Where are we going wrong with the peak bodies that

are meant to look after our children, because they're not held to account any day of the week when they break those 10 child safety standards? So, what's the view on that? Because I think the people who are meant to be leading it and the pinnacle of upholding those absolutely disregard them in their practices. So, I know that I'll lose my working with children if I don't uphold those standards. None of them mobs do. So, I just want to understand from your perspective, what do you think we need to be doing more of to keep them accountable? Thanks for your question. Great question. Yeah, look, I think that accountability has to be applied in both directions.

[ 01:06:48 ] So if there are parties to agreement, whether that's a closing the gap agreement, whether it's because you're bound to the child safety standards, that accountability, accountability needs to apply in all directions. And I think that that's one of the things that we're really trying to explain as a point of difference for children's commissioners is that we have to unapologetically be advocates for children and young people. We don't represent an industry. We don't represent a sector. We have to focus on children and young people. And so I think that some of the, how we've seen an evolution around with some peak bodies is that it is representative of the interests of their members who sometimes have forgotten that it's actually about the best interests of children and young people.

[ 01:07:29 ] So I think that, you know, there's, you know, got to hold some people to account. And I think that that has to just be consistent. And I think that, you know, having a good legal framework beyond just the child safe standards, yeah, might help us a little or a lot. And just on the child safe standards, I mean, it was a disappointment that the Royal Commission didn't recommend that they be mandatory. And so we've seen, you know, the slow progression of requirements under the child safe standards. And the recent Tasmanian Royal Commission basically repeated what the big Royal Commission had done because, you know, these were not implemented. So it just shows you that when there's no teeth, there's no accountability. Actually, there can be slippage.

[ 01:08:16 ] And that counters the idea of, 'no, you don't need legislation.' Actually, if there's no accountability, then we're not going to be able to do anything. So when it comes to children, I think sometimes they slip off the agenda; they fall into the gaps, whatever metaphor you want to use. Anyone else like to comment on that question? I think just, like, speaking from a frontline worker as well, Sis, like, we just have to keep turning up every single day. And, you know, we know in ourselves that we're turning up for mob, that we are there to help our people go forward. And, you know, we might positively impact one child's life. And I think doing that, I think is better than, you know, than not. So, yeah, thank you.

[ 01:08:57 ] And I should just use that moment. Thank you for mentioning that, Celine. I know all of you probably here are doing great work for kids. That's why you're here. So I wanted to acknowledge you as well. There are other questions in the audience that I'm not going to go to. I'm very sorry about that. And I'm just now going to go back to the panel for some final observations. Go in whatever order you'd like to, okay. I think that a big thing that we can take out from today's discussion is how we actually, what the status quo is with looking at children, with how we label them. And I think, you know, if you think of children in a domestic violence context, they're the victim. You know, if they're lucky, they're the survivor.

[ 01:09:39 ] I think of a group of Aboriginal children walking across the road past curfew in Alice Springs, they're criminals, they're thugs, you know. Children with the status quo are people who power should be exercised over, not people with their own inherent power. People who rights should be exercised over, not people with their own inherent rights, not actual stakeholders in the conversation of today. And this is something that I've seen in my work too. When I walk the halls of Parliament, there's, you know, you can tell it wasn't built for young people. It's not a place that young people are meant to be in. And, you know, even though I have just finished my teens, even though I have a bracelet on my hand that says 'Slay', like, I'm still, I still think that, you know, I think that young people as, you know, as much time as we may spend on TikTok deserve those rights and deserve those voices in the halls of Parliament.

[ 01:10:31 ] Thanks. I think what I'd like to say is: young people are not just tomorrow's future leaders, they are today's catalysts of change; and they must be listened to and respected because of that. Young people, as Ansh has just said, are stakeholders in all policies that impact them. What decision-makers and us as a society as a whole need to do is to start valuing the expertise that comes with lived experience. Thank you. I think along the same sentiment as you guys, but for myself, I want the future to be full of proud Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders. And there are leaders, like you said, right now, in communities that just need the support - they need to recognize their rights, to know their rights. I think that's empowerment within itself.

[ 01:11:24 ] So once we're able to empower in that way, you know, you'll see a lot more mobs stepping up and feeling that support. Yeah. Yeah, true. And exhale. And I think it's just that message is that the UNCRC isn't like, you know, it's not a figment of our imagination; it's not this thing that's so far away that can have no practical impact in the lives, you know, in our daily lives. And so, you know, while we wait or whatever it is that we need to do, I think that there are ways that we can be really proactive in progressing a child rights agenda in our, you know, personal and professional practice, within our organisations. I think there's definitely a capability and there's a legitimacy to doing that. You know, child rights policy is good policy.

[ 01:12:11 ] Yeah. Totally. Echo everything that's been said, I suppose as an adult who researches and works in this space, and a question for me and for all of us is, what are we doing today? If we do better tomorrow, we think about a child as a rights holder. What will that look like? And when I'm asking that question myself, I'm reflecting on one of my colleagues, Michelle Telfer, who works in Melbourne in the Gender Affirmation Clinic and she came and gave a class to my students and it's a complex space, right? And so she asked the class, what's the first thing you do when a child presents in my clinic? And they all sort of sat there and she said, listen, listen, listen.

[ 01:12:51 ] And I think that sort of echoes what our amazing young people said tonight as well, that we have to start listening properly and effectively to young people and what their insights might be. I think we all then benefit as well. So, lots for us to learn, including me as a dad. And if my kids were here, they'd say 'listen more', but I think that's core to it as well. Well, there's nothing for me to add really. I mean, especially that summary of listen, listen', because I think we've really been privileged today. I've been very privileged and I hope you feel so too, to hear from people

who have some really valuable things to say about the importance of paying attention to the human rights of children.

[ 01:13:31 ] But also that there are significant challenges that we face, that children are not listened to. I've been told myself many times by members of parliament that there's no votes in children. So, you know, like if we just, I think all of us have to work together and work a lot harder at amplifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child to make it real, to show how it is a compass that can guide us to make better decisions, and hold us as adults in the community accountable as the duty bearers when children don't have that voice that they need. It's given me great comfort to see so many people come today, as I said at the outset. Did you take a photo you wanted? Someone did take a photo. Thank you.

[ 01:14:17 ] And, you know, but I do think we need to be louder. I'd like to just finish with that, that it's not, don't think the Human Rights Commission is going to do it or someone else is going to do it. It has to be every single one of us, every single one of us, with our neighbours and with our local members of parliament. I am confident that if we are loud enough about and we speak with one voice for children, that we will get there in terms of progressive improvements for the human rights of children. Thank you very much. Please thank the panel. Well done. Thank you.