



# Ipswich Children's Voices

## Event Evaluation

### Summary

Ipswich Children's Voices, a livestreamed child-led discussion panel held on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2020, formed part of Ipswich City Council's official launch of its *Children, Young People and Families Policy*. The event was designed and delivered in partnership with Mission Australia, as a joint celebration of council's new policy and their *Children's Voice Project* being rolled out across the Ipswich to Inala region.

This report is a snapshot summary of the *Ipswich Children's Voices* event in terms of partnership inputs, event outputs and overall outcomes.

The event was held to coincide with *National Children's Week*. Planning for the event also took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the aim of being as flexible as possible to changing social restrictions and COVID-safe event arrangements.

As such, the event took the form of a physically-distanced discussion panel hosted at council's Studio188 entertainment venue, and livestreamed using council's GoTo Webinar platform.

Panel discussions were led by four primary school-age children from Goodna State School, Leichhardt State School, Redbank Plains State School and Riverview State School. These great young minds posed important questions to a panel made up of local community, council and service representatives about how we can collectively work to make Ipswich a more connected, safe, inclusive and responsive community.

### Ipswich Children's Voices: what did they say?

Ipswich City Council and Mission Australia have been listening to children's voices through a number of initiatives in 2019. These voices introduced Monday's event and highlighted that Ipswich children value:

- friendship, family, inclusion and kindness
- opportunities to learn and excel
- access to a range of sport and creative programs and activities across the city
- open spaces, parks and play equipment to suit different age groups
- a safe and healthy city – more time for outdoors, a healthy environment, good nutrition and exercise, no smoking
- children need to be heard and help the world change.

The event's discussion panel component invited four primary-school aged children to lead a Q&A session around how we collectively create better communities for children. This session highlighted the importance of:

- connection and social interaction for children and local communities
- family and support networks
- knowing where to get help in their community, which has been even more important since the pandemic
- listening to children's needs from within local communities
- feeling safe in their community and having safe places to go
- celebrating different cultural identities
- helping all children be included in local activities and opportunities
- having equal opportunity to thrive at school, to be supported, happy and well.



### **Ipswich Children's Voices: what did we hear?**

For the event's six panellists – made up of local community, council and service representatives – each question posed by local children was acknowledged as well-considered, comprehensive and important. Panellists drew on a combination of their personal and professional experience in Ipswich in their responses.

They highlighted the following important points.

#### **In order to connect community:**

- know who makes up the community, their cultural backgrounds, common interests
- reach out, talk and listen
- strengthen existing local networks
- build on local projects where children and families can come together
- value the contribution that children that make to each community
- learn how to build relationships – learn about different people and how to support them.

#### **To make a safe community for children:**

- provide a wide range of programs and activities for children – sports, recreation, creative endeavours
- create opportunities for children to come together, interact, share interests, support each other and feel safe
- recognise it is a child's right to be safe and well and take collective responsibility
- help children to be seen and heard, help them to feel safe and part of the community
- support parents and communities to be the best they can be in supporting children to thrive.

### **To support cultural connection, and to include and celebrate everyone:**

- recognise diversity is a strength to be celebrated and encourage inclusiveness across all aspects of our lives and work
- just like balloons we come in all different shapes and sizes – every child can direct their balloon to reach its greatest height, together with all other balloons
- children are the enablers of change through their conversations and growth
- Ipswich Youth Advisory Council has a strong focus on fostering inclusion and role modelling for younger generations.

### **To help children to thrive and have a perfect day every day:**

- lay the foundations before children start school – provide opportunities for them to interact, communicate, have fun and learn from birth
- every child deserves a champion – start the day with positive recognition of every child
- create daily structure for children and opportunities for learning
- work to enable each child's strong sense of self – each child is powerful beyond measure
- build on a child's unique strengths and the strengths within their family setting
- create a sense of belonging – make spaces for cultural and community belonging
- challenge ourselves to always do better in creating communities for children
- approach each day by focusing on the important things that have to be achieved and working through these
- a lesson for all of us is to start each day with an open mind, being willing to learn, acknowledge and be mindful of everyone around you.





## Measuring event outcomes

Measuring the outcome of the Ipswich Children's Voices event offers additional benefits and insights, beyond measuring the event's investment input and engagement output. Outcome measurement helps evaluate the event's effectiveness and identify opportunities for improvement.

In the days following the *Ipswich Children's Voices* event, Ipswich City Council and Mission Australia considered the event's outcome in the context of the event's original objective and stakeholder feedback received.

## Linking outcomes to objectives

One objective of the *Ipswich Children's Voices* event was to collectively celebrate the launch of Ipswich City Council's new policy for *Children, Young People and Families*, and Mission Australia's *Children's Voice Project*.

- ✓ Collaborative launch event
- ✓ Demonstrating shared commitment
- ✓ Hearing children's voices
- ✓ Enabling their views
- ✓ Shaping future work

However, the event's broader objective was to demonstrate each partner organisations' and the Ipswich community's shared commitment to engage with Ipswich children on matters that affect them and that are important to them. The event achieved this by encouraging children themselves to design questions that lead panel conversations about community attributes most important to them. This approach and the panel conversations that took place are well aligned council's policy principles of participation, best interests, health and wellbeing, inclusion, rights and responsiveness.

The event took place during an important time for Ipswich City Council as it shapes its five-year Corporate Plan, strategic priorities and subsequent annual plans. The voices of Ipswich children shared during the event are also providing direct input to next stages of Mission Australia's Children's Voice Project.

## Event inputs and outputs

An overall budget of \$10,000 was allocated to launch council's new policy for Children Young People and Families. This launch included the *Ipswich Children's Voices* event on Monday 26<sup>th</sup> October, and the *Flick the 'swich* youth engagement series on Friday 30<sup>th</sup> October.

For Ipswich Children's Voices, council budget was allocated to cover venue hire, audio visual equipment hire, technical staff and catering. Ipswich City Council also worked on local media and social media promotions ahead of the event and contributed 160 copies of its Best Friends Forever book series to school thank-you packs.

Mission Australia's Communities for Children Program and the roll out of the Children's Voice Project brought well-established relationships with participating schools and students to the Ipswich Children's Voices Event. The Children's Voice Project also enabled broader contributions from children in the form of creative artworks illustrating their views of what makes a strong community (showcased on Shape Your Ipswich).

Mission Australia covered the event's facilitation component and managed the consent process for children participating the event online and in person. Mission Australia also contributed to a national media campaign, and their project budget contributed a volume of merchandise used for thank-you packs for participating schools.





The Ipswich Children's Voices event involved:

- a physically-distanced discussion panel of six panellists representing community, council and service providers
- four local primary school-aged students who directed their own questions to the panel about strengthening community
- virtual conferencing with four participating schools supporting their peers based in Studio 188
- a livestream audience of 67 viewers
- 50 additional views since uploading the recording council's YouTube channel.

### **Evaluating event elements**

Ipswich City Council and Mission Australia have evaluated the effectiveness of the event's format and program, while noting there were certain limitations on how a child-centred engagement event could be planned and delivered during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Event program and format**

The event evaluation process confirmed the program was fit for its purpose, particularly in the context of COVID-19 and 1.5 hour time allocation.

Future event considerations included the potential to extend the panel discussion and increase the participation of children in the discussion, rather than hosting a Q&A event.

As a council-owned software package, GoTo Webinar was selected as the most suitable platform to livestream *Ipswich Children's Voices* event. It offered the greatest functionality to integrate pre-recorded Audio Visual footage, and loop in a small number of Virtual Conferencing Groups, while also engaging a broader online audience.

Some technical connection difficulties were encountered in the lead up to the event, due to the different IT network firewalls in place for different users. Of note, the IT network

firewalls in place across the Queensland Department of Education resulted in the GoTo Webinar domain being blocked, which impacted early attempts by participating schools to join as a virtual conference group.

The issue was resolved with increased and concerted effort from Ipswich City Council working with participating schools and their respective ICT teams. This required more time to be allocated to additional webinar trial runs. While resolved, the issue highlights broader implications should Ipswich City Council seek to use the GoTo Webinar to engage with Department of Education stakeholders or students in the future.

### **Internal project management**

This event involved intensive up-front planning to deliver all physical and virtual components successfully.

Project team feedback on internal project management emphasised the value of the structured approach and weekly partner interactions.

Liaison with all event participants in the lead up to the event was at times resource intensive and there were some challenges aligning this work to the time each school had available. Some of these issues were addressed by assigning key contacts to different communication activities.

### **Digital engagement**

Ipswich City Council's digital engagement platform, Shape Your Ipswich was used as effective and highly valued central point of all event information. From early October, the event page featured photos and quotes from all panellists, and showcased the logos and mottos of all four participating schools. The page was updated to feature an online gallery of children's artwork from 21 October 2020.







Visitor statistics since event page creation:

- 1049 page views made by a total of 385 individual visitors
- 164 page views during September and 876 views during October
- the peak number of views recorded on 22 October (297 views), coinciding with promotions of the children's art gallery

### Media and marketing

Ipswich City Council and Mission Australia shared responsibilities for event marketing and media. Ipswich City Council focused on direct promotions through community networks, targeted social media promotion, and local media engagement.

Mission Australia focused on event promotion through local networks and national media channels. Mission Australia's national event profiling resulted in a substantial boost in event registrations.

The post-event evaluation process by each partner organisation agreed to explore joint media opportunities earlier in the event planning process in future.

### Audience and participant feedback

Ipswich Children's Voices event reached an audience of:

- Approximately 120 primary school-aged children from Ipswich through virtual conference links with class groups
- 97 online event registrations, resulting in 67 individual viewers of the livestream.

While the event's online audience was largely made up local community members and local organisations, the event also had viewers join from Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria, NSW, and from across Queensland.

26 viewers completed a post-event feedback survey (representing a 39% response rate). Their positive feedback is reflected in the

comments received. Other constructive feedback during the event noted:

- sound was crackly at start and during pre-recorded footage. Sound issues were largely resolved within 5-10 minutes of the event starting, and subsequent improvements have been made to the sound of the post-event recording available on Shape Your Ipswich
- subtitles would have helped with the children interview clips.

When asked if the event improved audience understanding of the views of Ipswich children:

- 58% felt a little better informed, while 38% felt very well informed
- 96% fully committed to valuing the voices of children and young people in their work in the community
- 88% expressed interest in participating in future events like this, 13% were unsure.



Jake Zempf, Theodore Courtney, Letesha Pearce and Aaliyah Anderson with Ipswich City Council Mayor Teresa Harding and Jenny Chaves, Mission Australia

***"A great and important discussion-thanks everyone!"***

***"An important topic, think it would be worthwhile if possible to compile a summary showreel for the website for others to see. Thank you for bringing this together."***

***"Excellent, top shelf."***



***"Great example of how this type of event could happen. Would love to see a less formal event in this format, with the kids answering the same questions."***

***"It was great to hear directly from the children and to give them the opportunity to be able to voice their questions."***

***"I would have liked the adults to have raised the questions and for the children to have provided the answer. I think this would have given real insight into what is important to them, rather than hearing how adults address or would address the topics raised by the kids."***

***"It will be good to see what is next and some solid plans. It was lovely to hear all these words, but now for action! There is a lot of disadvantage in this area, and I think we can and need to do much work! It is exciting to hear what things are already happening with community groups, NGOs, and Education! :)"***

***"The beginning was too centred on adults. I would have liked to have seen children and young people centred more, such as through moderation, introduction and acknowledging country. But a great start, well done."***

***"This was a fantastic event and listening to the children is one thing we need to do more of."***

***"This was a fantastic way to run a virtual event, and to ensure that children's voices were genuinely part of this level of discussions. The event was well organized, and this was proven by how well it has come together on the actual day. Well done Ipswich CC and Mission Australia!"***

***"This was invaluable, more events to include children and young people need to happen"***

***"Thought the MC Jenny was extremely engaging - well done, this was a great event"***

***"Thank you so much for putting this online event together. I really enjoyed listening to the children express themselves and their questions really got me thinking."***

***"What a fantastic session, well done to all the students for posing such thoughtful questions, and to the panellists for their answers!"***

***"Thank you to all involved, the future is bright for the young people of Ipswich and in good hands."***

#### **What's next?**

A community feedback loop has been established via council's Shape Your Ipswich platform featuring post-event recordings and related media links.

This event evaluation report will be submitted to Ipswich City Council and provided to Mission Australia as facilitating partner.

Ipswich City Council is currently exploring a range of opportunities to continue conversations with children and young people and meeting their needs. This work will be reported separately following completion of Council's 5-year Corporate Plan in early 2021.

Mission Australia will also progress the next stage of their Children's Voice project and seek to involve children in local collective action groups across Ipswich and Inala region.

Ipswich City Council and Mission Australia will continue to work closely to listen and make Ipswich children's voices heard.