

## Listening to children's voices

'Listening to children's voices' is a familiar term and concept. But what does that mean and how exactly do we hear, gather, and capture children's voices? Most importantly, how can we do so authentically.

Children are experts in their own lives. Listening to them can challenge assumptions, provide insights into their capabilities, and raise expectations. Children feel they matter. Their confidence grows when their ideas, feelings, and abilities are treated with respect.

At Communities for Children, a national program funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services and facilitated in South Australia by AnglicareSA in two sites, Playford in the north, and Onkaparinga, south of Adelaide, gathering children's voices is at the heart of what we do.

One of the many ways we have been hearing children's voices is through the 'What's Important to Me?' Children's Art and Voices Project which has been running since 2013 in a statewide collaboration between six Communities for Children sites in South Australia.

While there are many ways in which we can capture children's voices, through experience, we have learned that children seem to prefer and are more easily able to express themselves through drawing rather than verbal questioning.

The project invites children 14 years and under to express and share what is important, or what matters most to them through a drawing or painting. Children also write, in their own words, an accompanying description providing them with a voice, helping us to better understand their interests, aspirations, and what they need to thrive from their perspective.

The artwork is displayed at a community exhibition and finally, showcased in a statewide calendar in a celebration of children, their creativity, and importantly, their voices.

As part of a Communities for Children Onkaparinga presentation at the 2023 Anglicare Australia Conference we spoke with young people involved in the project about their art and how important it is to be heard.



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