

People's Policy on Child Wellbeing

Methodology Overview

December 2017



What needs to happen to increase the number of children living safely at home and avoid the need for them to be removed from their parents and family? What different policies and or initiatives should governments implement? What can communities and individuals do?

This was the question considered by a Panel of 33 South Australians – the People’s Panel – that were recruited to develop policy on this critical issue for the consideration and potential adoption of political parties in the lead up to the South Australian election in March 2018.

A powerful partnership

The methodology for the Panel’s deliberation was created by democracyCo and co-designed with international think-tanks and experts in the field, with input from local stakeholders with an interest in democratic processes, including Business SA, the Conservation Council, SACOSS, Community Centres SA and SA Unions.

These stakeholders considered a range of topics for the People’s Panel to deliberate on and the issue of child protection was identified as a priority for our State. A group of six partners was convened with interest and experience in the topic to guide the process - Uniting Communities, SACOSS, The Smith Family, The Wyatt Trust, Community Centres SA and Aboriginal Family Support Services. The Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia also joined as a partner in late October. Each of these partners has contributed funding to the panel. democracyCo was the primary funder of this process – as a way of modelling citizen-led policy making.

This issue matters

South Australians want South Australia to be the best place for our children, where they can live safely and happily in their own homes and communities. We need to do more to support families and communities to better care for and protect children and young people because what we are doing now isn’t working:

- almost 3,500 children in our State live away from their family in ‘out of home care’ and this number has been steadily rising each year.
- 1 in 4 children are the subject of at least one notification of child abuse or neglect by the age of 10. This is much higher in some communities and sadly for Aboriginal children the figure is even more alarming.

The People’s Policy for Children’s Well-being is a world first for democracy, with everyday community members coming together in a ‘People’s Panel’ to hear evidence, deliberate and develop robust public policy on ‘what needs to happen to avoid the need for children to be removed from their families’.

Who are the People's Panel?

The opportunity to join the People's Panel was promoted to all South Australians through partner networks, social media, the Messenger Press and 891 Radio. Around 140 people registered to be included, and through a 'random stratification' process a Panel of 33 people was selected which reflected the overall demographics of South Australia. (see attached).

For a variety of personal reasons a few of the group left the process at various points in the process resulting in 28 working as part of the panel to the end.

What evidence did they consider?

Panel members read and heard extensive evidence to understand this complex problem and potential solutions. They tapped into their own knowledge, and that of other panellists, as well as personal experiences and academic research about the topic. They reviewed a range of South Australian, National, and International research recommended by internationally renowned academics and the partner organisations.

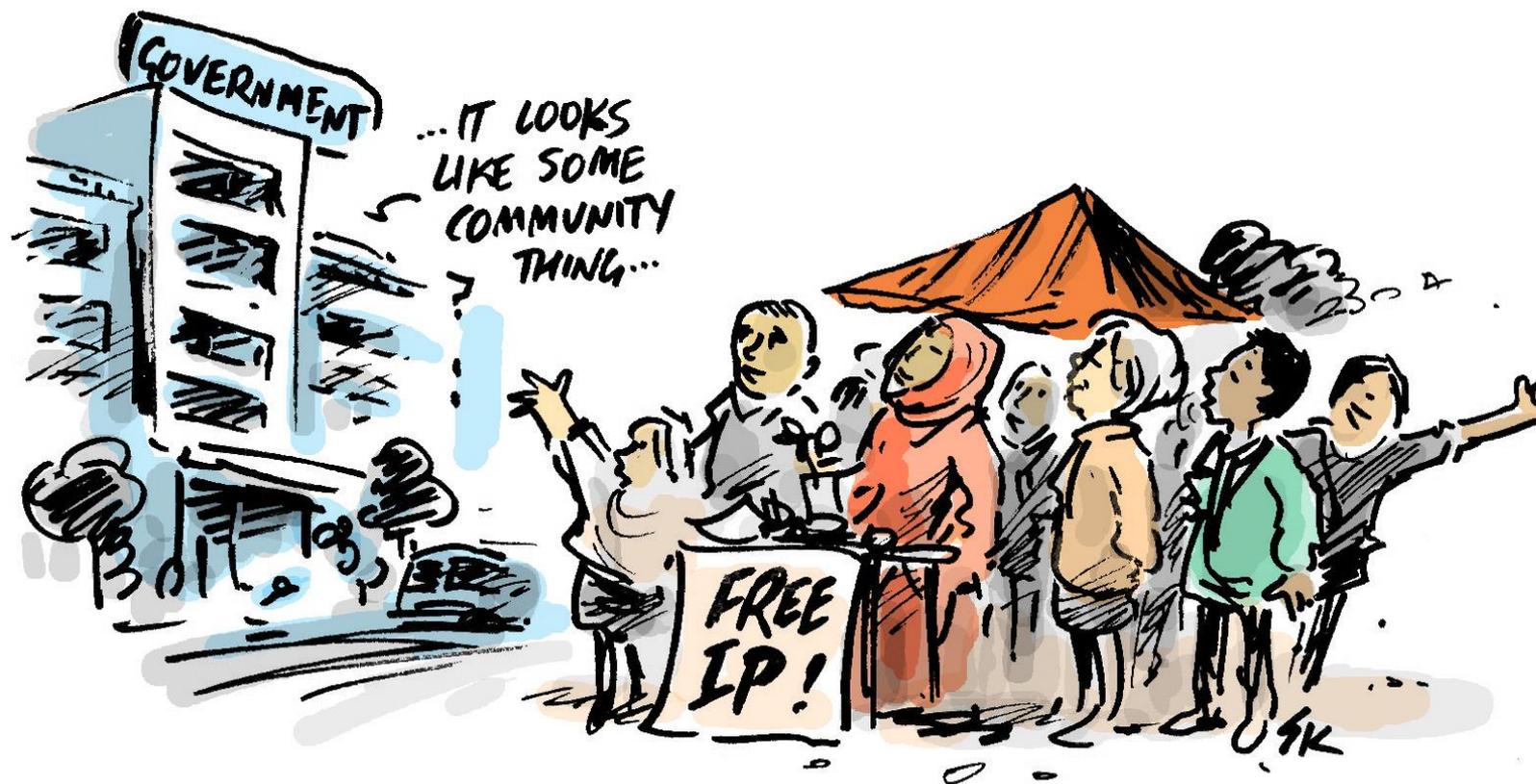
Panellists heard from around 30 experts in a variety of ways – through Panel presentations, small group conversations and a session where they heard a range of perspectives in a round of short conversations over an afternoon. This process provided maximum exposure to a range of experts in a short period of time, and allowed Panellists to build their knowledge and challenge the experts and their own knowledge and assumptions.

Expert presenters included:

- the Commissioner for Children and Young People
- the Guardian for Children and Young People
- the Chief Executive of the Department for Child Protection
- an academic from the University of Adelaide Better Start consortium
- The Australian Centre for Social Innovation
- Relationships Australia
- Child and Family Health Services
- Mid Murray Family Connections
- Together in the South
- the Smith Family
- Midway Road Community House
- Grandparents for Grandchildren
- Lutheran Community Care
- Uniting Care Wesley Country and Centacare.

Delegations of Panellists also met with:

- the Aboriginal Community Leadership Reference Group
- senior Department for Education and Child Development staff
- people who had been removed from their families as children
- an expert on 'Information Sharing Guidelines' and
- The Migrant Resource Centre.



Developing Policy through facilitated deliberation & public input

Panel members committed to a process of 4 full days of deliberation over a 3-month period - it is estimated the panel has collectively contributed over 1500 hours to this process.

The process adopted a citizen-led facilitated approach where panel members influenced the way in which they spent their time together. This resulted in them creating a 'masterplan' for their policy document, working in small writing and conversational groups, at times having consensus conversations culminating in them convening a small writing group to refine the final policy

document. Scaffolding the in-person sessions was an online portal where the panel shared their individual stories, experiences and ideas and worked to refine their thinking.

This portal had over 60 message threads, with each generating deep and challenging conversation between panel members that endured across their 3-month commitment.

In contrast to much public policy development, their deliberations were open to the public – and eighteen people took up the opportunity to see the Panel in action as observers.

The panel were supported by a group of volunteers, recruited and managed by democracyCo, who shared their expertise and helped the Panel to deliberate productively. The panel was also supported by volunteer counsellors, who were available to panel members as they heard challenging and tragic stories of children and families.

Before finalising the policy, the panel developed a survey to test their thinking with the broader community which they shared through their own networks, via social media and through partner networks. The Panel received 148 responses to this public consultation. During this time, democracyCo also shared the panel's draft thinking at a conference of 48 South Australian community centres, involving over 250 people.

The results of the survey and this workshop were considered by the Panel when they finalised their Policy document on the 18th of November 2017.

All initiatives within the policy received 80% or more support from the Panellists on that last day.

A sub group of the Panel then worked to 'word smith' and edit the document before final distribution for approval back to the Panel.

The Policy

The policy has a clear focus on community-led action to prevent child abuse and neglect, and identifies policy initiatives for consideration by the wider public, including;

1. **Community awareness and education** to grow understanding of what a Child Friendly South Australia looks like, including empowering notifiers to play a bigger role in preventative approaches
2. **A focus on supporting children to thrive in their first 1000 days**
3. **Greater coordination of services and support for children and families**
4. **New opportunities for community based peer to peer supports for families**
5. **Exploring a number of additional specific initiatives to protect Aboriginal children**

The policy has universal relevance, as well as targeted initiatives to support those children and families who are most at risk.

Finalising the policy for policy makers

The Policy will be provided to six South Australian political parties (Labor, Liberal, SA Best, Dignity, Greens, Australian Conservatives) for their consideration and adoption during December 17/ early 2018.

Panel members are also meeting with their local members of Parliament across 20 different electorates.

The process is being externally evaluated by the Jefferson Center in the US and the learnings from this evaluation will be published on the democracyCo website in 2018.

Why a People's Panel?

We want to create a policy that focuses on creating long-term sustainable solutions to complex problems, that empowers the community, connects the diverse interests of individuals and organisations, and gives the government real, evidence-based options to work with.

And we'll achieve this by turning the system inside out.

Instead of politicians setting the policy agenda – we want the public to work in close collaboration and partnership with key stakeholders and experts to set the agenda.

Instead of public servants holding the data, the expert advice and facts – we want them shared with the public and for the public to debate the evidence and form their own conclusions.

It's policy by the people, for the people, provided to the political parties.

The result – more trusted evidence based policy that represents common sense and intelligent solutions to our most complex issues.

Reference List

The following documents were used by the Panel to build their understanding of the issues and potential solutions;

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Summary)
- Child Protection in South Australia, Pilkington R, Grant J, Chittleborough C, Gialamas A, Montgomerie A, Lynch J, 2017, Better Start Child Health and Development Research Group
- Report on Government Services 2016, Chapter 16, Child protection services
- Prevention of child abuse and neglect, NAPCAN, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Commonwealth of Australia, 2017
- Submission to SA Royal Commission, Child Protection Systems, Office of the Guardian for Children and Young People, January 2015

- Investing in New Zealand's Children and their Families, Expert Panel Final Report, 2016
- Response to Investing in New Zealand's Children and their families, Office of the Minister for Social Development, New Zealand Government, 2016
- The Family Matters Roadmap, SNAICC – National Voice for our Children, 2015
- Putting children first: Delivering our vision for excellent children's social care, UK Department for Education, 2016
- Their Futures Matter: A new approach, reform directions from the Independent Review of Out of Home Care in New South Wales, NSW Government, 2016
- Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study: Outcomes of Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care in NSW, Wave 1 Baseline Statistical Report, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Department of Family and Community Services, 2015
- Improving the effectiveness of the child protection system – overview, Molloy D, Barton S, Brims L, Early Intervention Foundation, UK, June 2017
- Bringing Them Home 20 years on: an action plan for healing, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation, 2017
- Stronger communities, safer children, Findings from recent Australian research on the importance of the community in keeping children safe, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2016