Queensland
Family & Child
Commission

Inquiry into social isolation and loneliness in Queensland

Submission

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Queensland
Government

Contents

The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians across the lands, seas and skies on which we walk, live and work.

We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as two unique peoples, with their own rich and distinct cultures, strengths and knowledge. We celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures across Queensland and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

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Background

The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) is pleased to provide a submission to the Community Support and Services Committee (the Committee) Inquiry into social isolation and loneliness in Queensland (the Inquiry).

The QFCC seeks to give practical effect to the rights of children and young people in Queensland through advocacy, awareness and accountability. Under the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014*, the QFCC is responsible for promoting the safety, wellbeing and best interests of children and young people.[1]

It is important to understand how social isolation and loneliness impact different groups in the community, and how social policy can help to mitigate these impacts. This submission will respond to the terms of reference that align with the QFCC's legislative responsibilities, with a particular focus on children's rights.

As with adults, there is no single common cause for children's loneliness. Children's loneliness can be significant and can be symptomatic of more complex underlying mental health issues. Potential diversion and treatments for children might be similar to those for adults, but children may require additional support to access services. The Committee should consider the unique experiences and needs of socially isolated and lonely children when preparing its report.

Children and young people are an invaluable source of information on the issues that impact them. Article 12 of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* holds that children have the right to have a say when adults are making decisions that affect them.[2] The QFCC includes views of children and young people who responded to the 2020 Growing up in Queensland survey in this submission. The QFCC also encourages the Committee to actively seek and consider the views and experiences of children and young people in all elements of its Inquiry.

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[1] *Family and Child Commission Act 2014* (Qld), s.4.

[2] United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 1989, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, accessed 11 August 2021, https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx.

Summary

- Children's experiences of social isolation and loneliness can be different to that of adults.

- Children may face additional challenges with respect to social isolation or coping with feelings of loneliness.

- Children and young people report social isolation and loneliness as an issue that is important to them.

- The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on children's experiences of social isolation and loneliness.

- Social isolation, loneliness and exclusion can lead to antisocial behaviours.

- Online activity, including social media, creates opportunities and also further challenges for children and young people managing social isolation and loneliness.

- Social policy and service delivery can support children's participation in community and the activities they enjoy, reducing their experiences of social isolation and loneliness.

Children's experiences of social isolation and loneliness

Loneliness is widely recognised as a transient mood that most people will experience at some point in their lives. When loneliness is ongoing or recurrent, it can have a serious impact on an individual's wellbeing and their ability to participate in society. Social isolation, loneliness and associated issues have been linked to poor physical and mental health for individuals,[3] and negative impacts for the community as a whole.

Loneliness in childhood is characterised by children's 'perceived dissatisfaction with aspects of their social relationships', which can include the quality of relationships with family, as well as peers.[4] While children's perception of social relationships is typically contingent on their experiences of social inclusion and peer connectedness, the emphasis on the association between social interaction and loneliness varies between groups.[5]

There are many reasons to consider the issue of loneliness in children.[6] Research establishes a link between childhood loneliness and symptoms of depression in adolescence.[7] Children's loneliness has also been linked to lower physical activity, higher rates of cigarette smoking, unsafe weight loss practices, and increased tension and anxiety.[8]

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[3] Holt-Lunstad, J., Robles, T., and Sbarra, D. 2017, *Advancing social connection as a public health priority in the United States* in American Psychologist, 72(6), pp. 517–530. https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000103

[4] Qualter, P., Brown, S., Munn, P. and Rotenberg, K. 2010, *Childhood loneliness as a predictor of adolescent depressive symptoms: an 8-year longitudinal study,* European child and adolescent psychiatry, 2010, Vol.19 (6), pp.493-501

[5] Bauminger, N., Shulman, C., and Agam, G. 2003, *Peer Interaction and Loneliness in High-Functioning Children with Autism* in Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders 33.5 Pp 489-507. Web.; Smit, S., Mikami, A. and Normand, S. 2020 *Correlates of Loneliness in Children with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder: Comorbidities and Peer Problems* in Child Psychiatry and Human Development 51.3 pp. 478-89

[6] Tillinghast, E. 2017, *Why addressing loneliness in children can prevent a lifetime of loneliness in adults* in The Conversation, https://theconversation.com/why-addressing-loneliness-in-children-can-prevent-a-lifetime-of-loneliness-in-adults-76248, accessed 11 August 2021.

[7] Qualter, P., Brown, S., Munn, P. and Rotenberg, K. 2010, *Childhood loneliness as a predictor of adolescent depressive symptoms: an 8-year longitudinal study,* European child and adolescent psychiatry, 2010, Vol.19 (6), pp.493-501

[8] Qualter, P. 2003, *Loneliness in children and adolescents: what do schools and teachers need to know and how can they help?* Pastoral p. 13 Pastoral Care in Education, 21:2, pp. 10-18

Some research suggests children and young people report feeing lonely more often than their older, adult counterparts. England's Office for National Statistics *Community Life Survey* found respondents aged 16 to 24 years were the most likely to report feeling lonely 'often' or 'always' (nine per cent) and the least likely to report they 'never' felt lonely (11 per cent).[9]

A separate study conducted by the English Office for National Statistics found children aged 10 to 15 years were again more likely to report feeling lonely. The study found 11.3 per cent of children aged 10 to 15 years reported they 'often' felt lonely, with younger children (10-12 years of age) more likely to say they were often lonely than older children (14 per cent compared with 8.6 percent for those aged 13-15 years).[10]

The report identifies periods of education transition and increasing independence as primary reasons for children to experience loneliness.[11] Other circumstances and events identified as influencing feelings of loneliness included loss of significant relationships, mental health challenges, living with severe, long-term illness or disability and the experience of being bullied.[12] Racial discrimination has also been linked to loneliness among Australian school children,[13] while COVID-19 emerges as a growing cause of concern[14].

Family, especially parents, can be a positive influence on children's psychological well-being and mitigate the effects of peer related stress for children.[15] The United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* recognises family as the 'natural environment for the growth and well-being of … children'[16] and affords children the right to family connectedness.[17] In supporting families to fully assume their responsibilities within the community, we can protect children's right to relationships with their family,[18] promote social connectedness and mitigate the impacts of loneliness for children.

What children have told us about social isolation and loneliness

In the QFCC's report, *Voices of hope: Growing up in Queensland 2020*, children and young people identified social isolation and loneliness as important issues for young people.[19] For this submission, the QFCC is able to provide information in addition to the findings represented in the report.

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[9] Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport 9united Kingdom) *Community Life Survey report 2018-19* p. 7 accessed 29 July 2021 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/820610/Community_Life_Survey_2018-19_report.pdf

[10] Office for National Statistics (United Kingdom) 2018, *Children's and young people's experiences of loneliness: 2018* accessed 29 July 2021 https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/childrensandyoungpeoplesexperiencesofloneliness/2018

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Priest, N., Perry, R., Ferdinand, A., Kelaher, M. and Paradies, Y. 2017, *Effects over time of self-reported direct and vicarious racial discrimination on depressive symptoms and loneliness among Australian school students* in BMC Psychiatry vol 17, Pp. 50-62

[14] Commission for Children and Young People (Vic) 2021, *Checking in with children and young people youth survey - June 2021* accessed August 10 2021, https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/assets/COVID-Engagement/CCYP-Youth-Survey-Snapshot-June-21.pdf; Kids Helpline 2021, *Insights Report 2020* accessed 10 August 2020 https://www.yourtown.com.au/sites/default/files/document/Kids-Helpline-Insights-2020-Report-Final.pdf

[15] Kotchick, B., et al 2020, *Peer Victimization and Depressive Symptoms in Early Adolescents: The Protective Role of Perceived Supportive Parenting* p.1351, Journal of Child and Family Studies, vol. 29, no. 5, 2020, pp. 1350–1362.

[16] United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* preamble accessed 10 August 2021, https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx

[17] Ibid. Art. 9

[18] Ibid. preamble

[19] Queensland Family and Child Commission 2021, *Voices of hope: Growing up in Queensland 2020*, https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/keeping-kids-more-safe/listening-children-young-people/growing-queensland, accessed 10 August 2021.

When respondents were prompted with *'I think the most important issue/s for young people today is/are:'* relevant responses included:

- at the moment social isolation is taking a toll on our youths mental health as some cannot stand to be alone with themselves

- cyberbullying, loneliness and uncertainty about the future

- Loneliness and social anxiety

- feeling lonely and very stressed

- loneliness or domestic abuse

- connection and loneliness, drugs, alcohol and violence

- loneliness and mental illness

- loneliness and not being able to connect with young people

- loneliness / trouble socialising

- loneliness

- social problems including loneliness and depression

- feeling lonely

- mental health support for youth with anxiety, we do not have enough support, it feels very lonely

- they are always lonely and start talking about suicide

- isolation cause you feel alone

- social isolation.

In 2020, at the onset of the pandemic, the Australian Medical Association (AMA) released a statement indicating a likely increase 'in youth suicide and a surge in demand for specialist mental health services as the full and lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is experienced across the community.'[20] The statement called for long-term modelling and investment in mental health to guide critical decision making in social, economic, and health policy to help Australia transition out of the pandemic.

While we are yet to see the full depth of this disruption, the Growing up in Queensland survey in 2020 indicates restrictions put in place to reduce community movement and transmission of the COVID-19 exacerbated experiences of isolation and feelings of loneliness for some. When asked to respond to *'Things that might stop me from achieving my goals'* children and young people's survey responses included:

- isolation and quarantine, especially coronavirus

- isolation, as it is decreasing my previously extremely high motivation and causing my mental health a lot of strain

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[20] Tony Brown et al., *Joint Statement – COVID -19 Impact Likely to Lead to Increased Rates of Suicide and Mental Illness*, AMA 7 May 2021, accessed 09 August 2021 https://www.ama.com.au/media/joint-statement-covid-19-impact-likely-lead-increased-rates-suicide-and-mental-illness

- corona virus. Not having a good network of support e.g. Teachers, friends and family... Self isolation and not being able to undertake the practical side of my course.

Growing Up in Queensland 2020 responses also highlighted children and young people's desire for more specialised and safe community spaces for regular socialising and community engagement.[21] The survey results show that the desire to belong and be accepted continue to be priority concerns for children and young people, and are integral for future social health.

Children can face practical barriers to participating in activities that help them avoid being socially isolated or feeling lonely. The availability of public transport, the cost and scheduling of everts and feelings of safety can all impact children's ability to participate in activities they enjoy,[22] while organisational barriers limit their ability to participate in activities such as volunteering,[23] or being able to participate in processes to influence government or corporate decision-making.[24]

Children's right to participate without discrimination is protected under both the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the *Human Rights Act 2019* (Qld).[25] The QFCC advocates for government, businesses and the community to consider the right of all children to participate when planning and making decisions. By providing safe spaces and opportunity to belong and participate in society and the activities they like, otherwise-isolated children and young people can build and maintain friendships and trusted relationships.

Social media, social isolation and loneliness among children and young people

In 2018, the Office of the eSafety Commissioner estimated at least 75 per cent of children aged 13-17 years used social media.[26] A 2015 Pew study showed 57 per cent of children in that age-group had made a new friend online, however only 20 per cent of all teenagers have met an online friend in person, suggesting many online relationships exist only in the online space.[27]

Social media can help children and young people develop and maintain relationships, and for some children, can be a more comfortable setting to communicate with others. However, social media is also associated with negative experiences, including social isolation.[28]

In 2021, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child released *General comment no. 25* on children's rights in relation to the digital environment. The comment reports digital technologies are vital to children's lives and states that the rights of every child must be respected, protected and fulfilled in the digital environment. It

[21] The State of Queensland (Queensland Family and Child Commission) 2021, *Voices of hope: Growing up in Queensland 2020* accessed 05 August 2021 https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-05/GUIQ%20report_2020_Digital.pdf

[22] The State of Queensland (Queensland Family and Child Commission) 2018, *This place I call home – The views of children and young people on growing up in Queensland*, Pp. 26-31 accessed 29 July 2021 https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-02/This-place-I-call-home-report_FULL_0.pdf

[23] The State of Queensland (Queensland Family and Child Commission) 2019, *Young people volunteering: Removing the barriers* Pp. 12-13 accessed 29 July 2021 https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/19_5205_Volunteering_Growing%20Up%20In%20QLD_5.pdf

[24] Commission for Children and Young People (Vic) 2021, *Empowerment and participation: A guide for organisations working with children and young people* accessed 09 August 2020 https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/assets/resources/Empowerment-and-Participation-Guide/CCYP-Empowerment-and-participation-guide-for-Web.pdf

[25] United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* accessed 05 August 2021 https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx; Human Rights Act 2019 (Qld)

[26] Office of the eSafety Commissioner 2018, *State of play – youth, kids and digital dangers*, https://www.esafety.gov.au/about-us/research/youth-digital-dangers, accessed 8 August 2021.

[27] Lenhart, A. 2015, *Teens, technology and friendships*, Pew Research Centre, https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2015/08/06/teens-technology-and-friendships/, accessed 8 August 2021.

[28] Crone, E.A. and Konijn, E.A. 2018, *Media use and brain development during adolescence*, Nature Communications, Vol.9, pp.1-10.

encourages governments to 'ensure that, in all actions regarding the provision, regulation, design, management and use of the digital environment, the best interests of every child is a primary consideration'.[29]

Children are highly sensitive to acceptance and rejection, including through social media. Social media allow users to connect with others while, in turn, presenting and managing an identity to present to their peers. Peer pressure and group dynamics are a powerful contributor to children's online experience. It has been shown that adolescents take more risks in the presence of their peers, and this can hold true for the influence of a peer group on an adolescent's online behaviour, including their online comments. It is possible that social media influences children's self-concept and their expectations of themselves and others.[30]

In addition, problematic use of social media is known to be related to anxiety, stress and loneliness. For some children, their use of social media will be protective against feelings of social isolation and loneliness, while for others, it will increase those feelings.[31]

During the COVID-19 pandemic, social media has allowed people of all ages to remain connected to their friends and peers while adhering to social distancing and 'lockdown' restrictions.[32] However, habitual or excessive online activity has been associated with depression, anxiety and loneliness.[33] This association goes both ways: a recent study of Italian adults has shown perceived feelings of loneliness predicted excessive social media use during periods of enforced social restrictions to reduce the spread of COVID-19.[34]

Excessive social media use is a particular concern for children and young people. Recent studies in the United States have found children who spend more time on social media and smartphones were more likely to report mental health issues. Widespread increases in depression and suicide among children and young people could be correlated with the increasing adoption of electronic devices over the past decade.[35]

It is important to note the risk factors for adolescents may not be unique to their use of electronic media. Children may be experiencing many of the same stressors faced by previous generations, such as wanting to fit in, develop peer relationships and form a unique personal identity. However, smartphones and social media have amplified these concerns to a different scale, where children may find it difficult to 'switch off' these concerns.[36]

Social media also have unique attributes that can be stressful to all users, particularly children. Some of these include:

- seeing people posting about events to which they haven't been invited

- feeling pressure to post positive and well-liked content

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[29] United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child 2021, *General comment no. 25 on children's rights in relation to the digital environment*, https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRC/Pages/GCChildrensRightsRelationDigitalEnvironment.aspx, accessed 10 August 2021.

[30] Crone, E. and Konijn, E. 2018, *Media use and brain development during adolescence*, Nature Communications, Vol.9, pp.1-10.

[31] Lippke, S., Dahmen, A., Gao, L., Guza E. and Nigg C. 2021, *To what extent is internet activity predictive of psychological wellbeing?* Psychology Research and Behavior Management Vol. 14, pp. 207-219.

[32] Lippke, S., Dahmen, A., Gao, L., Guza, E. and Nigg, C. 2021, *To what extent is internet activity predictive of psychological wellbeing?*, *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, Vol. 14, pp. 207-219.

[33] MacDonald, K., Willemsen, G., Boomsma, D. and Schermer, J. 2020, *Predicting loneliness from where and what people do*, Social Sciences, Vol. 9, Iss. 4, p.51.

[34] Boursier, V., Gioia, F., Musetti, A. and Schimmenti, A. 2020, *Facing loneliness and anxiety during the COVID-19 isolation: the role of excessive social media use in a sample of Italian adults*, Frontiers in Psychiatry, Vol. 11, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7752864/, accessed 8 August 2021.

[35] Twenge, J., Joiner, T., Rogers, M. and Martin, G. 2017, *Increases in depressive symptoms, suicide-related outcomes, and suicide rates among U.S. adolescents after 2010 and links to increased new media screen time*, Clinical Psychological Science, Vol. 6, Iss. 1, Pp. 3-17.

[36] Shafer, L. 2017, *Social media and teen anxiety*, Harvard Graduate School of Education, https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/17/12/social-media-and-teen-anxiety, accessed 8 August 2021.

- feeling pressure to get comments and likes on posts

- having someone post things about them that they cannot change or control.[37]

Certain cohorts of children, such as those who identify as LGBTQIA+ and who live in regional or remote areas, may be more likely to experience feelings of loneliness and isolation. Social media use can be a protective and a risk factor for mental health outcomes in these groups. Online networks can help to reduce the impact of geographic isolation and discrimination. However, the pressure to maintain a desirable social media presence, and any experience of cyberbullying, can be a risk factor for negative mental health outcomes.[38]

In 2018, the Queensland Anti-Cyberbullying Taskforce released *Adjust our settings: a community approach to address cyberbullying among children and young people in Queensland*. The Taskforce had been convened by the Premier of Queensland and include members of the QFCC Youth Advisory Council in its membership. It revealed children and young people experience fear, loneliness, depression and helplessness after being bullied online. This can lead some children to withdraw from family, social and sporting activities.[39]

Government responses to social isolation and loneliness should consider the significance of online relationships and social media for children and young people. Strategies should aim to encourage protective uses of social media, such as encouraging communication with friends and peers, seeking information, and accessing telehealth services.[40] At the same time, these strategies should seek to discourage excessive or harmful use, and provide support to children and young people who are experiencing negative consequences from social media.

Further consultation with children and young people in Queensland about their experiences with social media, isolation and loneliness could help to develop targeted strategies to support them.

Social isolation, loneliness and exclusion lead to antisocial behaviours

Social isolation is also known to lead to a range of antisocial behaviours, including weapon carriage (most commonly knife carriage). Children's offending has been linked with negative self-image, material inequality and relative deprivation, lack of opportunities and perceptions of insecurity.[41]

In 2011, a study by the University of Central Otago in New Zealand asked 1,169 secondary students if and why they carried a weapon. Those who reported carrying a weapon for potential use were more likely to have been in a fight, to have missed school in the past 30 days due to feeling unsafe, to have felt lonely, been bullied, bullied others or have few self-perceived competencies.[42]

Boys who carried weapons with intent to use were 4.6 times more likely to have felt lonely than boys who had not carried a weapon in the past 30 days, while girls who carried weapons with intent to use were six times more likely to have been bullied and 7.1 times more likely to have bullied others then their peers who did not carry

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[37] Lenhart, A. 2015, *Teens, technology and friendships*, Pew Research Centre, https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2015/08/06/teens-technology-and-friendships/, accessed 8 August 2021.

[38] Escobar-Viera, C., Whitfield, D., Essel, C., Sensa, E., Sidani, J. et all 2018, *For better or worse? A systematic review of the evidence on social media use and depression among lesbian, gay and bisexual minorities*, Journal of Medical Internet Research Mental Health, Vol. 5, Iss. 3.

[39] Queensland Anticyberbullying Taskforce 2018, *Adjust our settings: a community approach to address cyberbullying among children and young people in Queensland*, https://campaigns.premiers.qld.gov.au/antibullying/taskforce/, accessed 8 August 2021.

[40] Lippke S., Dahmen A., Gao L., Guza E. and Nigg C. 2021, *To what extent is internet activity predictive of psychological wellbeing?*, Psychology Research and Behavior Management, Vol. 14, pp. 207-219.

[41] Harding, S. 2020, *Getting to the Point? Reframing Narratives on Knife Crime*, Youth Justice 20 (1-2) p. 33.

[42] Louise Marsh et al. 2011, *Why do New Zealand High School Students Carry Weapons?*, Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology, 44 (3), pp. 2-11, 425.

weapons.[43] This indicates feeling lonely and having difficult peer relationships leads to an increase in weapon carriage.

In 2019, an inter-agency conference with youth advocates in London concluded excluding vulnerable young people from their immediate community worsens feeling of isolation and loneliness and increases the likelihood of engaging in knife crime. They found that 'while the exact relationship between exclusions and knife violence is unclear, there is little disagreement that being kicked out of school leaves children more vulnerable to being sucked into crime.'[44]

The QFCC's 2021 report *Changing the Sentence* found negative perceptions of children and young people, and the extent of their involvement in crime, can be detrimental to children, young people and their communities.[45] In 2010, the National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales investigated approaches taken by local authorities to improve how young people are perceived in their communities.[46] Their findings indicate engagement in positive activities decreases young people's negative behaviours which, in turn, improves the profile of young people in the community..

Children's feelings of connection, support and acceptance by their community can influence their behaviour. There is a link between isolation, loneliness, alienation, disengagement from education and community, and adolescent criminalisation.[47] The success of youth crime prevention depends on holistic cross-agency engagement and support for families and children, especially by the agencies responsible for housing, education and health. Improving communication, referral pathways and information sharing between these agencies and with service providers would benefit children in need of holistic support.

In 2018, the Queensland Government commissioned the *Report on Youth Justice*. The report recommended the Government adopt four pillars to guide youth justice policy:

- intervene early

- keep children out of court

- keep children out of custody

- reduce reoffending.[48]

In 2019, the Queensland Government released *Working together, changing the story: the Youth Justice Strategy 2019-23* (the Youth Justice Strategy).[49] The Youth Justice Strategy accepts the four pillars approach, with a focus on prevention, early intervention and collaboration to tackle the underlying causes of youth crime.[50] It includes a

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[43] Ibid. p. 434

[44] Henshaw, C. 2019, *How Can Schools Tackle Knife Crime*, Times Higher Educational Supplement, 22 February 2019.

[45] The State of Queensland (Queensland Family and Child Commission) 2021, *Changing the sentence: overseeing Queensland's youth justice reforms* p.59 accessed 22 July 2021 https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/keeping-kids-more-safe/monitoring-reviewing-systems-protect-children/changing-sentence

[46] Martin, K., Hart, R., MacLeod, S., and Kinder, K. 2010, *Positivity in Practice: Approaches to Improving Perceptions of Young People and their Involvement in Crime and Anti-social Behaviour* p. 41

[47] *Preventing children's involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour: a literature review;* Testing three explanations of the emergence of weapon carrying in peer context: The roles of aggression, victimization and social network; Brennan, I., (2008), *Understanding weapon violence in the UK: Thirteen unanswered questions.* University of Hull.

[48] Bob Atkinson, *Report on Youth Justice*, p. 6. https://www.cyjma.qld.gov.au/resources/dcsyw/youth-justice/reform/youth-justice-report.pdfqld.gov.au) Accessed on 30 July 2021

[49] Queensland Government 2019, *Working together, changing the story: the Youth Justice Strategy 2019-2023*, https://www.cyjma.qld.gov.au/youth-justice/reform/youth-justice-strategy, accessed 10 August 2021, p. 15.

[50] The State of Queensland (Queensland Family and Child Commission) 2021, *Changing the sentence: overseeing Queensland's youth justice reforms* accessed 22 July 2021 https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/keeping-kids-more-safe/monitoring-reviewing-systems-protect-children/changing-sentence

priority to have children, young people and families engaged in community, sport, recreation and cultural activities, which would address loneliness and social isolation among children at risk of contact with the criminal justice system.[51]

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, cultural identity provides a strong sense of self, community and belonging. The QFCC 2021 report *Changing the Sentence* identifies cultural identity is a protective factor that promotes resilience for Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander children.[52] The report discussed how having opportunities to express cultural identity can measurably improve wellbeing, and contribute to a reduction in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in contact with the youth justice system.[53]

Policy interventions to address social isolation and loneliness will have clear benefits for children's mental health and wellbeing, as well as helping to meet the Queensland Government's commitments under the Youth Justice Strategy. A focus on children's experiences of isolation and loneliness, and consideration of children's rights, will help the Committee to recognise the unique concerns of children and young people while preparing its final report.

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[51] Queensland Government 2019, *Working together, changing the story: the Youth Justice Strategy 2019-2023*, https://www.cyjma.qld.gov.au/youth-justice/reform/youth-justice-strategy, accessed 10 August 2021, p. 15.

[52] The State of Queensland (Queensland Family and Child Commission) 2021, *Changing the sentence: overseeing Queensland's youth justice reforms* p.41 accessed 22 July 2021 https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/keeping-kids-more-safe/monitoring-reviewing-systems-protect-children/changing-sentence

[53] Ibid.