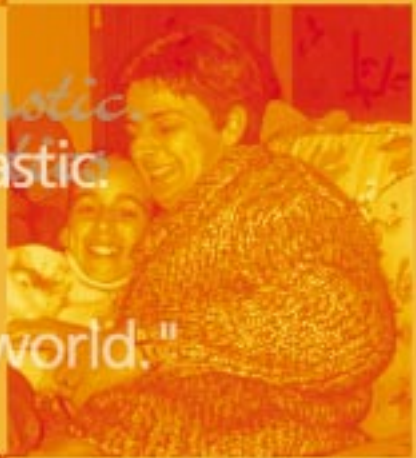


Our annual report to the kids of NSW

# FEEDBACK 2002



*Being a young person is fantastic  
to get involved. You get so many  
opportunities to get  
involved in the world."*



Danielle, 14 years



## WHAT IS THE COMMISSION?

The Commission for Children and Young People is an organisation that looks out for kids.

## WHAT DO WE DO?

We work to make NSW a better place for all children and young people.

We do this by working with kids, parents and other organisations such as schools, government departments and community organisations.

Our main areas of work are about:

- giving you a better chance to speak up about things that are important to you;
- helping you have better relationships with your family, friends, school and community;
- making NSW a safer place for kids.

## WHO'S IN CHARGE?

Gillian Calvert is NSW's first Commissioner for Children and Young People.



**"Spending time with friends is the most important thing at our age."**

Kimberley, 16 years.



## WHAT IS FEEDBACK 2002?

Feedback 2002 is our report to you, the children and young people of NSW.

We were set up by Parliament to help make NSW a better place for kids. It's important you have a chance to see what we've been doing so you can check we're doing the best job we can for you!

We've also written a longer report for the NSW Parliament. You can find it at [www.kids.nsw.gov.au/publications/](http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au/publications/).

## OUR YOUNG PEOPLE'S REFERENCE GROUP

The Young People's Reference Group is a group of kids who advise Gillian about issues that are important to children and young people and tells us what they think of the work we're doing.

The group is made up of 12 young people aged 12 to 17 years from all around NSW. Some of them live in the city, others in the country, some are into sport, others are into books, and they come from lots of different cultural backgrounds.

During 2001-2002 the Young People's Reference Group helped us with a range of things, including:

- working out what issues we should focus on at the Commission;
- organising 'The Good, the Bad and the Ugly' mobile phones forum to look at some of the problems young people have with owning a mobile phone and what things phone companies could do to make it better;
- looking at the Entertainment Industry Code of Fair Practice to see if it considers the needs, rights and well-being of kids;
- seeing if the NSW Government Youth Policy meets the needs of young people;
- looking at a report we made to the NSW Inquiry into Prescription Drugs and Medication to help drug companies and health workers consider the needs of young people;
- making our website better; and
- telling us what they thought about the NSW Department of Education and Training's Anti-Discrimination Policy.

If you are interested in joining the Young People's Reference Group, or would just like to find out more, please telephone the Commission on 02 9286 7276 and ask to speak with Peta Lucas or Stephen Robertson. Or visit our website at [www.kids.nsw.gov.au/about/refgroup.html](http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au/about/refgroup.html).



"Being on the **Young People's Reference Group** gives me a great sense of responsibility. It's really **cool** to be able to have an **impact on issues** that **affect young people** like myself across NSW."

"The Reference Group is a place where **my opinion** is respected and I have **a chance to make a difference for the better**".

## MOBILE PHONES -

### 'THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY'

*Did you know that over one third of all young people own or use a mobile phone?*

Many young people think of having a mobile phone as a necessity. As one young person who spoke with the Commission said, "If it wasn't for mobile phones, I don't know how I would keep in contact with friends".

Lots of young people dive head first into owning a mobile phone without thinking too much about what's involved. Some young people end up owing lots of money or get locked into long-term deals they don't like. Some get their mobile phones stolen and then have to pay back lots of money for something they're not even able to use.

The Commission and the National Children's and Youth Law Centre got together to run a forum about mobile phones, called 'The Good, the Bad and the Ugly'.

During the forum young people were able to talk with people from the phone companies, community legal centres and government agencies about some of the issues they've come across in owning a mobile.

Young people said they like mobiles because they helped them keep in touch with family and friends, develop relationships, show their individuality and organise their lives better. They also talked about what they don't like, such as aggressive marketing, a lack of information from the people who sell the phones and debt problems.

The young people at the Forum came up with some positive ideas for the phone industry, including:

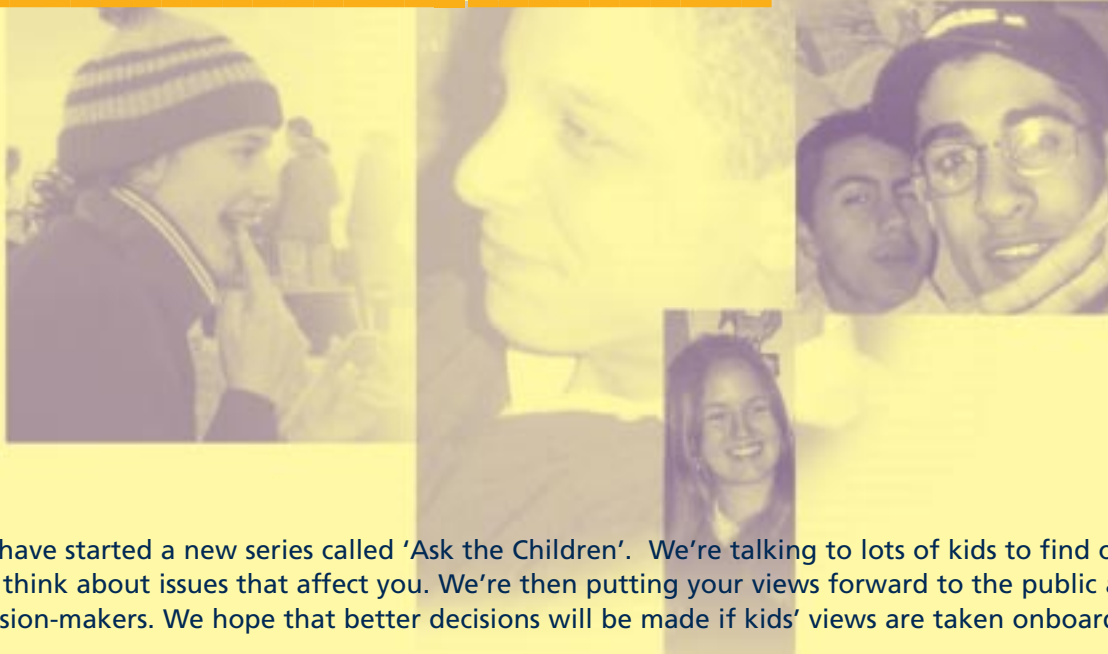
- making sure people who sell phones are properly trained and stick to a set of rules called a 'Code of Conduct';
- getting regular updates via the Internet or SMS to show how much money you owe during the month rather than just getting a bill at the end of the month;
- easy-to-read contracts that are the same for all phones;
- more education about handling debt and information about where to get help if you get into financial trouble; and
- a 'cooling off' period on contracts so you can change your mind if you realise you're in over your head.

The Commission has been working with the phone industry to come up with ways these ideas could be put into practice.

If you would like to find out more about 'The Good, the Bad and the Ugly' of mobile phones check out the links on the Commission's website at [www.kids.nsw.gov.au/links/kids.html](http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au/links/kids.html).



## 'ASK THE CHILDREN': PRESCRIPTION DRUGS AND OVER-THE-COUNTER MEDICATION



We have started a new series called 'Ask the Children'. We're talking to lots of kids to find out what you think about issues that affect you. We're then putting your views forward to the public and to decision-makers. We hope that better decisions will be made if kids' views are taken onboard.

In the first 'Ask the Children' we talked with over 70 kids to find out what they thought about prescription drugs and medications. These include ones that you can buy at the chemist, health store or supermarket, such as Ventolin, Disprin, Ritalin, guarana and sports supplements such as Creatine.

We put this information forward to the Committee on Children and Young People, a group of politicians who look into things that affect kids then report to Parliament. The information was considered as part of a Parliamentary Inquiry into children and young people's use of over-the-counter drugs and prescription medicine.

We also wanted to make sure this information was put forward to people such as doctors, pharmacists, sports coaches and teachers. We did this by sending information sheets to them and also by getting in touch with organisations that represent these people so kids' views could be put forward through professional magazines.

We hope this information encourages people to involve children and young people more in looking after their health needs.

If you would like to find out more about 'Ask the Children' visit [www.kids.nsw.gov.au/ask/](http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au/ask/).

"It was easier in primary school to take my medication – they knew my routine. At high school you have different teachers throughout the whole day and you have to explain – one day you have English at medication time – the next day it's another teacher and class – you have to tell them you really truly have to take it and you're not just trying to get out of class."

A young person's experience of taking medication at school.

# SPEAKING UP, SPEAKING OUT - ADVOCACY WORKSHOPS

## *What does advocacy mean?*

Advocacy means speaking up for a person, a cause or an issue. Advocates don't have to be adults with university degrees; anyone can be an advocate.

There are lots of different ways that kids can advocate for something or someone. For example you may talk to a teacher on behalf of a friend who is having some problems with school work or you may talk to your local council about young people needing more things to do in your area. Advocacy helps you get heard about the things that matter to you.

## *How do we help you learn to speak up?*

In the last year we held four 'Speak Up, Speak Out! Advocacy Training Workshops' involving almost 60 young people. These sessions were held in Forbes, Sydney and Kurri Kurri.

The aim of these sessions was to provide young people with information and skills to help them stand up for themselves and things they believe in. Some of the things we looked at in the workshops included meeting and influencing people, communicating, sorting out disagreements, working with the media and looking at Australia's system of government.

You can try out your advocacy skills by visiting our website and playing our "Follow that Falafel" game at [www.kids.nsw.gov.au/youdecide/](http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au/youdecide/).

Or, if you are interested in learning more about being an advocate, please telephone us on 02 9286 7276 and ask to speak with our Senior Training Officer.



**"The advocacy workshops,  
teach us to stand up  
for what we believe in."**

Paul, 16 years - a member of our Young People's Reference Group 2002.



## INVOLVING KIDS IN DECISION-MAKING

*The Commission wants to make it easier for kids to have a say about decisions that affect their lives. Participating means getting involved and having a say.*

### *Why is it important for kids?*

The ideas and opinions that adults have about what's important to you might be different from your own. If people who are affected by something are asked what they think then better decisions get made. After all, there are 1.5 million kids in NSW – almost a quarter of the population – so you should have a chance to have your say.

### *How can we involve you more in decision-making?*

You told us it was important that adults did things differently, so in 2001 we released a kit to help adults change the way they do things. It's called 'TAKING PARTicipation Seriously' and it encourages adults to involve you in decision-making.

In 2002 we used the kit to develop a 'Participation Checklist' to help organisations work out how much of a say kids were having in the running of the organisation.

We presented workshops at conferences to people from different organisations about how they could get kids more involved. We even helped the people organising the conferences, including the people running the Third International Conference on Drugs and Young People, to involve kids more.

The Commission also used the kit to help school teachers and community workers in Minto develop some lesson plans they could use to help kids under 12 years learn how to go about changing things in their communities.



**"We wanted young people to have a say in building the community."**

A community worker talking about involving kids more in their local area.

## TAKING KIDS' RIGHTS SERIOUSLY

*If you don't know what your rights are, how can you stand up for them?*

We've found that lots of kids don't really understand what their rights are or who they can go to if their parents and friends can't help them.

The Commission has put together some lessons that teachers can use in school to teach kids what their basic human rights are.

The lessons also let kids know about organisations like the Commission, who work to stand up for kids, help kids to stand up for themselves, and help parents and other adults to stand up for kids.

We're basing the lessons on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, an agreement which sets out what the basic rights of every kid around the world are. Australia has agreed with the Convention, which means that we should put it into practice.

Eight primary schools in NSW started using this information in 2001. The schools will tell us if the information is useful or if there is anything we can do to make it better.



## ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES PROTECTING YOUNG PEOPLE

Kids growing up in Aboriginal communities can have many things to deal with.

The Aboriginal community is working with the Commission and other groups to help keep kids in Aboriginal communities safe.

Part of the work we're doing is finding ways to help lots of different people in the community work together. All these people come together to talk and work out what things need to be done to protect kids.

They also decide if it would be useful to train people in the community. By doing this, people in the Aboriginal community can learn more about recognising when kids are having a hard time and what they can do to protect them. They can also teach other people in the community what they've learned.

The Aboriginal community in the Taree region of NSW has been working with the Commission and other groups over the last year and will continue to do so in 2003.

# 'HELPING RELATIONSHIPS WORK' - TIPS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Ever had a fight with your brother or sister? Fallen out with a group of friends? Been worried about your parents splitting up?

The Commission has put together some information and ideas to help you make the relationships you have with important people in your lives, such as your friends and family, the best they can be. You can get hold of this information through our website at [www.kids.nsw.gov.au/arcade/relationships.html](http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au/arcade/relationships.html)

In late 2002 the Commission worked with *Girlfriend* magazine to put together a series of four articles to give young people tips and information about dealing with things that might come up in your relationships with family and friends.

The first of these articles was published in September 2002. In this issue *Girlfriend* also asked young people to complete a quick survey asking questions about their relationships. More than 500 readers completed the survey and the results were published in the December 2002 issue of *Girlfriend*.

**"my friends, my family, my support group"**

Pia, 15 years.





## KEEPING KIDS SAFE

We want to make NSW a safe place for kids.

Two years ago we set up a way to check out people who have applied for jobs working with kids. Organisations that work with kids can now check someone's background to make sure they are OK and haven't hurt or abused kids in the past.

In the last year we, and other organisations who help us do the checking, looked at the background of more than 230,000 people. Seventy-five people didn't get the job they'd applied for because something in their past made them unsuitable to work with kids.

Another way we help keep kids safe is by doing research into issues that affect kids. This helps us to pinpoint any problem areas so we can help to find solutions.

We have also put some information for adults on our website to give them tips on what they can do to keep kids safe. The information looks at things like parenting and protecting children from abuse. You can check it out at [www.kids.nsw.gov.au/info/](http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au/info/).



## YOUNG PEOPLE WORK AT THE COMMISSION

The Commission has three young people aged 16 to 20 years doing "traineeships" with us. This means that they work with us for one year and are able to learn work skills and get work experience. We also encourage and support our trainees to do further studies.

We have also had several young people doing work experience with us as part of high school or TAFE.

**"In my job, I feel supported and valued as an important member of the team...."**

**Every day I learn something new and build my skill level. Working at the Commission has given me the confidence to pursue the career I want and the motivation to get there."**

## YOUNG PEOPLE HELP CHOOSE OUR STAFF

We believe it is important that our staff members get along well with kids. That's why young people help us to select new staff members – after all you're most likely to know who will get on well with kids. It also gives you the chance to find out what employers look for in a job application and interview, which might help you when you're looking for work.

We also encourage other organisations that work with kids to involve young people in selecting staff. You can check out the information we've put together to help other organisations at [www.kids.nsw.gov.au/info/1023238135\\_23997.html](http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au/info/1023238135_23997.html).

**"Being on a selection panel is both fun and educational. After all, you'll sooner or later be on the other side of the table!"**

**"Young people can often see things about an applicant that adults don't notice. You get to have a say as to who young people like you will work with."**

Arthur, 16 years, participated on interview panels to help select Commission staff in 2002.

## CHANGING THE LAW

We want to see laws and policies that help keep kids safe and well.

Sometimes when groups of politicians are looking at changing or bringing in different laws and policies that affect kids, they ask the Commission to have a say.

At other times we speak up because we see that things are being changed and we want to make sure that kids' views are being considered.

In the last year we provided advice on 117 different matters. These looked at a heap of issues that affect kids, like public education, Internet chat rooms, kids visiting their parents in prison, tobacco use by young people and kids' use of libraries.

Before we give advice we often ask our Young People's Reference Group to have a look and tell us what they think. We can then put kids' views forward to the politicians.

From July 2001 to June 2002 our Young People's Reference Group gave us their views on a range of things, including:

- How Australia treats people from other countries, like refugees, who want to live in Australia. [www.kids.nsw.gov.au/news/lawspolicies/1026866385\\_26318.html](http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au/news/lawspolicies/1026866385_26318.html)
- What rights and responsibilities the NSW Police have in matters concerning kids. [www.kids.nsw.gov.au/news/lawspolicies/1020142179\\_2278.html](http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au/news/lawspolicies/1020142179_2278.html)
- The laws that affect young people in the workplace. [www.kids.nsw.gov.au/news/lawspolicies/1022459550\\_10580.html](http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au/news/lawspolicies/1022459550_10580.html)
- Changes to the law about looking after kids who can't live at home.
- Changes to the laws about adoption.

## OUR WEBSITE

The Commission's website includes a section especially for kids called The Arcade. The Arcade includes games, e-cards, links to other cool sites, stories, pictures, reviews and information about your rights. We've recently put some new games on the website that you can play at [www.kids.nsw.gov.au/arcade/youdecide.html](http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au/arcade/youdecide.html).

There's also a new section in the Cool Room where you can upload your own artwork, stories and music. You'll find it at [www.kids.nsw.gov.au/coolroom/](http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au/coolroom/). You might also be interested in visiting the 'What We're Doing' section to see how we speak up for kids or to give your views about issues that are affecting kids [www.kids.nsw.gov.au/ourwork/](http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au/ourwork/).

From time to time website links disappear or change. If you have trouble visiting one of our website links send us an email at [kids@kids.nsw.gov.au](mailto:kids@kids.nsw.gov.au) and we'll help you find the information.

We'd also love to hear from you if you have any ideas about our what we could do to make our site better.



## WANT TO KNOW MORE?

If you're interested in finding out more about the Commission and what we're up to, check out our website at [www.kids.nsw.gov.au](http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au). Or, if you want to get in touch with us, drop us an email at [kids@kids.nsw.gov.au](mailto:kids@kids.nsw.gov.au).

## WHAT NEXT?

### *We'll be asking some kids:*

- What ideas they have for helping schools involve kids in decision-making;
- Whether they think setting up a Children's Commission, like the one in NSW, for the whole of Australia is a good idea.

### *We'll:*

- Do a survey of young people who have jobs to find out what their views are about work and if there's anything we can do to help make things better;
- Make opportunities for kids to be involved in media and publicity activities;
- Let people know about the conditions kids experience in immigration detention centres so we can improve their lives.

### *Getting help*

Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800 [www.kidshelp.com.au](http://www.kidshelp.com.au)

Reach Out! [www.reachout.com.au](http://www.reachout.com.au)

### *Acknowledgements*

*Our thanks to the children and young people who took the photographs for this report – Pia, Danielle, Paul, Kate, Holly and Emily. Our thanks also to the children from the Northern Beaches Interchange Saturday Program who appear in some of the photos throughout this report. Finally, we thank all the children and young people who gave us their views on a range of topics – their quotes appear throughout this report.*



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