

# Young, Willing and Able

Youth Survey Disability Report 2019

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**A special thanks to the organisations that provided valuable input and support, especially Children and Young people with Disability Australia, Youth Disability Advocacy Service, People with Disability Australia, Alannah and Madeline Foundation, National Ethnic Disability Alliance, Youth Affairs Council Victoria and Youth Action.**

We would like to acknowledge the Mission Australia staff who contributed to this report by providing helpful insights, clarity and examples of current and past programs that support young people. Their insight serves to remind us that behind the data, figures and words are young people, with their own families, experiences, culture and backgrounds. We would like to thank Alexandra Ingleton, Angela Brazendale, Brooke Draper, Carolyn Hodge, Cathryn Daniel, Chinthaka Amarasinghe, Darren Stockman, Gaylene Oliver, Jesse Taylor, Jo Brown, Juanita Ford, Jye Ryan, Kudzi Moforimbo, Michelle Filz, Nicole Grimwood, Phil Flint, Rachele Roberts, Sarah Brown, Sharon Huckel, Shiva Panchalingam and Troy Crellin.

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of lands throughout Australia and we pay our respects to the Elders past, present and future for they hold the memories, culture and dreams of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We recognise and respect their cultural heritage, beliefs and continual relationship with the land and we recognise the importance of the young people who are the future leaders.

**A note on COVID-19.** This research was conducted before the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Mission Australia would like to acknowledge the challenges faced by young people during this time, especially those with disability. It is important to note that the pandemic and its effects are likely to be long term and may result in increased levels of disadvantage and economic hardship for many young people in Australia, as well as an increased need for services.

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# Foreword

**For the first time, Mission Australia has analysed our Youth Survey data with a focus on young people with disability and how their experiences differ to young people without disability. This report offers a deeper understanding of what young people with disability in Australia are experiencing as it relates to their situations, aspirations, concerns, barriers and wellbeing.**

The findings point to an urgent need for greater representation of young people with disability in decisions which affect their lives as well as to address their concerns, improve their wellbeing, and remove the social, built environment and transport barriers that still exist in our country.

There were 25,000 young people aged between 15 and 19 who participated in Youth Survey 2019, and of those, 1,623 reported a disability.

We know from our survey, that the majority of young people with disability are engaged in education, have aspirations, their top post-school plan is to go to university and they're involved in a range of activities.

While this is encouraging, compared to young people

without disability, more than twice the proportion of young people with disability reported they were not studying and are at higher risk of educational disengagement.

The findings also expose some deeply concerning experiences of young people with disability. Worryingly, young people with disability were twice as likely to have experienced bullying in the past 12 months than their age group peers, with two in five young people with disability reporting this – commonly at home or in their neighbourhood. They were also more likely to experience physical bullying and cyberbullying than young people without disability.



Bullying is a dangerous and deeply concerning reality for too many young people with disability. Disability stigma sits at the root of this type of bullying and these findings expose an urgent need for a national campaign to prevent bullying of young people with disability by de-stigmatising disability.

Young people with disability also reported they are twice as likely than their counterparts to feel sad or very sad about their life as a whole, and feel more negative about their future. They face a range of barriers to achieving their post-school goals such as mental health, academic ability, financial difficulties and physical health. I was also particularly concerned to learn that young people with disability are more likely to express personal concerns around mental health, suicide, bullying or emotional abuse.

Taken together, these results show that growing up and living with disability in Australia is clearly having a major impact on young people's lives now, and their aspirations and futures. Young people with disability are telling us they simply don't have the same access to opportunities as their peers.

Opportunities which would allow them to better connect with their communities, friends and families and lead fulfilling, more independent lives into the future.

Whatever a young person's ability or experience, access to suitable support and opportunities at the right time is the antidote that can dissolve a range of barriers they may face. For example, more sustained investment and effort is needed to design and build public spaces that are fully accessible for all people with disability and to adapt workplaces, schools, TAFEs and universities to be more obviously accessible and welcoming.

Listening to the voices of young people, including young people with disability, is in the spirit of our Youth Survey, as is conveying their voices to the public sphere to be acted upon.

**Ultimately, there needs to be a whole of community approach across all life domains, so we can foster true inclusion and accessibility and better support young people with disability as they transition to adulthood.**



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'James Toomey'.

**James Toomey**  
CEO, Mission Australia

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# Executive summary

**This report considers the similarities and differences between two groups of young people who took part in the Mission Australia Youth Survey 2019: those who reported having disability compared with those who reported no disability. We used quantitative and qualitative findings throughout this report to highlight these issues.**

For the purpose of this report, disability has been defined as any continuing condition that restricts everyday activities. Disability is therefore not just a health issue. It is a complex, contested, evolving concept, reflecting the interaction between features of a person's body and features of the society in which they live.

Overcoming the difficulties faced by young people with disability requires interventions to remove environmental and social barriers. The purpose of this report is to bring their stories to light, in order to advocate for programs and policies that address their needs.



# Key findings:

## Education

- The majority (84.6%) of young people with disability were studying full-time; however, this proportion was lower than for respondents without disability (94.0%).
- Compared with respondents without disability, more than twice the proportion of young people with disability reported they were not studying (9.4% compared with 3.6%).
- Young people with disability reported lower levels of study satisfaction than respondents without disability (57.0% were either *very satisfied* or *satisfied* compared with 68.3% respectively).
- More than twice the proportion of respondents with disability did not plan to complete Year 12 (8.2% compared with 3.8% of respondents without disability).
- Close to half (48.3%) of young people with disability reported *go to university* as their post-school plan. This was much lower than for respondents without disability: 66.1%.
- Young people with disability were less confident in their ability to achieve their post-school goals: 18.3% indicated that they were *slightly confident* or *not at all confident*, compared with 10.5% of participants without disability.

## Employment

- A much smaller proportion of respondents with disability reported that they were working part-time (31.1% compared with 44.0% of respondents without disability).
- A greater proportion of respondents with disability reported that they were looking for work (39.9% compared with 34.0% of respondents without disability).

## Barriers to finding work

- A higher proportion of young people with disability indicated that they felt there were barriers impacting upon them finding work (63.7% compared with 48.1% of respondents without disability).
- Compared with respondents without disability, young people with disability were more likely to indicate that the majority of the items listed as potential barriers were impacting upon them finding work; especially *mental health* (27.7% compared with 16.0%) and *physical health* (12.4% compared with 4.0%).

## Personal concerns

- *Coping with stress* was the top item of personal concern for all participants, however a higher proportion of young people with disability (49.9% compared with 44.5% of respondents without disability) indicated that they were either *extremely* or *very concerned* about this issue (and all other issues).
- Compared with young people without disability, respondents with disability reported much higher levels of personal concern about *mental health*, *suicide* and *bullying/emotional abuse* (45.5%, 25.6% and 25.5% compared with 32.4%, 13.5% and 13.6% of participants without disability).

## Sources of support

- Young people with disability were less likely than respondents without disability to turn to close personal connections for support with important issues, particularly their *friend/s* (71.8%), *parent/s or guardian/s* (64.3%) or a *relative/family friend* (48.2%) (compared with 83.7%, 76.0% and 58.1%).

## (Key findings cont)

- A higher proportion of respondents with disability indicated they would turn to a *community agency* (19.8%) or a *GP or health professional* (51.1%) for help (compared with 12.3% and 45.0%).
- Slightly higher proportions of young people with disability participated in *youth groups and activities* (35.1% compared with 29.6% of participants without disability) and *political groups/organisations* (12.3% compared with 6.9%).

## Experience of bullying

- Compared with respondents without disability, more than twice the proportion of young people with disability reported that they had experienced bullying in the past twelve months (43.4% compared with 19.3%).

Higher proportions of young people with disability who had experienced bullying reported that they experienced this *at home or in my neighbourhood* (27.9% and 15.1% compared with 16.5% and 5.1% of respondents without disability).

- Of the respondents with disability who had experienced bullying in the past year, 75.0% of young people reported that they experienced *verbal bullying*.

Notably higher proportions of young people with disability reported that they had experienced *physical bullying or cyberbullying* (34.1% and 42.0% compared with 19.5% and 35.7% of respondents without disability).

- The top three methods that helped young people with disability deal with bullying were *ignoring it* (38.3%), *removing myself from the situation* (31.0%) and *distracting myself through other activities* (31.1%).

Notably lower proportions of young people with disability reported *ignoring it* (38.3% compared with 47.5% of young people without disability) and *removing myself from the situation* (31.0% compared with 38.1%) helped them deal with their experience of bullying.

## Participation in activities

- Young people who reported having disability carried out a wide range of activities however, notably lower proportions took part in *sports (as a participant)* and *sports (as spectator)* (52.7% and 45.1% compared with 69.4% and 57.5% of participants without disability).

## Community inclusion

- Young people were asked whether they felt their community is supportive of people who are living with a disability. Nearly seven in 10 (67.8%) respondents with disability indicated that they felt their *community is supportive of people who are living with a disability*. This is notably lower compared with young people without disability (83.3%).
- Young people were also asked whether they thought that people living with a disability are treated unfairly because of their disability. Over six in 10 (61.8%) young people with disability thought that people living with a disability are treated *unfairly* (compared with 49.5% of respondents without disability).
- Over half (55.0%) of young people with disability stated that their disability made it hard for them to *feel like they fit in (at school, work or socially)*. Close to half (47.8%) of young people with disability indicated that their disability made it hard for them to *do everyday activities as other young people their age usually do* and four in 10 (40.4%) struggled to *do things in public places with friends* (e.g. go to shopping centres, sporting or music events).

## Wellbeing, happiness and the future

- Over one in three (35.5%) young people with disability rated their family's ability to get along as either *fair* or *poor* compared with one in five (20.8%) participants without disability.
- More than double the proportion of young people with disability reported feeling *very sad/sad* with life as a whole (24.1% compared with 10.1% of young people without disability).
- More than double the proportion of respondents with disability felt *negative* or *very negative* about the future (26.0% compared with 11.2% of participants without disability).

# List of recommendations:

## Education

- Develop a National Education Strategy for children and young people with disability that encompasses schools, tertiary and vocational education settings.
- Increase investment in resources and funding to raise awareness in schools and educational settings of Disability Standards for Education. Ensure they are implemented uniformly across the country with requisite accountability measures.
- Increase flexible education options that allow students with disability to study at their own pace, with access to additional wrap-around supports as needed.

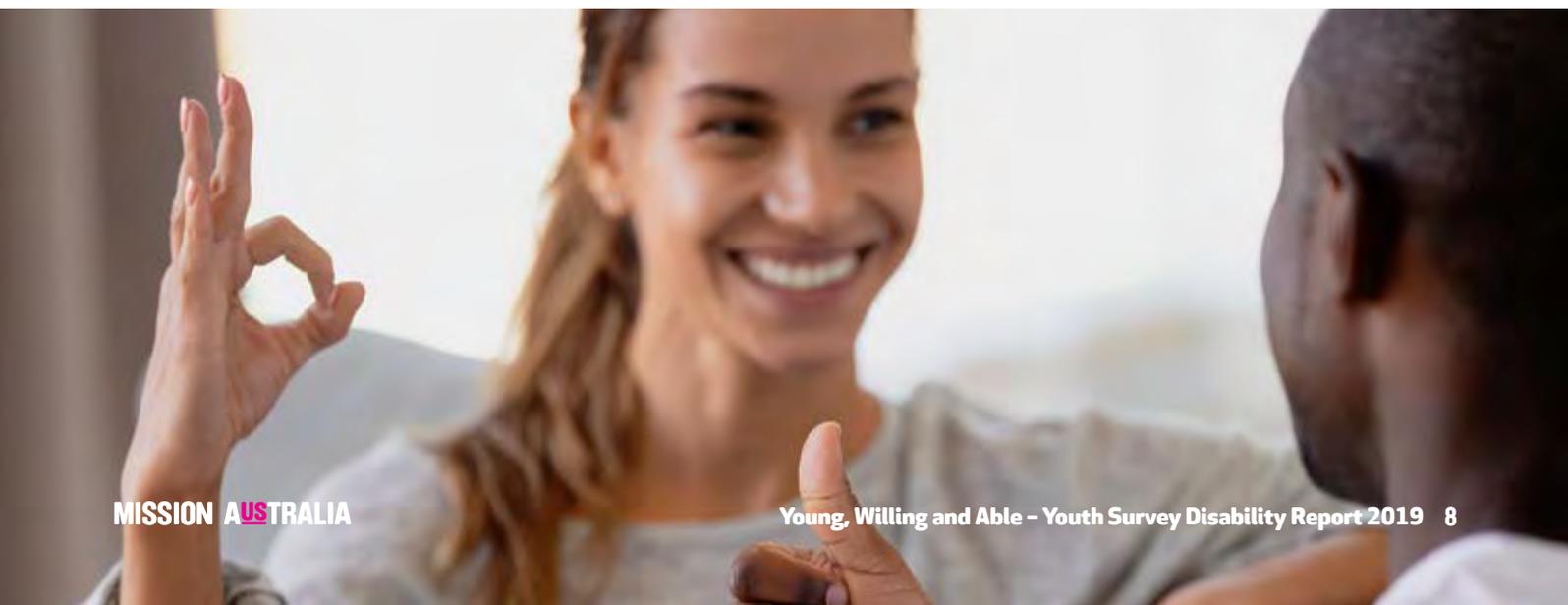
## Employment

- Implement significant improvements to both disability specific and generalist employment services to better support young people with disability, to gain and maintain meaningful employment. This includes providing access to career advisors and mentors while they are still engaged in education.
- Develop a National Jobs Plan that will bring together the different levels of government, as well as the private and not-for-profit sectors to create meaningful employment opportunities for people with disability including young people.

- Develop a comprehensive national advertising campaign to promote employment of people with disability, including young people with disability. This should be designed and developed in consultation with people with disability, including young people with disability, employers and the employment and community sector.
- Ensure the implementation of agile and accessible work environments, inclusive work culture, recognition of diverse needs and provision of flexible work conditions to meet the needs of young people with disability. Employers should be proactive in making these changes and broader monitoring and accountability is required.

## Personal concerns

- Increase school-based mental health supports in consultation with young people with disability including embedding wellbeing personnel within schools.
- Provide training to school staff members to effectively support young people with disability who are experiencing a range of challenges including study pressure, stress, bullying, alcohol and drug issues, discrimination and other mental health problems.
- Fund youth programs that use a strengths-based and flexible approach to support young people



## (List of recommendations cont)

with disability including those experiencing mental health issues, bullying, family conflict and other issues to build a positive sense of identity and meet their individual needs.

### Sources of support

- Increase supports available to parents or guardians of young people with disability to ensure they can be a more effective resource to young people with disability in their families.
- Increase investment in peer support networks and peer education initiatives to equip young people with the knowledge and skills to recognise mental health issues, bullying and other issues their friends with disability are experiencing and to provide assistance and support when needed.
- Improve access to GPs and other health professional by providing training and support on the needs of young people with disability and promoting a youth-friendly, inclusive practice environment.
- Provide additional capacity building to community organisations to deliver services that are sensitive and appropriate to meet the needs of young people with disability.
- Provide a wide range of support services to young people with disability, make information about these services available in accessible formats, distribute information in relation to confidentiality and deliver services in flexible locations and hours.

### Experience of bullying

- Establish a new national campaign to address bullying of young people with a special focus on different cohorts that are more susceptible to being victims of bullying including young people with disability. This should include personal stories of young people who are victims of bullying and positive portrayals of young people with disability.
- Implement whole of school strategies to prevent bullying of young people with disability that are co-developed with young people with disability.
- Distribute information about support services and complaint mechanisms in multiple accessible formats and target hard to reach communities

including young people with disability in rural, remote and regional areas, those with language and communication limitations and young people with limited access to technology.

### Participation in activities

- Develop a streamed fund for young people with disability to purchase sports equipment and relevant uniforms and cover the cost of transport, fees and other requirements of participation in sports, cultural and other activities.
- Increase funding to ensure accessibility of the built environment by making spaces such as sporting grounds, parks, pathways and recreation facilities accessible and accommodating for young people with disability.
- Spaces should be co-designed with young people with disability and accountability measures implemented to ensure universal design of public spaces.

### Community inclusion

- Strengthen the focus on the specific needs of young people with disability when developing the next iteration of the National Disability Strategy (NDS) through genuine engagement of young people with disability.
- Embed the voices of young people with disability in all decision making and service design processes.

### Wellbeing, happiness and the future

- Increase support services available to the whole family of young people with disability especially where young people identify family conflict or family violence as issues affecting them.
- Build capacity of young people with disability by educating them about their rights and helping them increase leadership and advocacy skills.
- Improve accessibility of information and access to mental health services and professionals who specialise in working with young people with disability to deliver effective early intervention.

# Introduction

Under the *United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, ratified by Australia in 2008, disability is described as a result of *‘the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental behaviours that hinders full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others’*.<sup>1</sup> According to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), impairments could involve sensory disability, physical disability, intellectual disability, or a psychosocial disability from a mental health issue.<sup>2</sup> An estimated 290,600 young people aged 15-24 or 7.2% of people in the age range in Australia are persons with disability.<sup>3</sup>

People with disability should be a valued and important sector of society with many skills to offer, however they often face prejudice based on their disability.<sup>4</sup> Young people with disability are far more susceptible to social, educational and emotional inequalities when compared to their peers without disability as a result of discrimination.<sup>5</sup> As reported by the Australian Human Rights Commission, people with disability face many barriers in society, such as using public transport, completing education or participating in the work force and they are more likely to live in poverty.<sup>6</sup>

“Society needs to be more accepting of autistic people and their directness and honesty. Autistic people ... are honest all the time and we are ostracised for it.” Male, 18

Throughout the last 40 years, Australian society has strived to become more inclusive and change attitudes towards people with disability.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, the barriers imposed by the environment often continue to discriminate against people with disability rather than supporting their inclusion. In 2010, the National Disability Reform Agenda instilled a commitment to uphold basic human rights for young people and adults with disability. The objective to promote human rights for people with disability has been pursued by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) in an effort to maintain social and economic participation, inclusion and strategies to protect the needs of people with disability.<sup>8</sup>

## Education

Education is one of the most significant determining factors in young people’s future outcomes. Higher levels of employment and better health are associated with the completion of higher levels of education.<sup>9</sup> According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), in 2015, 81% of children and young people aged five to 20 with a disability attended school, and 84% of young people with a severe or profound limitation attended school. In the same report, people with disability between the ages of 20 and 24 had completed secondary school at a rate of 64%, and people without disability at a rate of 81%.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations General Assembly 2007, 1

<sup>2</sup> National Disability Insurance Scheme, 2

<sup>3</sup> Australian bureau of Statistics 2018

<sup>4</sup> Lansdown et al. 2013, 5

<sup>5</sup> Lansdown et al. 2013, 22

<sup>6</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission 2014, 2

<sup>7</sup> Wayland and Hindmarsh 2017, 1

<sup>8</sup> Wayland and Hindmarsh 2017, 3

<sup>9</sup> Victorian Health Promotion Foundation 2012, 6

<sup>10</sup> Joenpera and Murdoch 2016, 4

Many teachers want to have the ability to educate their students with disability, recognising that with proper supports in place, their outcomes would improve. However, there remain limitations of resources, knowledge and opportunity in school systems for these outcomes to be achieved.<sup>11</sup> From education surveys undertaken by the Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) in 2015 and 2016, a majority of students with disability and their families felt that the in-school support was not meeting the adequate standards.<sup>12</sup>

“[We need] ... more 'classroom talk' around not discriminating against people with disabilities.” Male, 15

The 2015 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Survey of Disability, Ageing and Caring found that 21% of 15-24 year olds had experienced discrimination or unfair treatment because of their disability in the previous 12 months.<sup>13</sup> People with disability aged 15 and over who were attending an educational institute for non-school qualifications experienced discrimination at a rate of 19% in the previous 12 months and, 24% of which reported the source of the discrimination was the teacher or lecturer.<sup>14</sup>

Studies over many years have shown that inclusive education facilities for students with disability allows for positive effects in academic achievement, communication, social engagement and behavioural advancement.<sup>15</sup> Research shows students who feel more involved and accepted in school have better interpersonal relationships and more community ties.<sup>16</sup>

The growing notion that inclusive education provides a greater chance for success has derived from an increasing understanding that young people with disability thrive when given equivalent social and educational opportunities as their peers. Potential positive educational outcomes for young people with disability include stronger skills in reading and mathematics, higher attendance, lower behavioural issues and better chances of completion of secondary school. Socially, students with disability find more social connections in inclusive education, higher rates of post-secondary education opportunities, and increased outcomes of employment and independence.<sup>17</sup> There is also evidence that educational inclusion can reduce the rates of bullying, as young people who attend 'special' facilities have a higher chance of experiencing bullying than those in mainstream schooling.<sup>18</sup> It is therefore important that adaptations be made in the classroom for students with disability in order to allow the most equal and inclusive education to fulfil their individual needs.<sup>19</sup>

Educational inclusion should expand past secondary school through to university, Technical and Further Education (TAFE), and Vocational Education and Training (VET) options for young people with disability. Encouragingly, the proportion of students with disability enrolled in Australian universities has increased from 4% in 2007 to 6% in 2014.<sup>20</sup> In addition, over close to 50, 000 students with disability were enrolled at TAFE in NSW alone in 2018-19, which offers varying services and supports for students with disability, including financial support on fees.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Australian Federation Disability Organisations 2013, 4

<sup>12</sup> Centre for Applied Disability Research

<sup>13</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2015

<sup>14</sup> Joenpera and Murdoch 2016, 4

<sup>15</sup> Cologon et al. 2019, 8, 9

<sup>16</sup> Truscott et al. 2014, 14

<sup>17</sup> AllMeansAll 2017

<sup>18</sup> Cologon et al. 2019, 9

<sup>19</sup> Lansdown et al. 2013, 22, 23

<sup>20</sup> Cunninghame et al. 2016, 9

<sup>21</sup> TAFE NSW 2019

## Employment

Employment for young people with disability can offer a source of financial independence, as well as increasing the likelihood for an improved standard of living and better physical and mental health. Beyond this, employment can offer people with disability expanded social networks and increase their social skills, confidence and wellbeing.<sup>22</sup>

Educational attainment continues to have a strong influence on the level of workforce participation of young people with disability, as do other workforce factors.<sup>23</sup> In the 2012 ABS report on Disability and Labour Force Participation, approximately 57% of young people aged 15 to 24 with disability participated in the labour force, compared to 71% of young people without disability.<sup>24</sup>

More could be done to improve post-school transitional programs for young people with disability in Australia. Many young people's post school transition experiences are reported as very poor, and recent studies have concluded that hardly any information is provided on options for employment programs for those with disability after school.<sup>25</sup> Apprenticeships and traineeships are important options. Research has found that young people with disability who have completed apprenticeships or traineeships showed similar rates of full-time employment as students without a disability. However, only a small proportion (1.6%) of individuals attending the programs were people with disability.<sup>26</sup>

Many people with disability display an ability and willingness to work, yet have to rely on the Disability Support Pension due to limited employment options and high costs of living.<sup>27</sup> According to the *SHUT OUT* report, a transition from receiving the Disability Support Pension to paid employment can create high transitional costs, consisting of unaffordable transport and disability support service fees.<sup>28</sup>

### Barriers to employment

A large proportion of people with disability in the workforce also display the desire to work more hours. According to the ABS, 32% of people with disability working part-time wanted to work more hours, compared to 27% of people without disability.<sup>29</sup> There are a range of systemic barriers for people with disability that make it difficult to pursue working more hours, or to enter the workforce in the first place. This includes misconceptions, stigma and discrimination by employers, and the impression that there are high costs related to modifications and adaptations required by technology to accommodate people with disability in employment. On top of this, there are also limitations for people with disability travelling to work using public transport, creating further barriers to some employment.<sup>30</sup>

Experiencing discrimination from an employer is fairly common for people with disability. In 2018, the Survey of Disability, Ageing and Caring (SDAC) reported that people with disability between the ages of 15 and 64 experienced discrimination in the labour force.<sup>31</sup> Discrimination in the labour force was most commonly reported from the employer at a rate of 40%, as well as

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<sup>22</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012

<sup>23</sup> Australian Federation Disability Organisations 2013, 3

<sup>24</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2015

<sup>25</sup> Pelling 2015, 11

<sup>26</sup> Pelling 2015, 26

<sup>27</sup> National People with Disabilities and Carer Council 2009, 6

<sup>28</sup> National People with Disabilities and Carer Council 2009, 35

<sup>29</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2015

<sup>30</sup> Pelling 2015, 29

<sup>31</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2015

from work colleagues at a rate of 35%.<sup>32</sup> A fear of discrimination and lack of confidence can also create reluctance for some to enter into a work environment.<sup>33</sup>

## Personal concerns

Young people with disability are at greater risk of having mental health problems than are their peers.<sup>34</sup> Mental health problems can impact children and young people at a personal, social and economic level, as well as reduce their life expectancy including young people with disability.<sup>35</sup> When experienced early in life, mental illness can seriously derail pathways into adulthood through poor academic performance, higher levels of school drop-out and absenteeism, unemployment, interpersonal problems, increased risk of substance use and an increased likelihood of self-harm.<sup>36</sup> Research also found that mental disorders remain the leading cause of disability in children aged under 15 years.<sup>37</sup>

Engaging in professional help early can reduce the long-term impact of many mental health problems and protect against the development of more severe forms of mental disorders. According to the *Young Minds Matter* report, many more families are now receiving professional help compared to 15 years ago, yet there remains a significant need to increase the availability and uptake of services when mental health problems are first developing and services are most needed.<sup>38</sup>

Findings from the 2007 National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing suggest that, among young people aged 16–24 years who had a diagnosable common mental disorder in the last 12 months, three quarters had not accessed formal mental health services for their condition, and half of these had tried to manage their symptoms themselves.<sup>39</sup> These rates are likely to be lower for young people with disability. There are many reasons for this behaviour, including low levels of mental health knowledge and literacy, beliefs about having little need for help versus having a need for autonomy, and the process of help-negation where symptoms of psychological distress themselves may hinder young people with disability from seeking help.<sup>40</sup>

Many young people face considerable physical, attitudinal and structural barriers that prevent them from accessing services that may address their personal concerns. These barriers need to be addressed to ensure young people with disability are provided with the necessary supports at the earliest possible point in time.

## Sources of support

As with all young people, it's important that young people with disability have a strong support system to turn to when in need of assistance and care. Support can come from a range of sources, such as family, friends, teachers, peers, community and government agencies.<sup>41</sup> All young people deserve to feel supported and safe in every stage of their day to day life.

However, formal support can be difficult to navigate and access. In a consultation conducted by Youth Action in 2019, half of the respondents claimed that the information in Australia regarding services for people with disability was difficult to understand and inaccessible for young people, creating a barrier to attaining services. This same consultation noted an even more

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<sup>32</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2019

<sup>33</sup> Pelling 2015, 29

<sup>34</sup> Kariuki 2011, 90-101

<sup>35</sup> Erskine et al. 2015; Lawrence et al. 2015

<sup>36</sup> National Research Council (US) 2009; Lawrence et al. 2015

<sup>37</sup> Goodsell et al. 2017

<sup>38</sup> Lawrence et al. 2015

<sup>39</sup> Wilson et al. 2010

<sup>40</sup> Olesen et al. 2010

<sup>41</sup> Wayland and Hindmarsh 2017, 1

concerning finding: 100% of those that accessed youth services, reported that they encountered obstacles. Additionally, Youth Action found that only one in five young people said they felt comfortable, if they couldn't find a service, in trying to report what adjustments were needed or to further seek support.<sup>42</sup>

Social networks can also be a strong daily support system by allowing an individual to feel included, accepted and appreciated by others. Maintaining social networks in the community is important for a majority of people with disability.<sup>43</sup> The ABS reports that 83% of people with disability nominated a family member as their main source of support, as well as 73% friends. In comparison, 90% of people without disability would nominate a family member, as well as 90% friends. The ABS also reported that 90% of those with severe or profound disability claimed having a source of support in circumstances of a crisis, but for those with severe psychological impairments 82% claimed having a source of support, compared to 95% of people with no disability.<sup>44</sup>

“I need to be sociable with people and do my best. There is no cure [for autism] but I can ask people to help me out with stuff that I cannot do. Friends are important because I don't have any family here” Male, 15

Having a family member or friend to turn to in time of crisis is especially important for young people with disability, as they are more likely to experience multiple challenges compared to their peers without disability. For example, the Disability Services Commission of Western Australia reported that young people with disability were nearly four times more likely to experience violence. This includes over four times greater risk of emotional abuse, nearly three times higher risk of sexual violence, and more than three times greater risk physical violence.<sup>45</sup>

## Experience of bullying

According to the national definition of bullying for schools, ‘bullying is an ongoing and deliberate misuse of power in relationships through repeated verbal, physical and/or social behaviour that intends to cause physical, social and/or psychological harm’.<sup>46</sup> A report on anti-bullying in Australian schools, conducted by the University of South Australia, found that school students with disability experienced bullying more frequently than others, but they were not more likely to feel unsafe than others.<sup>47</sup>

One of the most prevalent reasons young people with disability avoid or drop out of the school system is because of stigma, prejudice and bullying, not because they are doing poorly academically.<sup>48</sup> A growing body of evidence suggests young people with disability experience far more bullying than their peers without disability. One Australian study found that children with disability between the ages of four to five, eight to nine, and 12 to 13 were bullied at a rate of 61%, compared to a rate of 54% for children without disability. In this study, children between the ages of 12 and 13 experienced bullying the most in the form of social victimisation, where peers prevented others from befriending those with disability or did not allow them to be included in activities.

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<sup>42</sup> Youth Action 2019, 5

<sup>43</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011c

<sup>44</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011d

<sup>45</sup> Wayland and Hindmarsh 2017, 4

<sup>46</sup> Bullying No Way 2020, 1

<sup>47</sup> Rigby et al. 2016, 9, 27

<sup>48</sup> Lansdown et al. 2013, 21

The results of bullying and discrimination have life-long negative impacts amongst young people with disability socially, emotionally, educationally and in terms of their health. Those who experience bullying are far more susceptible to mental illness, suicide and poor social engagement. Bullying ranges from physical, to social, to name calling, and exclusion, and puts young people at high risk of bad health, chronic disease and negative social employment outcomes.<sup>49</sup> Bullying can lead to negative effects on mental health and wellbeing, and can cause poor self-esteem; these effects can contribute to mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. These mental health issues and others are more likely to occur among young people with intellectual or physical disability as a result of bullying.<sup>50</sup>

## Participation in activities

Inclusion in activities beyond the classroom can strongly improve the wellbeing of young people with disability. Participation in community activities, such as sports, events and social groups, are important components of inclusion for young people with disability.<sup>51</sup> Young people with disability report they experience significant satisfaction in non-academic activities, retaining a sense of value, identity, and stronger self-esteem.<sup>52</sup> However, they face challenges in participating equally in the community because of barriers which need to be addressed if positive outcomes are to be achieved and sustained.

A 2015 survey reported by the AIHW noted that about 30% of Australians with disability and 51% with profound or severe limitation in the community, ages 15-64, claimed to not go out as much as they desired. Roughly 54% of the respondents reported that their disability was the reason for not getting out as much, and this was even higher for those with profound or severe limitation, at 67%.<sup>53</sup> Both of these groups reported fear and anxiety about leaving their homes, as well as cost and affordability as barriers. Furthermore, a quarter faced difficulty accessing buildings and facilities, two in five avoided visiting their family and friends and community activities because of their disability, and one in seven encountered discrimination.<sup>54</sup> Built environments may serve as a barrier for people with disability participating in day-to-day activities, and modifications should be made to accommodate people of all abilities.<sup>55</sup>

Community and group engagement is very important, however people with disability are not as likely to participate in social groups as compared to those without disability.<sup>56</sup> According to a 2011 ABS survey of 'Active Involvement in Groups', attendance at health promotional activities, support groups or welfare organizations was more likely among people with severe or profound limitations. This differed from people without disability, who participated in more activities related to education, training, parenting, child or youth groups. The same survey reported that participation of young people with disability in community groups serves as an impactful development opportunity to learn democratic skills and the capacity to take part in political life.<sup>57</sup> Along with participation in group activities, active involvement in community events can also lead to more social interaction for people with disability.<sup>58</sup>

"People need to be educated more on ASD [*autism spectrum disorder*] so they know how to deal with it."  
Female, 16

<sup>49</sup> Kavanagh et al. 2018, 332, 333

<sup>50</sup> Queensland Government 2016

<sup>51</sup> Joenpera and Murdoch 2017, 1

<sup>52</sup> Truscott et al. 2014, 20

<sup>53</sup> Truscott et al. 2014, 20

<sup>54</sup> Joenpera and Murdoch 2017, 2, 4, 5

<sup>55</sup> Joenpera and Murdoch 2017, 5

<sup>56</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011a

<sup>57</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011a

<sup>58</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011b

An ABS survey from 2009 found 'Participation in Sports' was much lower among people with disability, than people without disability (53% compared to 68%). In the same report, the highest rate of people with disability that participated in sports activities was in the 25-34 age bracket, and the 18 to 24 age bracket for people without disability.<sup>59</sup> However, according to the ABS 2006 General Social Survey, people with disability showed higher rates of participation in community organizations and groups, while people without disability showed lower rates in participation.<sup>60</sup> Although people with disability would like to leave their homes and participate in activities far more frequently than they do, impediments like limited accessibility, lack of inclusion and discrimination impose restraints.<sup>61</sup>

## Community inclusion

According to the US Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), disability inclusion means 'making sure everybody has the same opportunities to participate in every aspect of life to the best of their abilities and desires'.<sup>62</sup> In order to maintain a sense of inclusion in Australian society, various components of everyday life are required in order to offer a safe and accommodating environment. Inclusion in social, educational and employment settings is important for young people with disability, as unequal treatment allows poor treatment for those with disability leading to friendlessness and bullying.<sup>63</sup> Community inclusion is also influenced by access to health services. People with disability are often prevented from receiving the required health care by physical and organisational barriers such as inadequate transportation, failed communication and discrimination among healthcare providers.<sup>64</sup> In addition to attainable transport for health services, accessibility to public transport offers connection to other major components that impact one's health and wellbeing, such as employment and education.<sup>65</sup>

The ABS reported in 2015 that 40.2% of people aged five years and older that have a disability used public transport. A large majority (79%) reported being able to use every kind of public transportation and 70% of people with disability reported having no difficulty using public transport. Although the proportions are high, improvement is still needed, as 6.1% of people with disability reported they could not use all forms of public transportation and 14.7% reported they couldn't use any. The obstacles experienced by people with disability who had trouble accessing public transportation were issues due to steps, trouble getting to stops or stations, fear and anxiety, and a lack of seats or trouble standing.<sup>66</sup> It is essential that public transport accommodates everyone, as specialised transport is very costly and can lead to families and carers being caught in debt or poverty.<sup>67</sup>

Inclusion in society goes past overcoming physical barriers, but also involves overcoming misconceptions and discrimination within our society. Although Australians with disability are protected by the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, people with disability still experience discrimination, and avoid community engagement because of the fear of discrimination. According to a survey conducted by the ABS in 2018, about 33% of people with disability aged 15 and older did not attend social situations because of their disability. Of this population, 51% of people aged 15 to 24 avoided social situations, compared to 21% of people

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<sup>59</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009

<sup>60</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011a

<sup>61</sup> Joenpera and Murdoch 2017, 4, 5

<sup>62</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2019

<sup>63</sup> Truscott et al. 2014, 47

<sup>64</sup> Victorian Health Promotion Foundation 2012, 4

<sup>65</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016a

<sup>66</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016a

<sup>67</sup> National People with Disabilities and Carer Council 2009, 35

65 and older.<sup>68</sup> Participation in community institutions can have a positive impact on a person's mental health.<sup>69</sup> On the other hand, poor mental health is often associated with social exclusion, discrimination and bullying.<sup>70</sup>

## Wellbeing, happiness, and the future

It is important that all young people feel included and valued in a society, a sense of belonging, connection with others, genuine wellbeing, happiness, and hopefulness for the future. Unfortunately, in some cases young people feel alienated from society as a result of stigmatization and discrimination.<sup>71</sup>

Health is extremely important to wellbeing and happiness. According to the AIHW, among people between 15 and 64 years old, 42% of people with severe or profound disability reported poor or fair health, compared to 7% of people without disability.<sup>72</sup> The survey of *Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia* (HILDA) concluded that of young people with disability between the ages of 15 and 29, 15% had poor psychological health, compared to only 8% of their peers without disability.<sup>73</sup> Finding the stressors of young people and what key driving factors lead to poor mental health and low self-esteem is important in preventing feelings of hopelessness and low wellbeing among young people with disability.

Wellbeing extends beyond one's overall health to relationships, employment and general inclusion. The HILDA data shows that adolescents and young adults with disability, long-term health conditions or impairment reported a more than twice as likely to experience negativity that affected their wellbeing. The contributing factors consisted of being dissatisfied with their friendships, experiencing poorer general health, being unemployed, being dissatisfied with their employment opportunities, living in unsafe areas, being 'poor' or 'very poor', being dissatisfied with life overall and having poorer mental health.<sup>74</sup>

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People with Disability

The rate of disability among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is generally under-reported due to concerns of further discrimination.<sup>75</sup> However, among those who do report conditions, more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people report they have disability than do non-Indigenous people. In the 2012 ABS survey, of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 to 34, approximately 12.7% reported having disability, compared to about 8.1% of non-Indigenous people.<sup>76</sup>

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability were found to be 1.3 times more likely than non-Indigenous people with disability to have reported Year 10 or below as their highest level of educational attainment (59.7% compared with 45.1%), and were less than half as likely to have a bachelor degree or higher (6.3% compared with 13.0%).<sup>77</sup>

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people also share a history of intergenerational trauma, challenges to wellbeing associated with intergenerational poverty, and challenges with identity, discrimination and racism. Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can face discrimination and systemic barriers on the basis of both their Aboriginal and Torres Strait

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<sup>68</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2019

<sup>69</sup> The Department of Health 2008a

<sup>70</sup> The Department of Health 2008b

<sup>71</sup> Truscott et al. 2014, 14

<sup>72</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019, 4

<sup>73</sup> Emerson et al. 2012, 180

<sup>74</sup> Emerson et al. 2008, 4, 6

<sup>75</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016b

<sup>76</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017

<sup>77</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012

Islander identity and their disability, which can be compounded with marginalisation to create further implications and hardships.

It is essential that services and supports provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are disability accessible, culturally appropriate and work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

This Youth Survey report considers the similarities and differences between young people who reported having disability compared with those who reported no disability. In particular, we focus on: their engagement with education and employment; their concerns, wellbeing and sense of efficacy over their lives; as well as their support systems. As the above discussion has demonstrated, the experiences and transition into adulthood of young people with disability may be much more complex than those without disability. The purpose of this report is to bring their stories to light, in order to advocate for programs and policies that address their needs.

# Method

In 2019, Mission Australia conducted its 18th annual survey of young people, receiving 25,126 responses from young people aged 15-19 years.

As well as collecting valuable socio-demographic data, the *Youth Survey 2019* sought to capture the views and perspectives of young people on a broad range of issues. Topics covered by the survey include education and employment, perceived barriers to achieving post-school plans, participation in community activities, general wellbeing, values and concerns, preferred sources of support, as well as feelings about the future.

This year, a cluster of questions focussed on disability: two questions were directed to all survey respondents to capture perceptions of community support for people who live with disability and general perceptions of unfair treatment of people living with disability. An additional question was directed specifically to respondents who reported having disability that asked about challenges they face around access, independence and inclusion.

In this report, we discuss the experiences and aspirations of *Youth Survey 2019* participants who reported having disability, and compare these responses to participants who reported no disability. Those who did not answer the disability question are excluded from the analysis. It should be noted that the composition of this sample reflects only the *Youth Survey 2019* participants who self-reported disability and while it is not a representative sample of young people with disability or of the Australian population more generally, it still gives us a rich snapshot of the issues and challenges facing our young people with disability.

## Definitional points

Disability is a complex, contested, evolving concept as described above.

The main categories of disability are physical, sensory, psychiatric, neurological, cognitive and intellectual. Many people with disability have multiple disability. A physical disability is the most common type, followed by intellectual and sensory disability. Physical disability generally relates to disorders of the musculoskeletal, circulatory, respiratory and nervous systems. Sensory disability involves impairments in hearing and vision.<sup>78</sup>

Neurological and cognitive disability includes acquired disability such as multiple sclerosis or traumatic brain injury. Intellectual disability includes intellectual and developmental disability, which relate to difficulties with thought processes, learning, communicating, remembering information and using it appropriately, making judgments and problem solving. Intellectual disability is the result of interaction between developmentally attributable cognitive impairment, attitudinal and environmental barriers. Psychiatric disorders resulting in disability may include anxiety disorders, phobias or depression.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Department of Communities WA

<sup>79</sup> Department of Communities WA

# Results

## Demographics

Out of a total sample of 25,126 *Youth Survey 2019* respondents, 1,623 (6.5%) young people reported having disability and 23,057 (91.3%) young people reported no disability.

Close to half (48.7%) of respondents who reported having disability were male and 38.6% were female.

13.8% of respondents who reported having disability identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

The most frequently cited disabilities were (in order of frequency): autism, learning disability, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), physical disability and anxiety disorder.

## Education

### Participation in education

The majority (84.6%) of young people with disability were studying full-time. This is lower than the proportion of young people without disability (94.0%). Over double the amount of young people with disability reported not studying compared with those without disability (9.4% compared with 3.6%).

**Table 1: Participation in education**

	Young people with disability %	Young people without disability %
Studying full-time	84.6	94.0
Studying part-time	6.0	2.4
Not studying	9.4	3.6

### Study satisfaction

Table 2 shows that close to six in 10 (57.0%) young people who reported having disability said that they were *very satisfied* (11.6%) or *satisfied* (45.4%) with their studies, which is much lower than for young people without disability (68.3%). Over twice the proportion of respondents with disability were either *dissatisfied* or *very dissatisfied* with their studies (16.1% compared with 6.9% of participants without disability).

A total of 91.8% of respondents with disability who were still at school planned to complete Year 12 (lower compared with participants without disability: 96.2%).

**Table 2: Satisfaction with studies**

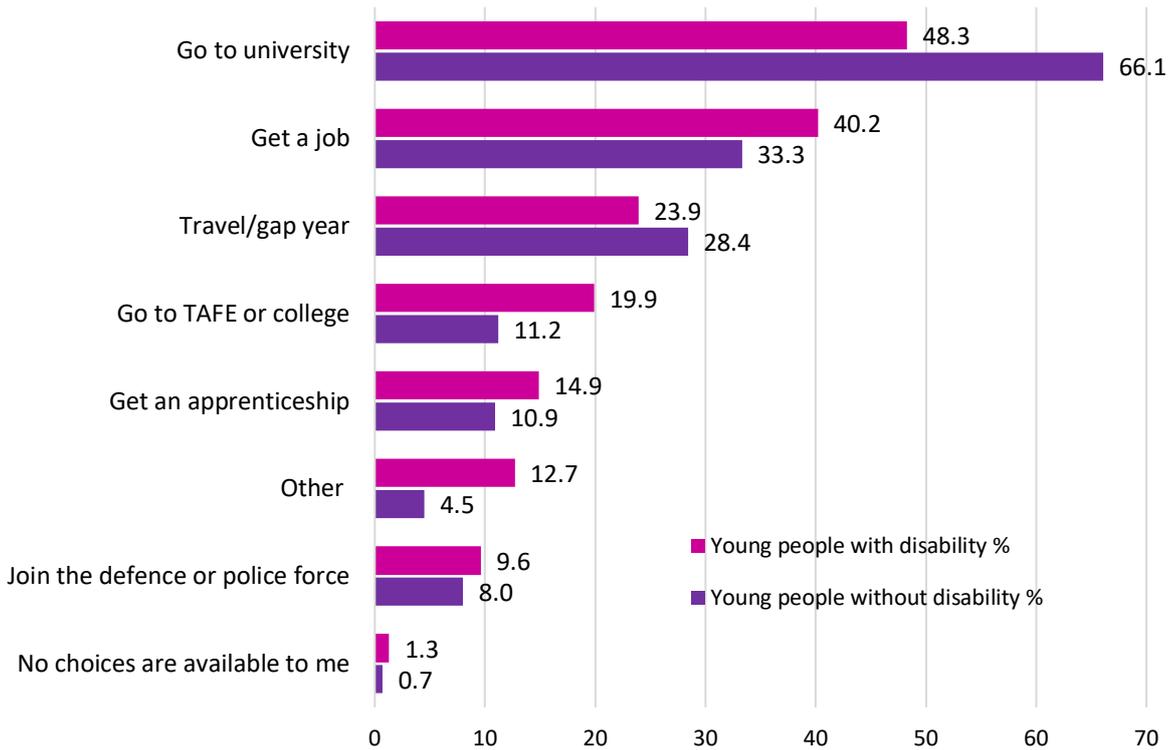
	Young people with disability %	Young people without disability %
Very satisfied	11.6	12.2
Satisfied	45.4	56.1
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	27.9	24.8
Dissatisfied	9.3	5.4
Very dissatisfied	5.8	1.5

### Plans after leaving school

The most frequently reported post-school plan for young people who reported having disability was to *go to university* (48.3%). This was much lower when compared with responses from participants without disability: 66.1%. Conversely, higher proportions of young people with disability planned to *go to TAFE or college* (19.9% compared with 11.2% of participants without disability) or to *get a job* (40.2% compared with 33.3%).

Young people were also able to select the response option *other* which allowed for a free-text response. For young people with disability, most free-text responses showed that they are unsure about what they would like to do after school, but they also revealed a desire to pursue a creative or athletic interest.

Figure 1: Plans after leaving school

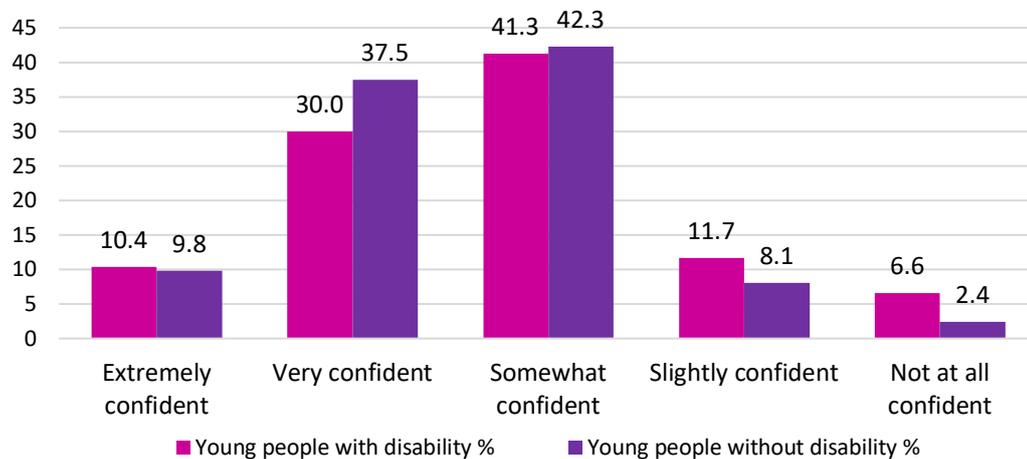


Note: Respondents were able to choose more than one option. Items are listed in order of frequency among respondents with disability.

## How confident are young people with disability in achieving their study/work goals?

Respondents were asked how confident they were in their ability to achieve their study/work goals after school. As shown in Figure 2, four in 10 (40.4%) respondents with disability indicated high levels of confidence in their ability to achieve their study/work goals, with 10.4% indicating that they were *extremely confident* and 30.0% indicating that they were *very confident*. This is lower than responses from young people without disability (47.3%).

Figure 2: Confidence in achieving post-school goals



## Barriers to the achievement of post-school goals

Young people were asked whether they felt there were any barriers that may impact upon the achievement of their study/work goals after finishing school. More than six in 10 (63.7%) respondents with disability indicated that they felt there were barriers that would impact upon the achievement of their study/work goals after finishing school. This is notably higher compared with respondents without disability (48.1%).

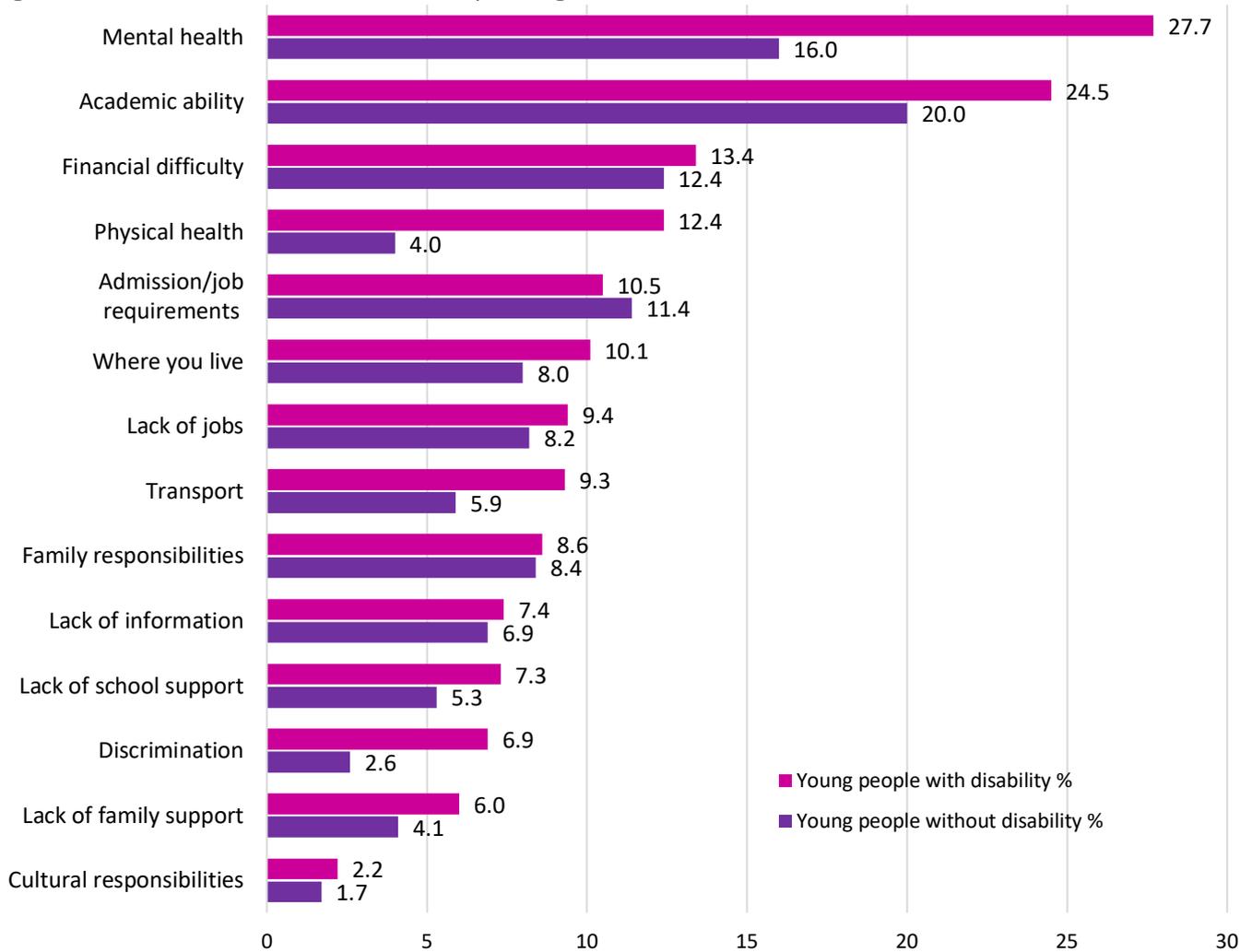
All respondents who stated that they felt there were barriers were then asked to indicate from a number of items the barrier/s that may impact upon the achievement of their post-school goals. Figure 3 shows the percentage of respondents who reported each item was a barrier. Overall, a higher proportion of young people with disability indicated that most items were barriers to achieving their study/work goals, compared with young people without disability.

Close to three in 10 (27.7%) young people with disability saw *mental health* as a barrier to achieving their post-school study/work goals (compared with 16.0% of respondents without disability).

Close to one in four (24.5%) respondents with disability saw *academic ability* as a barrier to achieving their study/work goals after school (compared with 20.0% of young people without disability).

Three times the proportion of respondents with disability saw *physical health* as a barrier to achieving their study/work goals after school (12.4% compared with 4.0% of young people without disability).

Figure 3: Barriers to the achievement of study/work goals



Note: Respondents were able to choose more than one option. Items are listed in order of frequency among young people with disability.

## Employment

Respondents were asked if they had paid employment and, if so, to specify how many hours they worked in an average week. Only a small number of respondents reported that they were employed full-time. Given the percentage of respondents who were in full-time education, this is not surprising. The proportion of young people with disability who participated in part-time employment was much lower than for their peers without disability (31.1% compared with 44.0%). A greater proportion of respondents with disability reported that they were not in paid employment but looking for work (39.9% compared with 34.0% of respondents without disability). A higher proportion of respondents with disability also reported that they were neither working nor looking for work (27.1% compared with 21.4%).

Table 3: Participation in paid employment

	Young people with disability %	Young people without disability %
Employed full-time	1.9	0.7
Employed part-time	31.1	44.0
Not in paid employment, looking for work	39.9	34.0
Not in paid employment, NOT looking for work	27.1	21.4

Note: Part-time employment is considered to be less than 35 hours per week, while full-time employment is considered to be 35 hours or more.

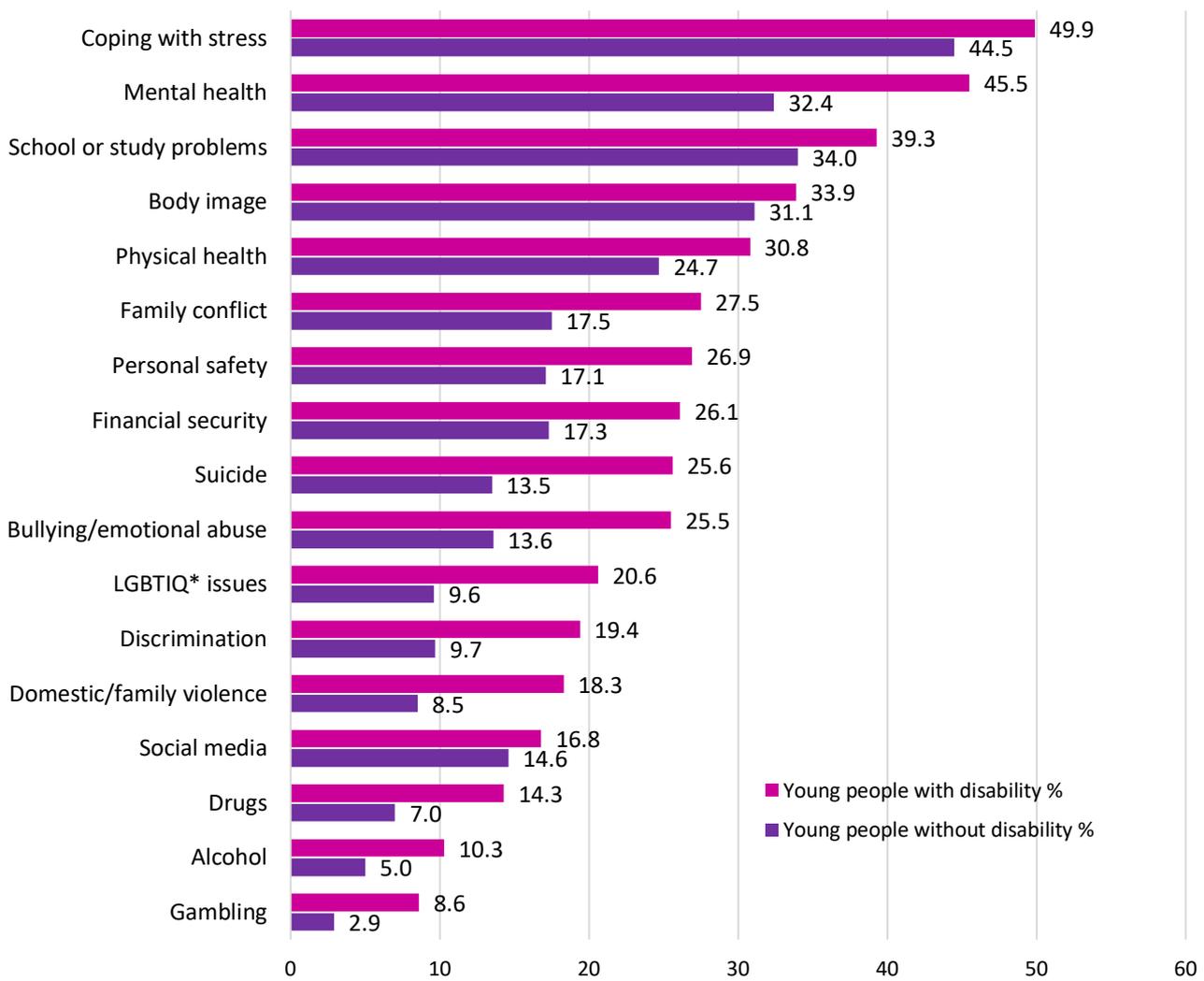
## Personal Concerns

The *Youth Survey* collects information on concerns through two different questions. First, we ask young people how personally concerned they were about a number of issues on a five-point scale (from *extremely concerned* to *not at all concerned*). The responses in Figure 4 below combine the *extremely* and *very concerned* responses. Secondly, we ask young people what they see are the most important issues facing Australia today (see Table 4).

*Coping with stress* was listed as the top item of personal concern for all participants, however a higher proportion of young people with disability indicated that they were either *extremely* or *very concerned* about it (49.9% compared with 44.5% of young people without disability).

Much higher proportions of young people who reported having disability listed *mental health*, *suicide* and *bullying/emotional abuse* as issues of personal concern (45.5%, 25.6% and 25.5% compared with 32.4%, 13.5% and 13.6% of participants without disability).

Figure 4: Issues of personal concern to young people



Note: Items were ranked according to the summed responses for *extremely concerned* and *very concerned* for each item, in order of frequency among respondents with disability. \*Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Queer (LGBTIQ) issues.

Young people were asked to list the three issues they considered were the most important in Australia today. The information provided by respondents was categorised and is listed in order of frequency among young people with disability in Table 4. In 2019, the top three issues identified by young people with disability were *mental health*, *the environment* and *alcohol and drugs*.

Around three in 10 young people with disability indicated that *mental health* (29.9%) and *the environment* (28.6%) are important issues in Australia today (compared with 36.7% and 34.7% of participants without disability).

Close to one in five respondents with disability reported that *alcohol and drugs* (18.9%) and *equity and discrimination* (18.8%) are important national issues (compared with 20.9% and 25.3% of participants without disability).

**Table 4: Most important issues in Australia today**

	Young people with disability %	Young people without disability %
<b>Mental health</b>	<b>29.9</b>	<b>36.7</b>
<b>The environment</b>	<b>28.6</b>	<b>34.7</b>
<b>Alcohol and drugs</b>	<b>18.9</b>	20.9
Equity and discrimination	18.8	<b>25.3</b>
The economy and financial matters	14.3	14.5
Politics	13.7	10.7
Education	10.1	9.0
Bullying	10.0	11.9
Crime, safety and violence	9.9	12.4
LGBTIQ* issues	9.3	6.6

Note: Items are listed in order of frequency among young people with disability.

\*Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Queer (LGBTIQ) issues.

## Sources of support

Respondents were asked to indicate, out of a number of sources, where they would go for help with important issues in their lives. Figure 5 shows the percentage of respondents who indicated that they would go to identified sources for help.

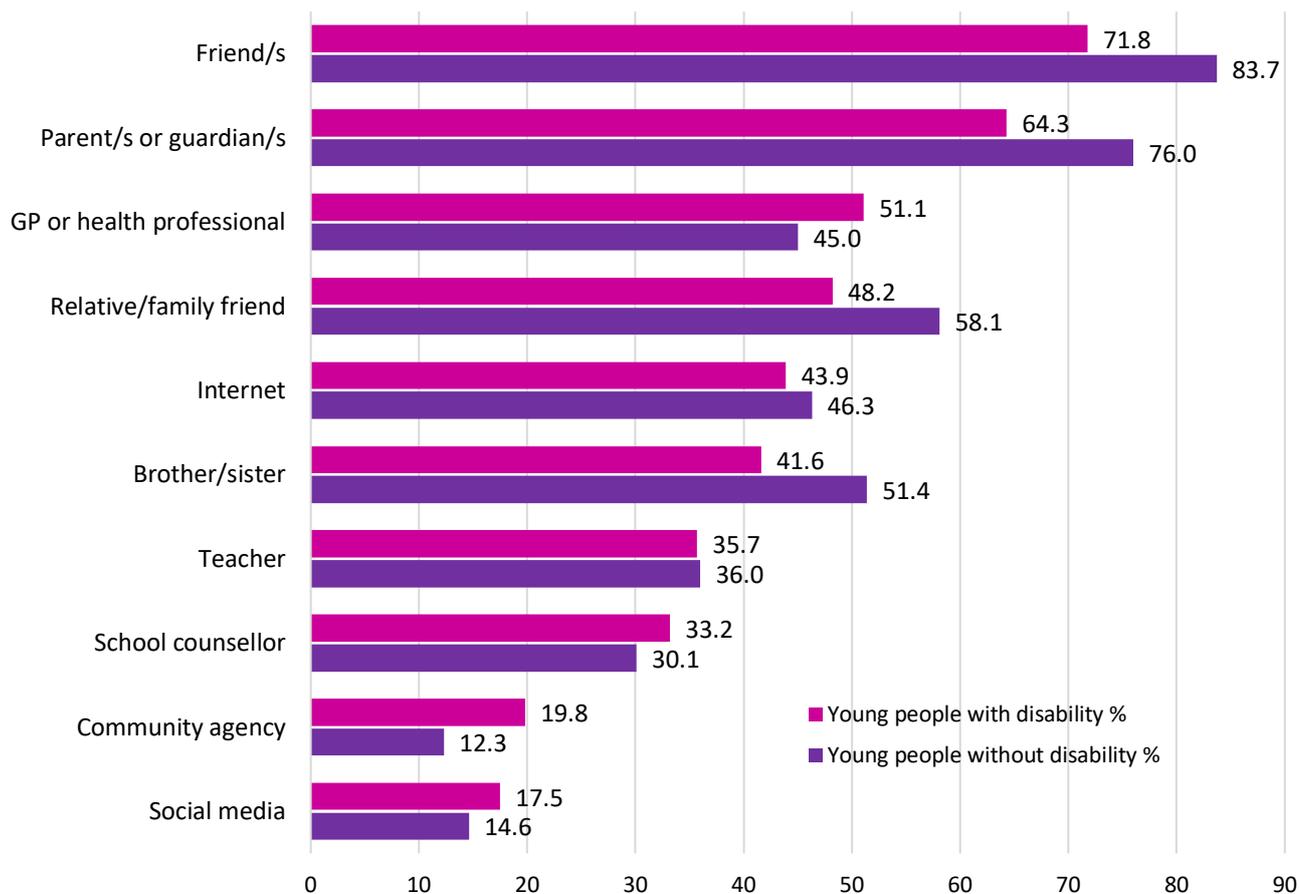
*Friend/s* (71.8%), *parent/s or guardian/s* (64.3%) and *GP or health professional* (51.1%) were the three most frequently cited sources of help for young people with disability.

Young people with disability were less likely than respondents without disability to turn to close personal connections for help or support with important issues, particularly their *friend/s* (71.8%), *parent/s or guardian/s* (64.3%) or a *relative/family friend* (48.2%) (compared with 83.7%, 76.0% and 58.1% respectively).

A higher proportion of young people with disability indicated they would turn to a *community agency* (19.8%) or a *GP or health professional* (51.1%) for help with important issues (compared with 12.3% and 45.0% of respondents without disability).

“Teachers and students need to be more educated and considerate towards learning disabilities such as autism.”  
Female, 16

Figure 5: Where young people go for help with important issues



Note: Items are listed in order of frequency among young people with disability.

## Experience of bullying

### Have young people experienced bullying?

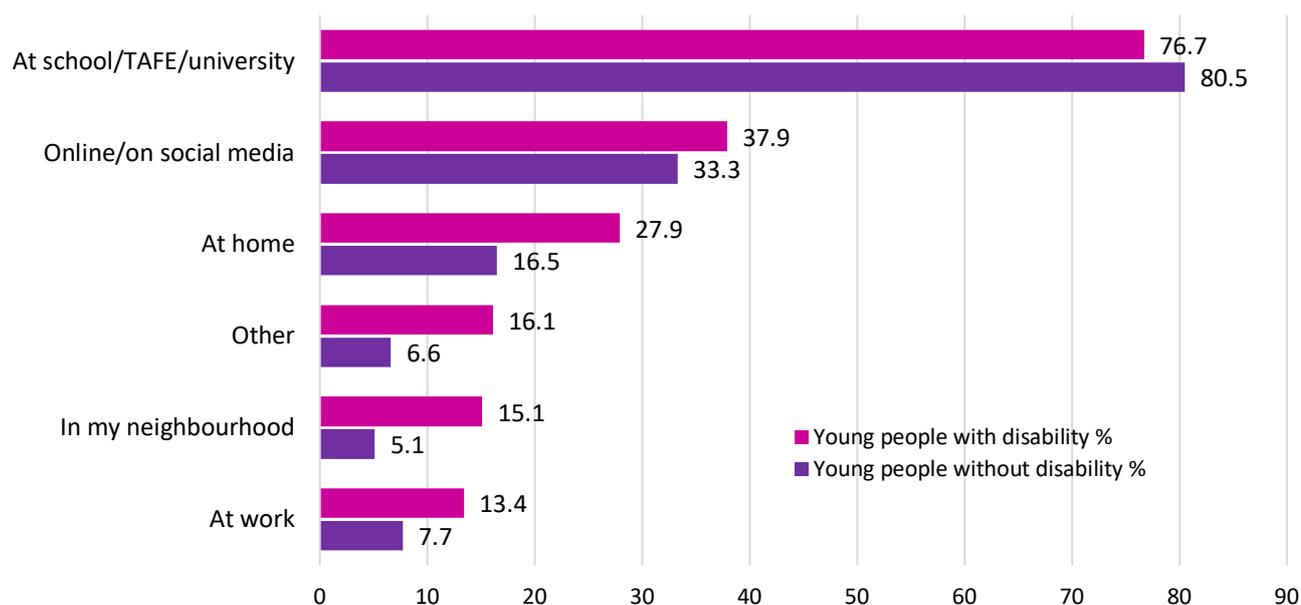
Young people were asked whether they had experienced bullying over the past twelve months. Compared with respondents without disability, more than twice the proportion of young people with disability reported that they had experienced bullying in the past twelve months (43.4% compared with 19.3%).

### Where have young people experienced bullying?

Young people who reported that they had experienced bullying over the past year were then asked to identify from a list of locations where the bullying took place. Figure 6 shows that, of the 43.4% of respondents with disability who had experienced bullying in the past year, close to eight in 10 (76.7%) reported that the bullying took place *at school/TAFE/university*. Close to four in 10 (37.9%) indicated they had experienced bullying *online/on social media*, while around three in 10 (27.9%) stated they had experienced bullying *at home*.

Notably higher proportions of young people with disability who had experienced bullying reported that they experienced this *at home* or *in my neighbourhood* compared with those who did not report a disability (27.9% and 15.1% compared with 16.5% and 5.1% of respondents without disability).

Figure 6: Locations of bullying in the past twelve months



Note: Respondents were able to choose more than one option

### What kinds of bullying have young people experienced?

Young people who reported that they had experienced bullying over the past year were also asked to identify the kind/s of bullying that they had experienced from a list of suggested items. Of the 43.4% of respondents with disability who had experienced bullying in the past year, Table 5 shows that 75.0% young people reported that they experienced *verbal bullying* (e.g. name calling, teasing). Over six in ten (63.1%) indicated they had experienced *social bullying* (e.g. rumours, being embarrassed or excluded), while more than four in ten (42.0%) reported they had experienced *cyberbullying* (e.g. hurtful messages, pictures or comments).

Notably higher proportions of young people with disability who had experienced bullying reported that they had experienced *physical bullying* (e.g. hitting, punching) or *cyberbullying* (e.g. hurtful messages, pictures or comments) (34.1% and 42.0% compared with 19.5% and 35.7% of respondents without disability).

Table 5: Kinds of bullying in the past twelve months

	Young people with disability %	Young people without disability %
Verbal (e.g. name calling, teasing)	75.0	71.0
Social (e.g. rumours, being embarrassed or excluded)	63.1	61.1
Cyberbullying (e.g. hurtful messages, pictures or comments)	42.0	35.7
Physical (e.g. hitting, punching)	34.1	19.5
Other	14.0	4.3

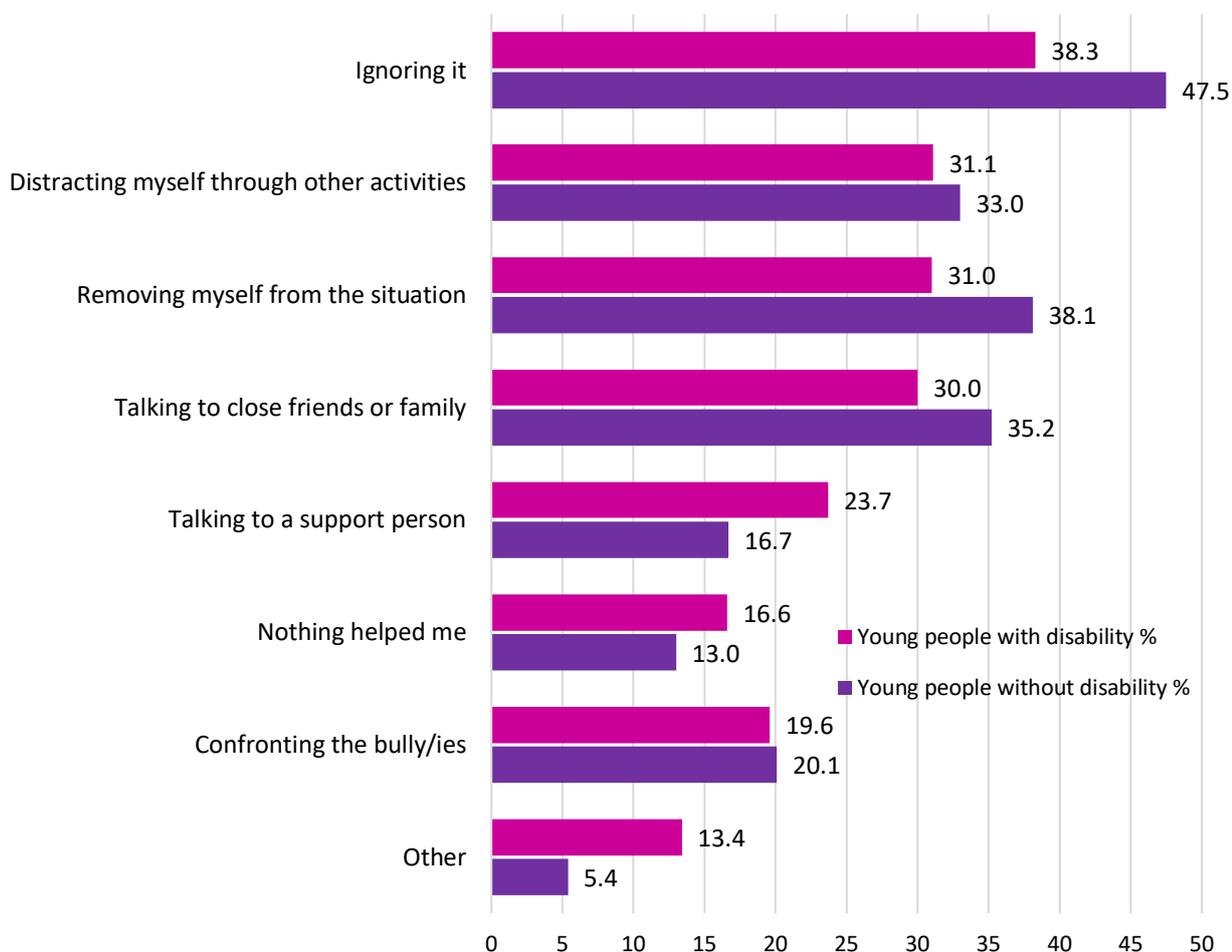
Note: Respondents were able to choose more than one option.

### What helped young people to deal with their experience of bullying?

Young people who reported that they had experienced bullying over the past year were then asked about what helped them to deal with their bullying experience from a list of suggested items, as shown in Figure 7. For the 43.4% of respondents who had been bullied in the past year, the top three methods that helped them deal with bullying were *ignoring it* (38.3%), *removing myself from the situation* (31.0%) and *distracting myself through other activities* (31.1%).

There were notable differences between what helped respondents with disability and respondents without disability deal with their experience of bullying. Notably lower proportions of young people with disability reported *ignoring it* (38.3% compared with 47.5% of young people without disability), *removing myself from the situation* (31.0% compared with 38.1%) and *talking to close friends or family* (30.0% compared with 35.2%) helped them deal with their experience of bullying. Conversely, higher proportions of respondents with disability reported that they dealt with bullying by *talking to a support person* (23.7% compared with 16.7% of young people without disability).

**Figure 7: Strategies that helped young people most to deal with bullying**



Note: Respondents were able to choose more than one option. Items are listed in order of frequency among young people with disability.

### Have young people witnessed bullying?

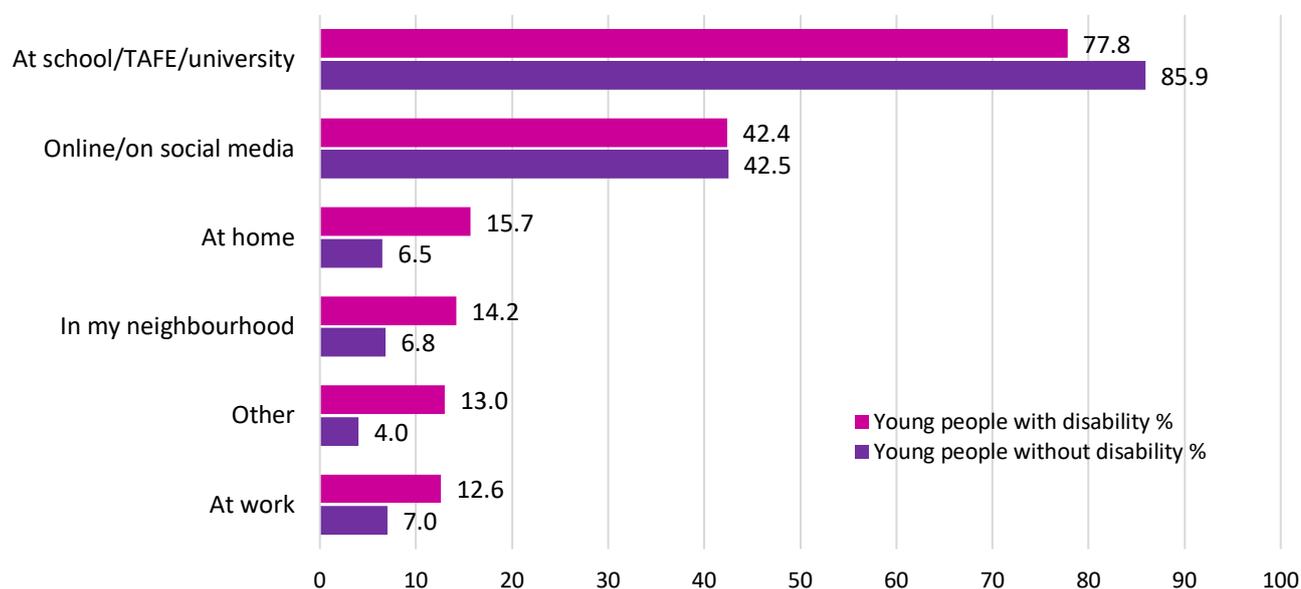
Young people were asked whether they had witnessed bullying over the past twelve months. Over half (54.4%) of young people with disability reported that they had witnessed bullying in the past twelve months. This is notably higher compared to young people without disability who reported that they had witnessed bullying over the past year (47.2%).

### Where have young people witnessed bullying occur?

Young people who reported that they had witnessed bullying over the past year were then asked to identify, from a list of locations, where they witnessed the bullying take place. Figure 8 shows that, of the 54.4% of respondents with disability who had witnessed bullying in the past year, 77.8% reported that they witnessed bullying *at school/TAFE/university*. More than four in 10 (42.4%) indicated they had seen bullying take place *online/on social media*. Of the 47.2% of respondents without disability who had witnessed bullying in the past year, 85.9% reported that they witnessed bullying *at school/TAFE/university*. More than four in 10 (42.5%) indicated they had seen bullying take place *online/on social media*.

Larger proportions of young people with disability who had seen bullying reported that they witnessed this *at home*, *in my neighbourhood* or *at work* compared with respondents without disability (15.7%, 14.2% and 12.6% compared with 6.5%, 6.8% and 7.0%).

**Figure 8: Locations of witnessing bullying in the past twelve months**



Note: Respondents were able to choose more than one option. Items are listed in order of frequency among young people with disability.

### Participation in activities

The importance of community participation is well established. Community participation ensures that young people have a sense of belonging, feel part of the community and are given opportunities to participate in activities and events that allow them to develop relationships with others.

As shown in Table 6, young people who reported having disability carried out a wide range of activities however, notably lower proportions took part in *sports (as a participant)* and *sports (as spectator)* (52.7% and 45.1% compared with 69.4% and 57.5% of participants without disability). While slightly higher proportions of young people with disability participated in *youth groups and activities* (35.1% compared with 29.6% of participants without disability) and *political groups/organisations* (12.3% compared with 6.9%).

**Table 6: Activities young people were involved in over the past year**

	Young people with disability %	Young people without disability %
Sports (as a participant)	52.7	69.4
Sports (as a spectator)	45.1	57.5
Arts/cultural/music activities	44.9	42.6
Volunteer work	43.9	47.2
Youth groups and activities	35.1	29.6
Student leadership activities	28.6	33.4
Religious groups/activities	24.7	23.7
Environmental groups/activities	17.5	13.3
Political groups/organisations	12.3	6.9

Note: Items are listed in order of frequency among young people with disability.

## Community inclusion

Young people were asked whether they felt their community is supportive of people who are living with a disability. Nearly seven in 10 (67.8%) respondents with disability indicated that they felt their *community is supportive of people who are living with a disability*. This is notably lower compared with young people without disability (83.3%).

Young people were also asked whether they thought that people living with a disability are treated *unfairly* because of their disability. Over six in 10 (61.8%) young people with disability thought that people living with a disability are treated *unfairly* (compared with 49.5% of respondents without disability).

An additional question was directed specifically to respondents who reported having disability that asked about challenges they face around access, independence and inclusion (see Table 7). It is concerning that 55.0% of young people with disability stated that their disability made it hard for them to *feel like they fit in (at school, work or socially)*. Close to half (47.8%) of young people with disability indicated that their disability made it hard for them to *do everyday activities as other young people their age usually do* and four in 10 (40.4%) struggled to *do things in public places with friends (e.g. go to shopping centres, sporting or music events)*.

**Table 7: Does your disability make it hard for you to...**

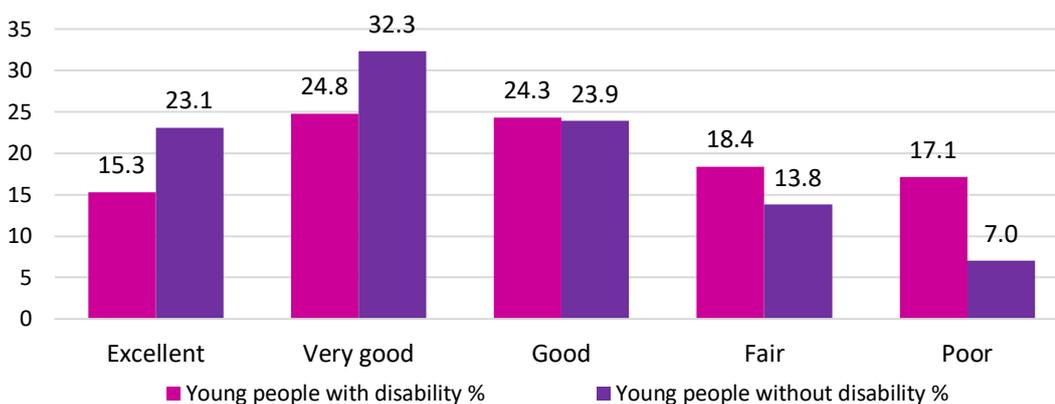
	Young people with disability %
Feel like you fit in ( <i>at school, work or socially</i> )	55.0
Do everyday activities as other young people your age usually do	47.8
Do things in public places with friends ( <i>e.g. go to shopping centres, sporting or music events</i> )	40.4
Feel supported by other people if you need help with something	36.2
Make choices and feel independent	34.8
Move around the community ( <i>e.g. using footpaths or public transport</i> )	22.1

Note: This question was directed specifically to respondents who reported having a disability. Respondents were able to choose more than one option.

## How well do young people feel their families get along?

Young people were asked how well they felt their family gets along with one another. As shown in Figure 9, a notably lower percentage of young people with disability rated their family’s ability to get along very positively (40.1% compared with 55.4% of participants without disability). A much higher proportion did not report such a positive experience of family relationships, with over one third (35.5%) of young people with disability rating their family’s ability to get along as either *fair* or *poor* compared with 20.8% of participants without disability.

**Figure 9: Family’s ability to get along with one another**



## Wellbeing, happiness and the future

Young people were asked to rate how happy they were with their life as a whole. Over four in 10 (43.0%) young people with disability indicated that they felt *happy/very happy* with their lives overall, which is notably lower compared with participants without disability (62.0%).

It is alarming to see that more than double the proportion of respondents with disability felt *very sad/sad* with life as a whole (24.1% compared with 10.1% of participants without disability).

**Table 8: How happy young people are**

	Young people with disability %	Young people without disability %
Happy/Very happy (70-100)	43.0	62.0
Not happy or sad (40-60)	32.8	27.9
Very sad/Sad (0-30)	24.1	10.1

Young people were further asked how positive they felt about the future and to rate their response on a five-point scale from *very positive* to *very negative*. As shown in Table 9, a much lower proportion of young people with disability indicated that they felt *very positive* or *positive* about the future (43.4% compared with 59.3% of participants without disability). More than double the proportion of respondents with disability felt *negative* or *very negative* about the future (26.0% compared with 11.2% of participants without disability).

**Table 9: Feelings about the future**

	Young people with disability %	Young people without disability %
Very positive	11.6	13.4
Positive	31.8	45.9
Neither	30.6	29.4
Negative	14.3	8.5
Very negative	11.7	2.7

## Implications for policy and practice

Numerous policy and service interventions over the years have made progress towards improving the lives of people with disability. However, as demonstrated by this research, young people with disability are still experiencing significant challenges compared to young people without disability.

People with disability are more likely to experience poverty, live in poor quality or insecure housing and have low levels of education. They are often socially isolated, with fewer opportunities to take part in community life.<sup>80</sup> Young people with disability are not a homogenous group and have varying challenges, circumstances and supports. Therefore, it is imperative that investment and supports for young people with disability are informed by their own voices.

The National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 (NDS)<sup>81</sup> is the overarching framework that was developed through the Councils of Australian Governments (COAG) to address challenges experienced by people with disability. It encompasses all mainstream services and programs including healthcare, housing, transport and education, to ensure these are accessible and address the needs of people with disability. While the NDS itself contains many positive features, there have been significant limitations in relation to its implementation. The next iteration of the NDS is currently being developed.<sup>82</sup> Considering the need to provide meaningful supports to people with disability from a young age, the next iteration of the NDS would benefit from a greater focus on the needs of young people with disability across all priority areas and should deliver the targeted, systemic and structural changes required to address their needs.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) was designed to facilitate full inclusion of people with disability in the community, and to maximise independence to achieve their individual goals in life through personalised funding.<sup>83</sup> Of the 4.3 million people with disability in Australia,<sup>84</sup> it was estimated that the full rollout the NDIS would support 460,000 eligible individuals with disability by July 2019.<sup>85</sup> Thus, the vast majority of people with disability (approximately 3.8 million people), including many young people with disability will not be eligible for individually funded NDIS supports. The existing and future policy settings should recognise this disparity and ensure that young people with disability are provided with access to disability specific supports and inclusion in mainstream, community services to achieve improved social and economic outcomes.

### Education

Schools and tertiary education settings provide vital access to education as well as avenues for young people with disability to explore their future aspirations and participate in the community. The *Youth Survey 2019* shows that the majority (84.6%) of young people with disability are studying full-time and 6% are studying part-time. Although this is encouraging, compared to respondents without disability, more than twice the proportion of young people with disability reported they were not studying (9.4% compared with 3.6% respectively).

There could be multiple reasons for the higher proportion of young people with disability not engaged in education, including lack of support within the school, issues in relation to accessibility, exclusion, lack of transport options, lack of accommodation for the diverse needs of young people with disability, or experiences of discrimination or bullying that discourage them from going to schools.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) definition of inclusion in education explains that no form of segregation constitutes inclusive education.<sup>86</sup> Inclusive education has positive outcomes for social justice, a sense of community and belonging for young people with disability, as well as positive outcomes for learning outcomes and for the social, behavioural and physical development of children and young people who do and do not have a disability, including opportunities to break down stereotypes and create inclusive societies more generally.<sup>87</sup> <sup>88</sup> However, Australian research demonstrates that children and young people with disability are indeed subjected to segregation, suspensions and expulsions at a higher rate

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<sup>80</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission 2014

<sup>81</sup> Department of Social Services (Cth) 2011

<sup>82</sup> Department of Social Services 2019

<sup>83</sup> National Disability Insurance Scheme (b)

<sup>84</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2019

<sup>85</sup> National Disability Insurance Scheme (a)

<sup>86</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability 2016

<sup>87</sup> Children and Young People with Disability Australia 2019a, 2

<sup>88</sup> Lissa et al. 1997

compared to young people without disability.<sup>89</sup> These factors can discourage children and young people with disability from continuing to participate in education which results in poorer educational outcomes.

The 2017 Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability identified 18.8% (724,624) of students received an educational adjustment to participate in education due to disability.<sup>90</sup> However, the inadequacy of resources at educational institutions to provide the necessary support for young people prevents full educational engagement and attainment of post school goals.<sup>91</sup>

Lack of or limited understanding among school staff about various forms of physical, intellectual and psychosocial disability can also create environments that are not inclusive, and that isolate, disengage or discourage young people with disability in educational settings. The Disability Standards for Education (the Standards) set out expectations and obligations of schools and education providers in ensuring that students with disability are able to access and participate in education and training on the same basis as their peers without disability.<sup>92</sup>

A review of the Standards found that although awareness among educators and education providers is relatively high, there remains a need to support development of the skills to interpret and apply the Standards in practice. It was also reported that awareness of the Standards among people with disability and their associates was sporadic.<sup>93</sup> As recommended by Australian Human Rights Commission and others,<sup>94 95</sup> more needs to be done to increase awareness about the Standards among educational staff, people with disability, their families and carers so that they can be proactively and consistently implemented. This should be coupled with an increase in funding for schools to provide training for educators on the application of the Standards.

Currently, education policy is designed at national as well as state and territory levels and this has created inconsistent outcomes for young people with disability. There are also interfaces with education from other government interventions such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). To increase clarity and transparency about funding responsibilities, governments have agreed to apply principles of supports that define whether the NDIS or another funding or service system is most appropriate to provide supports.<sup>96</sup> However, the NDIS has underlying assumptions in relation to people with disability having capacity to advocate for themselves and navigate the system which creates a disparity in outcomes.<sup>97</sup> In addition, communication barriers and complexity of diverse funding streams create a challenging environment for people with disability, their families, teachers, schools and other services to receive optimum supports under the NDIS.

A National Education Strategy for children and young people with disability should be developed through the COAG Education Council that encompasses schools, tertiary and vocational education settings to resolve these issues and inconsistencies by applying a uniform set of principles/strategies across the country. This should include strategies towards a more inclusive education system. The National Education Strategy could be facilitated by a comprehensive review of education policy and practice and the development of a national plan with measurable actions and robust monitoring and accountability mechanisms to ensure the rights of students with disability are upheld.<sup>98</sup>

**“The education system needs to be tailored to teach ALL students and actually make it possible to have a future job, according to academic achievement.” Female, 15**

Disengagement from education has a ripple effect on the lives of young people which may limit their future opportunities in terms of social connectedness, mental and physical health, self-confidence, independence and employment. More than twice the proportion of respondents with disability did not plan to complete Year 12 (8.2% compared with 3.8% of respondents

<sup>89</sup> Children and Young People with Disability Australia 2019a, 2

<sup>90</sup> Nationally Consistent Collection of Data 2017

<sup>91</sup> Children and Young People with Disability Australia 2019a, 7

<sup>92</sup> Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2020

<sup>93</sup> Thomas et al. 2015

<sup>94</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission 2017

<sup>95</sup> Children and Young People with Disability Australia 2019a

<sup>96</sup> National Disability Insurance Scheme 2015

<sup>97</sup> Mission Australia 2019, 3

<sup>98</sup> Children and Young People with Disability 2019b

without disability). Young people with disability were also less confident in their ability to achieve their post-school goals: 18.3% indicated that they were *slightly confident* or *not at all confident*, compared with 10.5% of participants without disability.

*Youth Survey* participants with disability identified *mental health* (27.7% compared to 16.0%), *academic ability* (24.5% compared to 20.0%) and *physical health* (12.4% compared to 4.0%) as some of the key challenges to achieving post-school goals. There were also notable differences in terms of other challenges young people with disability experience in relation to *transport* (9.3% compared to 5.9%), *discrimination* (6.9% compared to 2.6%) and *lack of school support* (7.3% compared to 5.3%). The *Youth Survey* data reinforces the global and Australian research and studies that identified these challenges in the past and have provided a raft of recommendations and solutions.<sup>99 100</sup>

Young people with disability demonstrated lower levels of satisfaction with studies compared to young people without disability. Further, close to half (48.3%) of young people with disability reported *go to university* as their post-school plan. This was much lower compared to respondents without disability (66.1%). This finding is reinforced by evidence that people with disability are underrepresented in university undergraduate programs.<sup>101</sup> Physical accessibility of education and other institutions and lack of support can be a major challenge, particularly in rural and remote areas. Thus, Government funding for education institutions should have a dedicated fund that institutions can utilise solely to improve accessibility and inclusion. Accountability needs to be built into this funding, with institutions required to report on how the funding was used, and how it has improved inclusion and accessibility within their institute for students with disability.

### National Disability Coordination Office

The National Disability Coordination Officer (NDCO) Program seeks to address barriers to participation in tertiary education and employment by improving the coordination and collaboration among service providers and building their capability to support people with disability.

The program also seeks to increase the knowledge and awareness of people with disability about their post-school options and supports to enable them to participate in education and subsequent employment to the same extent as people without disability.

Mission Australia delivers this program in North Sydney NSW and Hobart Tasmania. We work with training providers, schools and TAFEs to develop equitable access for people with disability. These include holding forums, expos and information sessions to build the awareness of local service providers who can support people with disability.

More young people with disability planned to *go to TAFE or College* (19.9% compared to 11.2% young people without disability) or *get an apprenticeship* (14.9% compared to 10.9% young people without disability). This could be due to a range of factors including confidence that TAFE or colleges would meet accessibility needs, some states offering fee-free courses and other financial supports for people with disability,<sup>102</sup> or having locally available options compared to having to travel further or move away from home to attend a university.<sup>103</sup> Considering the evident level of interest in TAFE, colleges and apprenticeships, there is a need to ensure that young people with disability feel supported within these settings.

In addition to providing additional support at schools and other educational settings, another way of reducing the pressure on young people with disability is to increase flexibility of education opportunities which enable them to study in a way that suits them. There are some programs that provide supports for young people to access flexible education options whilst providing wrap-around supports to address other challenges they experience such as managing their physical and mental health, housing related issues, escaping violence or overcoming alcohol and drug dependence related issues.

<sup>99</sup> World Health Organisation 2011

<sup>100</sup> Youth Disability Advocacy Service 2008

<sup>101</sup> Hartley 2015, 413-419

<sup>102</sup> TAFE NSW

<sup>103</sup> Youth Action, Uniting, and Mission Australia 2018

## Case study

Adam\* was a 16 year old Aboriginal young man who was referred to Youth on Track by the police through an automatic referral process after he was found driving unlicensed. At the time of the referral, Adam was sporadically attending school and was considering disengaging from school entirely. He was also diagnosed with an intellectual disability, however, was not receiving the required support that he needed to maintain his education.

During his initial discussions with the case worker, Adam indicated his numeracy and literacy skills were not strong, but he had mechanical engineering skills and was interested in undertaking a work placement.

Adam's case worker negotiated with the school to arrange for Adam to attend school three days per week and undertake a work placement one day a week. The case worker worked with a local mechanical business to have Adam complete his work placement with them.

Adam also attended TIDE (the local Aboriginal organisation) to complete his learner driving course one day per week, in order to obtain his licence. He was very happy with the arrangement and is now regularly attending school, the work placement and TIDE.

\*Name has been changed for privacy

## Recommendations –

- Develop a National Education Strategy for children and young people with disability that encompasses schools, tertiary and vocational education settings.
- Increase investment in resources and funding to raise awareness in schools and educational settings of Disability Standards for Education. Ensure they are implemented uniformly across the country with requisite accountability measures.
- Increase flexible education options that allow students with disability to study at their own pace, with access to additional wrap-around supports as needed.

## Employment

Employment provides people with disability an opportunity to increase social and economic participation.<sup>104</sup> However, Australia has had some of the poorest labour market outcomes for people with disability in the OECD.<sup>105</sup> As discussed above in the literature review, employment participation for young people with disability in Australia is much lower and young people with disability aged 15-24 years experience a higher unemployment rate (20.3%) than young people without disability (12.4%).<sup>106</sup>

### Barriers to finding work

Participation in meaningful employment that is in line with young people's career aspirations and interests is vital to emotional and financial wellbeing. According to the *Youth Survey*, young people with disability were more likely to be *looking for employment* (39.9% compared to 34.0%) or not be in paid employment and not looking for work (27.1% compared to 21.4%). A higher proportion of young people with disability indicated that they felt there were barriers impacting upon them finding work (63.7% compared with 48.1% of respondents without disability).

Compared with respondents without disability, young people with disability were more likely to indicate that the majority of the items listed as potential barriers impacting upon them finding work; especially *mental health* (27.7% compared with 16.0%) and *physical health* (12.4% compared with 4.0%). Agile and accessible work environments, inclusive work culture, recognition of diverse needs and providing flexible work conditions are likely to address the systemic and structural barriers to employment that are specific to young people with disability.<sup>107</sup>

Immediate measures are needed to address broader employment issues of young people with disability such as underemployment and employment in low-paid jobs that do not reflect their skills, qualifications or career interests. There are

<sup>104</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission 2016

<sup>105</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2010

<sup>106</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019b

<sup>107</sup> Deloitte Access Economics 2011

both supply-side and demand-side interventions that have the potential to improve employment outcomes for young people with disability. That is, employment services can provide more tailored and effective supports to young people with disability and employers can be encouraged and supported to employ more young people with disability.

There are numerous initiatives to increase employment participation of people with disability such as the Employee Assistance Fund under Job Access, Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs) and the Disability Employment Services (DES) program. Some of these programs have produced inconsistent employment outcomes for people with disability to obtain and maintain sustainable employment options.<sup>108</sup> This can be due to poor awareness about the availability of diverse services, subsidies and incentives to support young people with disability to address the barriers to employment.<sup>109</sup> More could be done to promote the Employment Assistance Fund and other Job Access related supports to small and other businesses through a national awareness raising strategy. More research is also needed to design evidence based models that provide people with disability meaningful choice and control over their careers.

ADEs were designed to provide employment opportunities for people with disability. Approximately, 20,000 people with disability are currently engaged in ADEs in areas such as packaging, assembly, production, recycling, screen printing, plant nursery, garden maintenance and landscaping, cleaning services, laundry services and food services.<sup>110</sup> These have been criticised for promoting segregated employment, limited access to skills development, not providing appropriate pathways to open employment and due to wage disparities.<sup>111 112</sup> ADEs can also restrict the ability of young people with disability to develop their employability skills so they can find roles that are better aligned with their career aspirations and skills. There have been clear calls to completely phase out segregated employment of people with disability by supporting them to enter mainstream employment and ensure equitable remuneration for work.<sup>113</sup>

Current mainstream employment services need to expand their services to assist people who may need additional supports but do not necessarily identify as people with disability or have not been diagnosed with a disability. In instances where young people identify that they have learning or other difficulties, obtaining a diagnosis can be challenging, particularly in rural and remote areas where access to medical professionals are limited. The often long waiting times to see medical professionals mean that young people with disability are waiting for prolonged periods without access to appropriate services to reach their educational and employment goals. Therefore, mainstream employment services need to be trained to work with young people with diagnosed and undiagnosed disability and tailor supports to meet their specific needs.

“[We need] ... better disability employment service.” Male, 16

While increasing employment opportunities for people with disability is a systemic issue, for those who are receiving supports under the NDIS, the uptake of employment supports in NDIS Plans has been low.<sup>114</sup> This could be a result of the siloed approach in service delivery and lack of understanding about these interfaces.<sup>115</sup> Employment policies should ensure that the employment service providers are able to link with complementary supports including the NDIS to achieve meaningful long-term employment outcomes for people with disability.

Employer attitudes towards people with disability can be negative, outdated and can limit recruitment of people with disability, contrary to numerous reports highlighting the benefits of hiring people with disability.<sup>116</sup> A research report of the Australian Government shows that while the majority of Australian employers are open to hiring people with disability (77%), a much lower proportion (35%) demonstrate behavioural commitment to doing so.<sup>117</sup> Workplaces need to dedicate human and financial resources to creating agile and accessible work environments, inclusive work culture, recognition of diverse needs and providing flexible work conditions.

<sup>108</sup> People with Disability Australia 2020, 5-8

<sup>109</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission 2016

<sup>110</sup> Department of Social Services 2018

<sup>111</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission 2016

<sup>112</sup> People with Disability Australia 2020, 5-8

<sup>113</sup> Australian Disabled People's Organisations et al. 2019

<sup>114</sup> Lawrence 2018

<sup>115</sup> Lawrence 2018

<sup>116</sup> Kavanagh 2017

<sup>117</sup> Kantar Public 2017

Social marketing and advertising campaigns can change these negative attitudes, with previous campaigns about people with particular disability (psychosocial/intellectual) having been successful in improving community views about people with disability.<sup>118</sup> A comprehensive national advertising campaign to promote employment of people with disability including young people with disability should be invested in by the government in consultation with people with disability and employers.

There is a clear need to maintain employment services for people with disability similar to DES. However, these services should be flexible in scope, person centred and able to provide services to meet the diverse and specific needs of young people with disability in order to ensure they have choice and control over their career aspirations similar to all other young people.

After conducting substantial research and consultations with a range of stakeholders, the Australian Human Rights Commission released the *Willing to Work* report in 2016 which contained a series of pragmatic recommendations.<sup>119</sup> One of the key recommendations of the Commission was to develop a National Jobs Plan that will bring together the different levels of government, as well as private employers and the not-for-profit sector to create meaningful employment opportunities. This includes strengthening the focus on pathways and outcomes for young people with disability who are transitioning from school to higher education or employment through career planning.<sup>120</sup>

### Case study

Harri is a 24 year old man from WA who owns his own transport business. Harri was born prematurely and was diagnosed with Autism. He is a participant of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). One of his goals in the NDIS Plan was to set up his own business, combining his passions of helping people in his community and driving cars.

Mission Australia's Local Area Coordinator (LAC) supported him to navigate the process of starting a business and assisted with complex application processes in order to obtain a private charter license.

His transport business 'Reabold Driving Services' is now fully licensed and he is seeking approval to become a registered NDIS service provider. Harri's goal is to build the business to the point where he can be completely financially independent. Harri shared his story with the Western Australian and it was published on 03 December 2019.

### Case study

Kevin\* is a young person who is 24 years from NSW who was referred to Mission Australia's Disability Employment Services through jobactive. Kevin and his younger sister were in out of home care. Kevin was diagnosed with depression and indicated that he had been through numerous traumatic experiences in the past.

Kevin was reserved, exhibited low self-esteem and motivation during the initial interactions. His case worker had to try multiple methods of communication to ensure Kevin continued his engagement with the service. He initially had fortnightly meetings with the staff, was referred to other services such as Headspace and community services that specialise in working with people who have experienced childhood trauma.

He gradually developed confidence when he was surrounded by a positive and supportive environment. With the support of community services, Kevin was able to remove his younger sister from out of home care and become her legal guardian. He is currently working at a local business and plans to continue his education.

\*name has been changed for privacy

### Ticket to Work

Ticket to Work delivered by National Disability Services supports communities to establish place-based networks between business and community to improve employment outcomes for young people with a disability. Since 2011, Ticket to Work has worked with 25 local communities across Australia to establish local partnerships between students, schools, social purpose organisations and employers.

Local partnerships between employers, schools and disability organisations offer young people with a disability the opportunity to participate in authentic work experiences and vocational skills training while completing secondary school.

The program is based on evidence that job readiness leads to more successful post school employment outcomes, achievable by direct exposure to real jobs with real employers.

<sup>118</sup> People with Disability Australia 2020, 5-8

<sup>119</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission 2016

<sup>120</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission 2016

Employers, schools and disability providers work in partnership to offer students school-based apprenticeships/traineeships and work placements with employer partners. During placements, students and employers receive support from the disability provider, including access to Disability Awareness Training for staff to develop skills and knowledge for working alongside and supervising a young person with a disability. An evaluation of the program demonstrated positive outcomes for young people with disability in terms of their employment outcomes as well as their community participation.<sup>121</sup> This model has been identified by Social Ventures Australia as a positive model of building employer connections.<sup>122</sup>

#### Recommendations –

- Implement significant improvements to both disability specific and generalist employment services to better support young people with disability, to gain and maintain meaningful employment. This includes providing access to career advisors and mentors while they are still engaged in education.
- Develop a National Jobs Plan that will bring together the different levels of government, as well as the private and not-for-profit sectors to create meaningful employment opportunities for people with disability including young people.
- Develop a comprehensive national advertising campaign to promote employment of people with disability, including young people with disability. This should be designed and developed in consultation with people with disability, including young people with disability, employers and the employment and community sector.
- Ensure the implementation of agile and accessible work environments, inclusive work culture, recognition of diverse needs and provision of flexible work conditions to meet the needs of young people with disability. Employers should be proactive in making these changes and broader monitoring and accountability is required.

## Personal concerns

Young people surveyed in 2019 continue to report *mental health* as one of the most important issues (36.2%) in Australia. Their personal concerns are closely related to this theme, with *coping with stress* (44.7%), *school or study problems* (34.3%) and *mental health* (33.2%) among the top three issues of personal concern.<sup>123</sup> Young people with disability were concerned about all these issues at a higher rate compared to young people without disability.

Almost half of the participants with disability indicated that they were concerned about *coping with stress* (49.9% compared to 44.5% of young people without disability). A higher proportion of young people with disability were also concerned about *mental health* and *school or study problems* (45.5% compared to 32.4% and, 39.3% compared to 31.1% respectively).

*Suicide* and *bullying/emotional abuse* were also significantly prevalent for young people with disability. It is important to note that 25.6% of young people with disability were concerned about *suicide* (compared to 13.5% of young people without disability) and 25.5% of young people were concerned about *bullying/emotional abuse* (compared to 13.6% of young people without disability). They were also much more likely to cite *discrimination* as a personal concern (19.4%) than young people without disability (9.7%). These elevated personal concerns are likely to contribute to or exacerbate the mental health issues experienced by some young people with disability.

Although not as highly ranked, young people with disability were more concerned about *drugs* and *alcohol* (14.3% compared to 7.0% and 10.3% compared to 5.0% respectively). Alcohol and drug dependence can be a co-occurring issue with mental health and can be mutually exacerbating. Where needed, young people with disability should have easy access to alcohol and drug related services.

Schools have a significant role to play in promoting mental health and wellbeing. They are likely to have a central, daily point of contact with young people with disability, including those who are currently experiencing mental health difficulties and those who may be vulnerable to such difficulties in the future.<sup>124</sup> Schools are therefore ideal settings to provide programs and

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<sup>121</sup> Hawkins and Rasheed 2016

<sup>122</sup> Social Ventures Australia 2016

<sup>123</sup> Carlise et al. 2019

<sup>124</sup> Hall et al. 2019, 43

interventions that promote and improve mental health and mental health awareness, reduce stigma in relation to various forms of disability through education, encourage help-seeking behaviours and provide pathways to support. These interventions should be co-designed with young people with disability to determine the most appropriate locations and ways of delivering services. Programs should also incorporate measures to build trust between the school staff and young people with disability to increase uptake and success of the program.

A significantly higher proportion of young people with disability were concerned about *family conflict* (27.5% compared to 17.5% of young people without disability) and *domestic/family violence* (18.3% compared to 8.5%). A research report revealed that only a small proportion of families with a family member with disability relied on community services for support.<sup>125</sup> More supports should also be made available to the families through sensitive and appropriate interventions.

Young people with disability were concerned about *personal safety* (26.9%) at a much higher rate than young people without disability (17.1%). Keeping young people safe is a responsibility of the whole of society, especially the safety of those who are likely to be vulnerable due to disability or other barriers. Young people with disability should feel safe in their homes, neighbourhoods and schools and have opportunities to thrive and participate in the community at the same level as young people without disability.

The current national Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability provides a timely opportunity to meaningfully engage with people with lived experience and provide solutions to create safe and supportive communities for people with disability. It is imperative that all levels of government make long-term commitments to implement the Royal Commission's recommendations when they become available, in consultation with people with disability, their families, carers and their representative organisations.

Recommendations –

- Increase school-based mental health supports in consultation with young people with disability including embedding wellbeing personnel within schools.
- Provide training to school staff members to effectively support young people with disability who are experiencing a range of challenges including study pressure, stress, bullying, alcohol and drug issues, discrimination and other mental health problems.
- Fund youth programs that use a strengths-based and flexible approach to support young people with disability including those experiencing mental health issues, bullying, family conflict and other issues to build a positive sense of identity and meet their individual needs.

## Sources of support

Family is a key connection for most people across their lifetime. It is one of the main influences on a person's skill and confidence development and their connection to community.<sup>126</sup> Siblings can also play a crucial part in each other's emotional development, allowing for companionship, learning of social skills and influencing their identity development.<sup>127</sup>

Young people with disability most commonly indicated *friend/s* (71.8%) and *parent/s or guardian/s* (64.3%) as their main sources of help and support, suggesting that more resources should be allocated to support each young person's close networks. However, these rates were much lower compared to young people without disability who indicated that they go to *friend/s* (83.7%) and *parent/s or guardian/s* (76.0%). Similarly, young people with disability rated going to their *brother/sister* (41.6%) and *relative/family friend* (48.2%) at a lower level compared to young people without disability (51.4% and 58.1% respectively). Although the levels are lower, a large proportion of young people with disability approach their friends or family in times of need. It is important that family members are equipped with the skills and knowledge to provide the support to young people with disability as and when needed.

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<sup>125</sup> Edwards et al. 2008

<sup>126</sup> Stohm and Loebel 2019

<sup>127</sup> Stohm and Loebel 2019

Peers of young people with disability may not have a clear understanding of the support needs or the available avenues of support within their local community or online. Considering the complexity of the disability service landscape, especially since the introduction of the NDIS, education resources that specifically target young people with disability and their families should be provided about referral pathways and the service systems currently in place.

“I think there should be an Autism act like in UK to make it compulsory that all mainstream education, healthcare, crisis line and DES services, are autism trained.” Male 19

Given the likelihood of young people confiding in their friends about their concerns, peer support programs can be an effective support system for young people with disability to discuss their issues. Peer networks also enhance connectedness, thereby reducing any sense of isolation.<sup>128</sup>

### JFY Peer Support Network

In 2016, Julia Farr Youth (JFY) started a peer support network in South Australia for young adults living with disability aged 18 to 35. The purpose of the group is for young people to connect with each other, share information, and get involved in their local community. Today the network has expanded to connect with a greater number of young people with peer support meetings in different parts of SA.

All meetings are themed on a topic of interest identified by network members such as employment, education, sexual health, the NDIS, and self-advocacy. Meetings are hosted by Peer Connectors, who use their lived experience of disability and their knowledge to support young adults who attend. Peer Connectors are positive role-models who provide guidance and leadership to network members.

### Circles of Support Initiative

Circles of Support Initiative is a collaborative project in South Australia. This initiative grew out of the recognition that many of the people with a disability, supported by a small service provider, had ageing parents. Circles of Support Initiative attempts to build circles of support and increase the social networks for a number of people who had been institutionalised or were at risk of being institutionalised. The members with disability are individually supported to be full members of community and to lead fulfilling lives.

Encouragingly, more than half of the young people with disability (51.1%) indicated that they would go to *GPs and other health professionals* for help with important issues. Health professionals should be well equipped to provide necessary supports or further referrals to appropriate services and supports including providing services in youth friendly environments. However, some young people can face difficulties accessing GPs and other health services due to high costs, long waiting times, and in certain instances discrimination.<sup>129</sup> Further, given that some generalist medical and health professionals may not have had experience working with young people with disability, they may not be able to provide services in a sensitive and an appropriate manner.

“[We need] ... more access to health services.” Male 15

Some rural and remote communities rely on medical and allied health professionals who visit intermittently, who are often on short-term contracts. This affects continuity of care and means that young people with disability have to regularly rebuild rapport with different professionals. The long waiting periods to obtain appointments, especially with mental health professionals can result in significantly deteriorating mental health or discourage people from seeking help. These challenges can be compounded for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people with disability and young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

<sup>128</sup> Wyman et al. 2010

<sup>129</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017

Young people with disability were more likely to go to *community agencies* for help with important issues compared to young people without disability (19.8% compared to 12.3%). These community agencies may not be directly related to services for people with disability. It is also important to note that, with the challenges emerging after the rollout of the NDIS, other mainstream services including community support services, health system and homelessness services are under further pressure to support those who fall through the cracks without additional funding or access to resources. Therefore, additional resourcing should be directed to community services to increase their capacity to provide supports that are sensitive and appropriate to meet the needs of young people with disability who approach them.

“More awareness should be showed in schools. People should understand everyone is fighting their own battle. People should feel safe to open up to people and have the access to health services/ hospitals.” Female, 15

Maintaining confidentiality and promoting young people’s right to confidentiality is essential to creating trust and encouraging them to visit and continue using a service.<sup>130</sup> Thus, confidentiality can be a key factor when young people with disability consider accessing health or community services. They are also likely to be engaged with education and employment and therefore the services should be able to provide flexible services at times and locations that are accessible and convenient for the young people with disability.

Recommendations –

- Increase supports available to parents or guardians of young people with disability to ensure they can be a more effective resource to young people with disability in their families.
- Increase investment in peer support networks and peer education initiatives to equip young people with the knowledge and skills to recognise mental health issues, bullying and other issues their friends with disability are experiencing and to provide assistance and support when needed.
- Improve access to GPs and other health professional by providing training and support on the needs of young people with disability and promoting a youth-friendly, inclusive practice environment.
- Provide additional capacity building to community organisations to deliver services that are sensitive and appropriate to meet the needs of young people with disability.
- Provide a wide range of support services to young people with disability, make information about these services available in accessible formats, distribute information in relation to confidentiality and deliver services in flexible locations and hours.

## Experience of bullying

Bullying has been defined as an ongoing and deliberate misuse of power in relationships through repeated verbal, physical and/or social behaviour that intends to cause physical, social and/or psychological harm. It can involve an individual or a group misusing their power, or perceived power, over one or more persons who feel unable to stop it from happening.<sup>131</sup>

Experiencing bullying at such a formative time as adolescence can have long-term negative impacts upon self-esteem, mental health and wellbeing.<sup>132</sup> It can also hinder young people’s educational attainment, participation in the community and employment prospects.<sup>133</sup>

For the first time in 2019, young people participating in Mission Australia’s *Youth Survey* were asked whether they had experienced bullying over the past 12 months. Compared with respondents without disability, more than twice the proportion of young people with disability reported that they had experienced bullying in the past twelve months (43.4% compared with 19.3%).

Schools and other education institutions should be safe spaces for young people with disability, free of discrimination and harm. Sadly, the majority (76.7%) of young people with disability who reported personal experiences of bullying indicated that they

<sup>130</sup> International Planned Parenthood Federation 2011

<sup>131</sup> Council of the Australian Governments 2018

<sup>132</sup> Carlise et al. 2019

<sup>133</sup> Alannah and Madeline Foundation and PwC 2018

experienced bullying at *school/TAFE/university*. Negative experiences including discrimination and not being believed by family and people with authority, limited confidential communication options and other challenges may prevent young people with disability from raising these issues.<sup>134</sup>

In 2015, a Commonwealth Parliamentary Committee in a report on violence, neglect and abuse of people with disability made a series of recommendations including the need to establish a national program to address bullying of students with disability.<sup>135</sup> Although there have been sporadic interventions and *ad hoc* generalist programs to address bullying in schools,<sup>136</sup> there is still an absence of an effective national program to address bullying of students with disability. Considering the challenges young people with disability experience, it is important that the anti-bullying campaigns are more intersectional and inclusive of diverse groups of people experiencing disadvantage including young people with disability.

Measures to combat bullying in any setting can be a combination of both proactive and reactive supports and measures. Young people with disability are likely to thrive if the individual issues or situations of bullying are dealt with effectively and promptly, and within a climate created by strong leadership.<sup>137</sup> Schools need the resources to address bullying in their schools and to engage effectively with students who are being bullied and require help from the school. Further professional training on anti-bullying for teachers would also be beneficial, as would the evaluation of specific anti-bullying programs.<sup>138</sup>

These approaches can set a tone in which inclusion of all students is expected and no form of bullying or harm of students with disability will be tolerated within or outside the education institutions. It is also imperative that these approaches stem from the leadership of institutions such as schools, through to all levels of staff and students. Increasing leadership or prominent roles given to students with disability has also been found to be an effective measure to address bullying.<sup>139</sup>

It is concerning that higher proportions of young people with disability who had experienced bullying reported that they experienced this *at home or in my neighbourhood* (27.9% and 15.1% compared with 16.5% and 5.1% of respondents without disability). Considering this, more research is needed to identify how to support young people with disability within their homes to ensure they have a safe space or a person to turn to for assistance.

Young people with disability also reported much higher rates of *physical bullying* compared to young people without disability (34.1% compared with 19.5%). Physical bullying can lead to serious physical injuries or long-term psychological distress.<sup>140</sup> They were also more likely to be bullied online, with 42.0% of young people with disability indicating experiencing *cyberbullying* (*hurtful messages, pictures or comments*).

Most young people with disability indicated that they dealt with bullying on their own either by *ignoring it, removing themselves from the situation or distracting themselves*. These strategies unfortunately are unlikely to address the issues of bullying. Young people with disability indicated *talking to close friends or family* at a lower rate compared to young people without disability (30.0% compared to 35.2%). Considering that close friends and family of people with disability may not necessarily have a clear understanding of what resources are available to support people experiencing bullying, complaint processes or ways of escalating issues to relevant authorities where appropriate and necessary.<sup>141 142</sup>

Notably higher proportions of young people with disability reported *talking to a support person* (23.7% compared with 16.7% of young people without disability).

The lower proportions of young people with disability seeking help compared to young people without disability could be due to a lack of trusted people to discuss the issues, fear of retaliation or not feeling safe to complain about bullying.<sup>143 144</sup> This could also include inaccessibility of mainstream services for people with disability due to physical access and attitudinal barriers. More supports and resources should be made available to young people with disability to ensure they are able to take action and report incidents of bullying at home, school or in their community.

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<sup>134</sup> Coloroso 2008

<sup>135</sup> Commonwealth Community Affairs References Committee 2015, 208

<sup>136</sup> Bullying. No Way!

<sup>137</sup> Robinson 2016

<sup>138</sup> Hall et al. 2019, 47

<sup>139</sup> Houchins et al. 2016, 259–273

<sup>140</sup> Rose et al. 2012, 1-10

<sup>141</sup> Anderson 2012, 82

<sup>142</sup> Coloroso 2008

<sup>143</sup> National Academy of Sciences 2016

<sup>144</sup> Olweus 2013

There are numerous campaigns on various online and other platforms to provide information about support services for people experiencing bullying. It is unclear how accessible these are for people with disability, particularly those with cognitive impairments, intellectual or sensory disabilities. Given that young people with disability are more likely to experience bullying, including cyberbullying, it is imperative that all campaigns to address different forms of bullying are available in multiple accessible formats and platforms.

These higher levels of bullying require prompt and effective action. An anti-bullying education campaign should be launched nationally, and this campaign should be based on evidence and engage young people with disability throughout the design, development and implementation process. The campaign should educate carers, family members, schools and other broader networks of young people with disability and be appropriate for different age groups. Young people with disability can be strong advocates for themselves, and should be provided with opportunities, tools and their capacity development to be part of anti-bullying solutions.<sup>145</sup>

Recommendations –

- Establish a new national campaign to address bullying of young people with a special focus on different cohorts that are more susceptible to be victims of bullying including young people with disability. This should also include personal stories of young people who are victims of bullying and positive portrayals of young people with disability.
- Implement both proactive and reactive measures to prevent bullying of young people with disability through whole of school strategies that are co-developed with young people with disability.
- Distribute information about support services and complaint mechanisms in multiple accessible formats and target hard to reach communities including young people with disability in rural, remote and regional areas, those with language and communication limitations and young people with limited access to technology.

## Participation in activities

The two most common activities young people with disability were involved in over the past year were *sporting events as a participant* (52.7%) and *sporting events as a spectator* (45.1%), although at lower rates than young people without disability (69.4% and 57.5% respectively).

There are numerous structural and systemic issues to participation in sports as a spectator or participant due to accessibility of venues, availability of accessible changing rooms, toilets and public transport options.<sup>146</sup> Negative attitudes of some coaches, teammates, teachers and carers may also limit participation in these activities.<sup>147</sup> In addition to these, the cost of purchasing sporting equipment and uniforms, travel costs and other associated expenses can be prohibitive for young people with disability.

Measures to increase participation of young people with disability in activities could include amendments to the physical education programs in schools and other educational settings to ensure equal participation opportunities.<sup>148</sup> Accessibility could also be improved through the provision of transport, improving accessibility of venues and removal of fees.

There are numerous for-profit and not-for-profit organisations providing a range of supports to increase opportunities for young people with disability to participate in sports and other community activities. However, these services are less likely to be available in rural, remote and regional areas.<sup>149</sup>

### The Dylan Alcott Foundation<sup>150</sup>

The Dylan Alcott Foundation is committed to helping young Australians with disability to overcome the barriers of entry to sport, education and employment through fundraising for grants, scholarships and mentoring.

Their efforts are targeted at supporting young people with disability to achieve their dreams through tangible means including but not limited to providing sporting equipment, scholarships at education institutions, and mentoring programs with industry trailblazers.

<sup>145</sup> National Academy of Sciences 2016

<sup>146</sup> Shields and Synnot 2016

<sup>147</sup> Shields and Synnot 2016

<sup>148</sup> Cologon et al. 2019

<sup>149</sup> Australian Institute of Family Studies and Child Family Community Australia 2016

<sup>150</sup> Dylan Alcott Foundation

Encouragingly, young people with disability were more likely to participate in *youth groups and activities, environmental groups and political groups or organisations* compared to young people without disability. Close to half the proportion of young people with disability also indicated that they are involved in *volunteer work* (43.9%). This demonstrates that young people with disability, provided with the right opportunities and accessibility are able to engage meaningfully in a diverse range of activities.

In instances where young people with disability are participating in volunteer work-related roles due to lack of paid employment opportunities,<sup>151</sup> government interventions should ensure that they are provided with pathways to meaningful employment as discussed above.

Another positive indication in the survey data was the higher participation rates of young people with disability in *arts/cultural and music activities* (44.9% compared with 42.6%). These activities provide young people with opportunities to meet others with similar interests, challenge self-boundaries and explore self-expression and creativity as well as a sense of belonging. Schools and education institutions as well as community services have a vital role to play in increasing supports and programs for young people with disability to pursue their creative interests.

### Case study

Andrew\* is a 19 year old Aboriginal young man who lives with his family in NSW. Andrew has been diagnosed with autism (high functioning), learning disability and depression. He was referred to Mission Australia's Creative Youth Initiative (CYI) program by a community disability service as Andrew was passionate about music and was interested in participating in music related activities.

During the initial conversations, Andrew indicated that he has previously disengaged from High School and TAFE due to lack of support to manage his mental health issues, struggles with literacy and numeracy and lack of support and challenges with maintaining relationships. He mentioned that the education process was overwhelming and he was not getting the support and the flexibility he needed.

He was interested in pursuing a career in the music industry and was looking for a safe, supportive and a flexible environment to learn vocational skills in music. Andrew's support team included a Student Support Coordinator and his music tutors. After identifying his goals and priorities, the team supported him to improve his literacy skills, provided ongoing emotional support, regular professional counselling and referrals to other professional support services. Andrew's music tutor worked with him to build confidence in his music skills through one on one mentoring and he was supported to complete his Certificate II course in music industry which provided him with a range of skills including song writing, recording, producing and performance. Andrew had to travel one hour each way to get to his classes. The support team scheduled his classes to ensure that the travel times and frequency would not cause him unnecessary stress or trigger anxiety.

Completion of the Certificate II course immensely contributed to increasing Andrew's self-esteem and confidence in his academic and music abilities. He was also able to create new friendship circles through his Sounds of the Streets Program group which addressed his concerns about social isolation.

Upon successful completion of the Certificate II course, Andrew is now enrolled at TAFE NSW to complete Certificate III in Music Performance. He continues to receive support from the team at CYI and the team at CYI are confident in Andrew's ability to obtain gainful employment in the Music Industry.

\*Name has been changed for privacy

### Recommendations –

- Develop a streamed fund for young people with disability to purchase sports equipment and relevant uniforms and cover the cost of transport, fees and other requirements of participation in sports, cultural and other activities.
- Increase funding to ensure accessibility of the built environment by making spaces such as sporting grounds, parks, pathways and recreation facilities accessible and accommodating for young people with disability.
- Spaces should be co-designed with young people with disability and accountability measures implemented to ensure universal design of public spaces.

<sup>151</sup> Trembath et al. 2010

## Community inclusion

Experiencing discrimination can make participating in everyday life more difficult for people with disability, affecting their education and employment opportunities, and limiting their social interactions.<sup>152</sup> Discrimination can take many forms, including being treated unfairly or being excluded.

Over six in 10 (or 61.8%) young people with disability who responded to the *Youth Survey* indicated that people with disability are treated unfairly, whereas only 49.5% of young people without disability held that view.

Most young people with disability are feeling *supported in their community*, with nearly seven in 10 (67.8%) young people with disability reporting that their communities supported people with disability. However, a higher proportion (83.3%) of young people without disability indicated that their community supported people living with disability. The poor awareness or engagement with people with disability can give young people without disability a different understanding about the community.<sup>153</sup> Increasing engagement of young people with and without disability in more inclusive activities will provide an environment that is mutually beneficial.

High proportions of participants with disability thought that their disability made it harder for them to *fit in at school, work or socially* (55.0%), *participate in activities that other young people do* (47.8%), *access public places with friends* (40.4%), *feel supported in times of need* (36.2%), *feel independent* (34.8%) and *move around using footpaths or public transport* (22.1%). These systemic, structural and attitudinal challenges created by the broader society hinder the opportunities of young people with disability from enjoying life at the same level as young people without disability.

In line with Australia's international obligations, all levels of government should make tangible commitments to increasing community participation for people with disability. The Department of Social Services' consultation report on the next National Disability Strategy (beyond 2010) found that children and young people are not being given the level of opportunity they should have to be part of the community and to live independently in the future.<sup>154</sup> The next iteration of the NDS provides a timely opportunity to address these issues by providing a strong foundation to uphold the rights of young people with disability. Thus, it is imperative that the voices of young people with disability are heard at the decision making level and their input is actively sought in policy-making processes.

"I also feel we need more of a voice. We need to be consulted about our needs – what's working and what's not working to make things better..." Male, 19

Recommendations -

- Strengthen the focus on the specific needs of young people with disability when developing the next iteration of the National Disability Strategy (NDS) through genuine engagement of young people with disability.
- Embed the voices of young people with disability in all decision making and service design processes.

## Wellbeing, happiness and the future

Family functioning has direct impacts on all young people's quality and enjoyment of life. Over one in three (35.5%) young people with disability rated their family's ability to get along as either *fair* or *poor* compared with one in five (20.8%) participants without disability. The introduction of the NDIS and related supports can increase the independence of young people with disability by providing them with supports outside their family, however a large proportion of young people with disability are unlikely to be recipients of support under the NDIS.

The needs of every family vary based on a range of factors and therefore, supports to families with children or young people with disability should be flexible in scope to meet the specific needs of the family. Supports could include facilitating family activities, access to safe, accessible and funded respite and access to cultural or community events. More programs and activities

<sup>152</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019a

<sup>153</sup> World Health Organisation 2011

<sup>154</sup> The Social Deck 2019

that promote leisure and entertainment for the whole family of young people with disability should be promoted to young people with disability and their families.

It is important that parents properly understand and can fully access the support systems.<sup>155</sup> This includes providing the right information and services at the right time, making sure services are accessible and inclusive, and offering appropriate, evidence-based parenting support programs. Case management and service pathways should also be in place so parents can navigate the service system.<sup>156</sup>

### People 1st Programme (PIP) WA

People 1st Programme (PIP) PIP offers professional development workshops for teaching staff, parents, carers, disability support workers and professionals on a range of topics. PIP provides services to people with disability in respectful relationships, protective education and sexuality. PIP covers a broad range of topics including: resilience and self-esteem, friendship education, respectful relationships, cyber safety, sexting and bullying, family and domestic violence counselling and sexual diversity among other things. PIP provides strategies to parents/ carers who have a family member attending the services. PiP is a local NDIS provider and young people Mission Australia's Local Area Coordinators support in WA have accessed a range of services offered by PiP.

Positively, over four in 10 (43.0%) young people with disability indicated that they felt *happy/very happy* with their lives overall. However, those respondents that felt *very sad/sad* with life as a whole was more than double in the proportion of respondents with disability (24.1% compared with 10.1% of participants without disability). This could be an indication of a range of personal challenges that young people with disability experience, higher levels of bullying, social isolation and family cohesion.

Feelings of unhappiness over extended periods of time can contribute to low self-confidence and mental health issues.<sup>157</sup> It is imperative that community services, supports and youth programs are easily accessible and easy to navigate for young people with disability and cater to their specific needs as and when they arise. Information about these services, particularly mental health related services for young people with disability should be made accessible in a range of formats and distributed widely.

A lower proportion of young people with disability indicated that they felt *very positive* or *positive* about the future (43.4% compared with 59.3% of participants without disability). It is concerning that more than double the proportion of young people with disability felt *negative* or *very negative* about the future (26.0% compared with 11.2% of participants without disability). Negative life experiences, difficulty with peer groups, bullying or loneliness, stressful life events and ongoing medical issues can all impact a young person's outlook on the future.<sup>158</sup>

As young people with disability are experts in their own lives and needs. Thus, programs should be co-designed with young people with disability and should cater to all the aspects of a young person's life. More could be done to improve happiness, wellbeing and feelings about the future including shifting the focus to resourcing schools to support young people with disability, providing strategies to support young people to cope with stress, boost self-esteem, improve mental health literacy and reduce stigma.

Recommendations –

- Increase support services available to the whole family of young people with disability especially where young people identify family conflict or family violence as issues affecting them.
- Build capacity of young people with disability by educating them about their rights and helping them increase leadership and advocacy skills.
- Improve accessibility of information and access to mental health services and professionals who specialise in working with young people with disability to deliver effective early intervention.

<sup>155</sup> Victorian Council of Social Services 2018, 22

<sup>156</sup> Victorian Council of Social Services 2018, 22

<sup>157</sup> Andreasson and Birkjær 2018, 28-29

<sup>158</sup> Hall et al. 2019, 46

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