

Hello,

Thanks for the opportunity to contribute to the discussion around the future of the State Government's strategy regarding children and youth. My answers to the discussion questions below are based on my experience of working with children and youth in my capacity as the Artistic Director of Rascal Robot Art Space, and also informed by my lived experience as a mother in Tasmania. I have responded to the discussion questions and also included some thoughts and notes based on what I've read of the strategy in the discussion paper.

1-3. I can't speak to this as I am not an Aboriginal person nor have I had any formal interactions with the Aboriginal community.

4. That all children and young people in Tasmania have equitable access to opportunities that will make their lives happy, safe, and healthy.

5. LGBTQIA+, disability, regional/rural

6. One of the strongest supports in our community is the Beaconsfield Child & Family Centre. The staff are knowledgeable, compassionate, and proactive. The centre's programming is exceptional when it comes to engagement with children, social and learning opportunities for parents and caregivers as well as children, and being champions for young children in the community. They regularly host allied health providers for children which cuts down on travel to Launceston for those appointments, and there is a committee of actively engaged parents (the CFC Champions) who contribute to the centre's ideas for activities, special events, and volunteer their time at various events.

7. There are a few ideas so I'll list them:

- We need more allied health professionals to visit or be based in the area - having to travel to Launceston means a trip of up to an hour (one way) for a 1 hour appointment which impacts the child/young person's schedule as much as the caregiver's.
- Support for LGBTQIA+ children, young people, and adults - as above, there is little in the way of mental health services in the area so traveling to Launceston is often the only option. But we are also ill prepared for the journey through a young person's gender and sexual identification as parents and fellow community members. As adults we must have the humility to accept that we can't understand the lived experience of a young person in the present day and the challenges they face when participating in their community when they feel different, unheard, or strange. So we must find more ways to support them confidently through that journey as they build their self image and self esteem, and educate parents, caregivers and the community about the struggles they're going through.
- Spaces and places for children and youth inclusion - Beaconsfield as a local hub with a youth centre, skate park, and playground is a great place for kids and relatively safe. There are also some sporting clubs for those inclined, and a few after school/holiday activities for younger children. But the Youth Centre operates twice a week (once for high school, once for primary), and Neighbourhood House once a week (for primary school) for a few hours at a time and only during school terms. We're therefore asking parents and caregivers to provide entertainment and supervision of children more often than not, which seems to fly in the face of State and Federal Government mantras of getting people into jobs. And we're also asking parents to pay for that entertainment and supervision. Disengagement of children and youth in communities stems from boredom and kids are very good at making their own fun, whether that fun is legal or socially acceptable or not. More and diverse places where children can access social, creative, playful, and sporting activities would only make our community more liveable for families, and more inclusive for young people.

8. The main barriers as I've witnessed are time, access to transport, and money. Beaconsfield is an odd town socio-economically speaking - an area of disadvantage surrounded by an LGA of relative privilege. Census data across several surveys reflects that this isn't new or giving any indication of changing despite recent surges in property prices. If anything it is pricing people out of the area by way of skyrocketing rents and a building real estate bubble. While the population grows, public transport hasn't increased or improved and most people are heavily reliant on their cars. The cost of housing going up means that more parents are having to work to make ends meet which is putting pressure on child care providers, and leaving older children at home unattended, and/or with no one to take them to their after school/holiday activities. And the cost of enrolling in those after school/holiday activities is one of the first things to go when the budget is stretched a little too thin. If the Wellbeing Strategy seeks to provide equitable access to children and young people across the state, these barriers must be approached holistically.

9. These barriers are deeply entangled with one another and many others which is why I say that they must be addressed holistically. I accept that there is an element of personal responsibility on the part of parents and caregivers that needs to be taken into account but there are many areas where government policy and action can influence these barriers.

- Housing - action on the part of the government can be things like regulating the short stay accommodation industry to ensure that affordable rental properties are available, a review of the tenancy act that is fair and equitable to tenants as well as landlords, increasing the amount of social housing available in areas where people live and can access services, reflecting on property prices and how they could be managed or influenced to ensure future generations aren't priced out of the market for life, and more grants and incentives for people wanting to build new houses regardless of whether its their first or not.
- Family income - entering discussions on a Federal level to make Parenting Payment a living wage for parents who work in the home. There are numerous studies available that show the financial value to the GDP of including unpaid domestic labour, child care/raising, and caring for family members. As a society we must ensure that there is no financial penalty placed on parents and caregivers who undertake this work in the short term while they aren't "contributing to the economy" and the long term while they aren't accruing superannuation for their retirement. There are also numerous studies indicating the fastest growing demographic of people experiencing homelessness is women over 65 as they were unpaid domestic workers while raising children and as a result they have little to no superannuation for their retirement. Add to this the increasing cost of housing and it's not really a surprise this is the case. It cannot be ignored that this situation affects women more than men and having time away from a workplace to raise a child is a valid and noble choice that deserves fair and equitable payment.
- Time - taking some of the financial pressure off families would enable parents/caregivers to have more time for their children.
- Transport - improving public transport services to regional, rural, and remote areas in terms of frequency of services and locations of access points, influencing fuel prices down where possible, bike paths and charging stations, driver education about cyclist safety, and improving access to local essential services in rural and remote areas would all help this.

10. Anecdotally, children and youth in Tasmania are concerned about a number of issues. Their experience of the world is very different to ours so again, humility is essential when we consider the issues they bring to us. The ones I hear about most frequently are climate

change/the natural environment, housing security/affordability, poverty/homelessness, and discrimination of many kinds.

11. A list:

- Climate change and the natural environment - legislate swift, ambitious, and immediate action to reduce emissions. Accessible recycling programs including green waste collection across the state. Improve public transport services between regional centres. A more robust plastic bag ban and support of groups like Boomerang Bags. I could go on but there is a lot of information freely available about how this can be more aggressively tackled.
- Housing security and affordability - I was born in 1979 and I'm struggling to buy a house with prices continually increasing so I can't imagine how much more ridiculous this issue will be for my children when the time comes. Suggestions include regulating the short stay accommodation industry, introduction of a universal basic income, ongoing incentives for people building new homes whether it's their first or not, legislation that makes tiny house living a real option, wage and welfare increases that keep pace with inflation with regards to housing costs. Honestly I can't believe that a roof over one's head has become a lucrative tradable commodity instead of a basic human right.
- Poverty and homelessness - while I can see that this is related to housing affordability, young people view these as two separate issues. Including life skills and financial literacy in the core education curriculum would be a very positive step - teaching children and young people the value of a dollar and how to manage their money, credit, investments, etc. However for children already locked in institutional poverty/homeless/at risk, financial support for families needs to be increased, and outreach services like the Community Engagement officer at Child & Family Centres is a crucial role for finding those children/families and supporting them with community resources.
- Discrimination - children and young people are particularly focused on racism as an issue of discrimination but young adults also include sexism in this category, particularly young women as they start to realise the disadvantage they are at because of their gender in terms of career options, safety, etc. The majority of discrimination issues stem from a lack of education and awareness but children also learn from the behaviours modelled for them by parents and caregivers. A robust education program from Kindergarten to Grade 12 that covers history of other cultures including Aboriginal, introduces kids to what racism and other forms of discrimination actually look like, and highlights what equitable treatment for all people means.

12 & 13. I've already sung the praises of the Child & Family Centres and the excellent work that our Beaconsfield one does. Having the CHaPS program run out of these centres is a brilliant idea as new parents are visiting the CFC as part of their routine health checks and can be exposed to all the services they provide and connecting with staff. The other program that I care deeply about is the Ante-natal service for pregnant women. Incorporating this program where appropriate into the CFCs is just as beneficial as the CHaPS service and means that new parents are getting connected with services for themselves and their children as early as possible. Additionally I feel like the midwifery ante-natal program could show improved outcomes for new mothers if they saw the same midwife throughout their pregnancy and birth to increase a sense of security and quell anxiety about the birth process. I experienced this for my first and second children (born in Canberra and Sydney respectively) and found that experience for continuity of care and forming a real relationship with the midwife who would be assisting me during the birth overwhelmingly positive and reassuring during a time that can be difficult, scary, and even traumatic. Having a team of midwives

seeing me and having to explain issues and symptoms at every appointment for my third child (at the Launceston General hospital) was exhausting and definitely more stressful.

14. Parenting Programs - Circle of Security is particularly good for helping parents understand the mechanism of connecting with even newborn babies, particularly if those parents didn't have secure attachments of their own and/or the parenting that was modelled for them as a child was not safe or secure.

15. All of the programs listed in this section sound as though they have value if it's available to those who need it most. Teachers and school support staff could need more training to help them identify children who are at risk, particularly with young girls and young women as their social skills are better developed and they are good at hiding signs and symptoms so they often go unnoticed. I also believe that more education around respectful relationships is needed, particularly with regards to educating all young people about the idea of consent. And more education is needed about family and domestic violence where there is no physical assault and stressing that abuse can take other forms than just hitting - financial, social, emotional, and verbal abuse are just as damaging and can often go unnoticed and ignored by friends, family, teachers, and community members. The expansion of the Student Wellbeing teams and more in school counsellors and psychologists are desperately needed, too.

16. As always, financial barriers are a major problem. Young people who need help with their mental health aren't always from families that can afford psychologists and/or counsellors. Having access to one through their school negates that barrier, ensures they miss a minimal amount of class time to attend, and the bonus that they have an ally in easy reach if/when they need it at school. The other barrier is one of self confidence - children who don't feel loved and/or safe have difficulty in asking for help because they believe they must deserve to feel that way.

17. Solving the financial barrier requires stepping away from a position of privilege and understanding that not everyone can afford to do many of the things we take for granted. A single parent missing half their shift to take a child to a doctors appointment knows that the trade off might be not eating a few meals that week. Or worse, being let go for being unreliable. I urge the Government to fund the expansion of the social worker/counsellor/psychologist in schools program so that any child who needs it can access it when they need it. We must prioritise attracting more allied health professionals to the state and keep them here.

18. STAS is an excellent program and has been very much appreciated when times were tough for school fees. The School Breakfast Club in Beaconsfield is always well attended and is a busy social hub on the mornings that it runs.

19. A partner program for parents accessing the STAS that helps with the cost of school uniforms would be a great initiative. Girl's school dresses are particularly pricey and they grow so quickly. Alternatively, changing the way uniforms are approached so that all children can choose to wear different pieces from a uniform collection, regardless of gender, and all pieces are kept to a minimal price point. It's also worth noting that Rascal Robot fundraised to provide 20 brand new strong backpacks with pencil cases, basic stationery, and basic art supplies to kids in the area, knowing that not every family can afford to replace school bags all the time because what they could afford was cheaply made and flimsy. The local CFC distributed them for us and I see them now on the backs and in the lockers of kids at the school and child care centre so I know they are being used. Finally, the Government has got to do something about winter utility bills. Families that are not in public housing but are still struggling are being hit with ridiculously high heating bills. Is there an incentive for installing solar panels or ensuring that homes are insulated and energy efficient? The trade off between being warm in winter and eating food is not a choice anyone in Tasmania should ever have to make but it happens regularly.

20. This one is almost entirely financial with a little bit of education/information, too.
21. There are much smarter people than me around the world looking at how to end poverty so I defer to their wisdom on this one. But as I look over the list of services the government is already providing on this topic, I can see a number of programs that aren't widely known about and people in the community who need to access them might not know they exist which is why I say education/information is key. Not having access to material basics is a symptom of poverty and disadvantage which leads to poor mental health and a cycle of problems that can feel like a tangled ball of yarn with no ends.
22. Immunisation programs are excellent although access to them can be tricky in rural and remote areas where getting an appointment with a GP can take weeks. Making them free and getting helpful reminders from CHaPS, Centrelink/Medicare etc is great. A combination of CHaPS and the CFC speech pathologist was how my daughter's autism diagnosis was picked up very early on so I can attest personally to how good it is to have those services in the community.
23. I've said it a few times and I'll say it again - we need more allied health professionals in Tasmania, especially in rural and remote areas, and we need better access to mental health services for everyone but particularly children and young people and preferably in schools. I have no doubt that all the physical health programs and sporting clubs are doing wonders for our kids but assuming that everyone wants to participate in sport or physical activity is short sighted.
24. These barriers are about access and education.
25. Children and young people living in rural and remote parts of the state have difficulty in accessing specialised health services, particularly allied health. The NDIS is amazing if your child has special needs but finding services to access locally to support them is difficult. I'm struggling to even find swimming lessons in my local community and living by the water makes this a fairly urgent need safety wise, but also for physical health. Beaconsfield Primary has a school pool but access to it is only during summer and only if you have a long list of qualifications and pay a large fee and I'm sure that other school pools are in a similar situation. The education barrier is more about making kids aware of how physical and mental health issues manifest - what's normal and what's not, and how to self advocate when you don't feel like your health concerns are being addressed.
26. CFCs are the BEST!! My daughter also attended ECIS pre-kinder and it was excellent for helping her prepare for what Kindergarten would be like the following year.
27. People learn in different ways - there is a LOT of studies and literature available on this subject. In my capacity at Rascal Robot I've noticed a few things that I wonder about when it comes to our education system and how it's serving our children and young people. The first thing is that in my classes here I try to encourage experimentation: with materials, processes, techniques, and media. And I see that even from as young as 6 or 7, children aren't keen to experiment because they might fail or make a mistake. The impression I get is that school is teaching them to "get it right" and "do it fast", and students are praised for being quick and accurate in their school work. That may be the case but I do wonder if we're setting them up to fail on a much larger scale when they finish school and the world doesn't shower them with praise and stickers and certificates for being efficient. In truth, if they go to university after finishing school, they will need to revert back to curiosity and experimentation after 12 years of efficiency and be ill prepared for how hard it will be to rewire their expectations of themselves. The other thing I've noted is how kids with neurological disabilities (ASD, ADHD, etc) are not set up for success in the public school system with regards to the way they learn. I see several students here who are engaged and excited to work creatively but hear from their teachers that they aren't doing well in their classrooms or are non-verbal or can't read at age 11. My personal experience with my daughter who has both ASD and

ADHD is that she has trouble concentrating and sitting still, as well as engaging in non-preferred activities. I'm also autistic and while I'm intelligent and did well at school, there are aspects of school that were frustrating and confusing to me, too (albeit in another state). Does the ECIS program need to extend beyond pre-Kinder? Do classroom teachers need more support for these children? I observe these children to be bright and clever and I'm concerned that their particular intelligence may go unnoticed and devalued because they don't fit the mold. And please please look at expanding the Artist in Residence at schools across the state program. I watch art programs become the domain of generalist teachers in primary school particularly and the number of children who love it but don't get to flex their creative muscles and I get very sad for the future of Australian art.

28. I'm not sure if I see more barriers here because of my work but I'd identify several. While school fees are supported for those who can't manage them, extra curricular activities for children with interests outside what they're learning at school are usually something they have to pay for including sport. There are children out there with real potential and talent across a diverse range of interests that aren't able to realise that potential because their parents can't afford it. There are the usual barriers in rural and remote areas about access and transport to those activities also. Reliable, fast and affordable internet is also necessary for children in those areas to access learning materials and participate in remote learning opportunities. Information about choices is also not widely available. When I was at school we had career days where we'd have guests from the local area talking about what it was like to work in certain jobs, locations, and organisations. Living in Tasmania means there are certain courses and pathways that we can't access or can only access remotely/virtually and those pathways can seem closed off or not available so educating children and young people about their options for their future feels extra important here.

29. Subsidising after school activities where possible and appropriate, inviting guest teachers/tutors/speakers to schools both in person and virtually, ensuring fast reliable and affordable internet to the State, and investigating how to engage children with learning difficulties in ways that work for them rather than trying to force them to fit the mold.

30. The Premier's Youth Advisory Council sounds like a great initiative and I'm keen to learn more. Giving young people a voice in their community whether it's local or global is key to engaging with their generation, understanding their struggles, and learning what's important to them. The CCYP is also a department I've had something to do with in my capacity at Rascal Robot but also via the CFC Champions committee. The advocacy work they do is so important for similar reasons to the Youth Advisory Council.

31. Kids need stuff to do, particularly in rural and remote areas. I mentioned earlier that they're pretty good at entertaining themselves in the absence of organised activities but that can occasionally lead to anti social behaviour when they make poor choices. Beaconsfield has a great Youth Centre that is hugely under-utilised (in that their funding can only go so far to provide programs for young people), but George Town currently has no youth engagement programs at all, no dedicated youth space, and a community that doesn't seem to understand their generation or seek to. Growing up in Sydney I didn't realise how privileged I was as a child where I had parks and playgrounds, but also after school activities, shopping centres with movie theatres and bowling alleys, roller and ice skating rinks, and galleries and museums. When I watch my teenage daughter trying to find things to do after school with her friends, Beaconsfield doesn't really offer a whole lot in the way of entertainment, opportunities for casual work, casual physical activity like bike tracks or swimming pools, etc. But alongside having activities like those I mentioned, an opportunity to participate in the community in a meaningful way through social groups, intergenerational service groups, performance opportunities for the theatrical minded, etc. don't really exist and need people to start them that understand the challenges that youth in 2021 face, as well as the humility to

accept that they will learn from young people sometimes, not just always teaching and instructing them.

32. Access based on geographical location - the further you are from a metropolitan centre, the less services and activities are available.

33. Encouraging more social enterprises in rural and regional areas, particularly those that involve and engage children and young people. Getting feedback, ideas, and inspiration from children and young people rather than dictating what they can and should be doing. Support for small business and entrepreneurs to hire young casual workers. Funding youth workers at all councils in Tasmania, venues, and the programs they run.

34. Again, I can't speak to the efficacy of any of the Aboriginal programs but I do know that there are virtually no supports for LGBTQIA+ children and young people in the West Tamar.

35. Any and all support for LGBTQIA+ kids, young people, and their families around the state and not just in regional centres - we live in rural and remote areas, too. Opportunities for the community to meet, socialise, educate, and advocate and some seed funding to start these groups. On top of that, more detailed and involved education about gender and sexual identity in schools from primary school to grade 12 in the curriculum in Health studies. Mental health support from within the LGBTQIA+ community for kids and young people is desperately needed, as well as support for families of children who are contemplating their gender and sexual identity. Understanding and education lead to acceptance which can only have positive outcomes for our kids.

36. there is a significant amount of mental health issues surrounding teenagers at the best of times but when you incorporate confusion about their gender and sexual identity and the shame or negativity or fear that might come from having to speak about that to people you're afraid won't understand adds even more stress and anxiety. Accessing other people who can help guide them through this process from past experience, mental health professionals, and even medical professionals can be challenging, especially when there are mental health issues in play that can make self advocacy difficult.

37. Here we go again...mental health support in schools. When a person has a strong supportive network around them, they're more likely to feel confident enough to ask for the help they need, be that from family, friends, teachers, other community members, or medical professionals. An ally in their school environment can make a huge difference when it feels like the whole world is against them.

I'm aware that there are still several questions I've left unanswered but I feel like my particular experience personally and professionally is not in those areas.

I would be more than happy to participate in any further discussion about the Strategy as it develops and welcome the opportunity to comment further on any of the questions I've answered.

Very best,
Sara