

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Access to TAFE for Learners with Disability

Melbourne—Tuesday, 11 May 2021

(via videoconference)

MEMBERS

Mr John Eren—Chair

Mr Gary Blackwood—Deputy Chair

Ms Juliana Addison

Ms Christine Couzens

Ms Steph Ryan

Ms Kat Theophanous

Mr Nick Wakeling

WITNESSES

Ms Maeve Kennedy, Policy and Program Manager, and

Ms Miranda Cross, Policy Officer, Children and Young People with Disability Australia.

The CHAIR: Welcome to the public hearings for the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee's Inquiry into Access to TAFE for Learners with Disability. All mobile telephones should now be turned to silent.

All evidence taken by this committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. Therefore you are protected against any action for what you say here today, but if you repeat the same things outside this hearing, including on social media, those comments may not be protected by this privilege.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript for you to check. Verified transcripts, PowerPoint presentations and handouts will be placed on the Committee's website as soon as possible. Could I please remind members and witnesses to mute their microphones when not speaking to minimise interference.

I invite you to make a brief opening statement and then we will proceed with asking some questions, if that is all right. Thank you for being here today.

Ms KENNEDY: Thank you very much, Chair and members. Good afternoon, everybody—Chair and members of the Committee. Thank you very much for providing us with the opportunity to speak to you this afternoon. My colleague Miranda and I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land from which we join you today, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded and that this always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

My name is Maeve Kennedy, and my pronouns are she/her. I am the Policy and Programs Manager here at CYDA, Children and Young People with Disability Australia. My colleague Miranda Cross is CYDA's Policy Officer. CYDA is the national representative organisation for children and young people with disability aged zero to 25 years. We undertake policy and systemic advocacy work to promote inclusion and equality for children and young people with disability and to promote and protect their human rights. Our presentation this afternoon will focus on sharing the systemic barriers experienced by young people with disability in their late high school years and in their transition to post-school education and employment. This is an issue CYDA has been working on for more than five years, and sadly we have seen very little progress made to date.

The CHAIR: You are freezing at the moment. We cannot—

Ms KENNEDY: And transition, based on—

The CHAIR: Where are you located, out of interest? It is very interesting.

Ms KENNEDY: We are just in our office in Collingwood.

Ms CROSS: I think Maeve is just having a go at the wi-fi.

Ms KENNEDY: We might relocate closer to the internet.

The CHAIR: It is back now, so I am not sure whether we should risk it or change the location. But you are back now, so if you want to start off where you left off.

Ms KENNEDY: Yes. No worries. We can keep going and you can let us know if it drops out again. Sometimes our wi-fi is a bit patchy, so we can always plug in if we need to. Our written submission to the Inquiry focused on what we hear from members and our community about their experiences with post-school planning and transition, based on a survey we conducted in 2019.

The CHAIR: No, it is not going to work. You might want to just move your location, actually.

Ms KENNEDY: Thank you very much. So CYDA today will speak to a 2019 survey that we undertook with our members around post-school planning and transition, and we will also share the key findings from engagement and policy work we have undertaken, particularly through the National Youth Disability Summit held in late 2020, which Miranda will speak to.

Young people with disability currently do not have the equal opportunity to gain an education on the same basis as their peers without disability. A 2019 national youth survey found that compared with those without

disability twice the proportion of respondents with disability recorded that they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their studies. CYDA's own national education survey in 2019 also found that about half of our respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that students with disability received adequate support in their education.

Respondents to our 2019 post-school transition survey—so we did two surveys in that year—were young people with disability, their parents and caregivers, and school staff. Their responses supported existing evidence that tells us that career planning and other post-school transition planning opportunities and support for students with disability are fragmented and generally poorer than those provided to other students. Along with low expectations and negative community attitudes around students' capabilities and desires, this contributes to poorer long-term outcomes and opportunities for young people with disability in further education, employment and social inclusion.

Overall, we know that young people with disability are one of the most disadvantaged cohorts in the labour market. They experience the intersectionality of systemic disadvantage of being both a person with disability and a young person, with this disadvantage being even further amplified by other demographic factors, such as socio-economic status, ethnicity, gender or sexual diversity or living in a rural or regional area. Young people are also more likely to bear the brunt of economic downturn, with employers more reluctant to hire or retain younger workers due to their limited experience and lower skills during periods of cyclical weakness. This is evident in the ongoing COVID-19 economic crisis, with young workers disproportionately impacted.

The rights of people with disability to study and work and enjoy full participation in the community on an equal basis as others is articulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which Australia has ratified. Not only are the rights of young people with disability not being met at the moment, but in experiencing increased systemic barriers to further education and employment their ability to benefit from the good things in life that come from having a job and having financial security is denied.

Miranda is now going to share findings and observations directly from young people with disability from our National Youth Disability Summit.

Ms CROSS: Thanks, Maeve. Good afternoon, Chair, and members. My name is Miranda Cross, and my pronouns are she/her. At the end of September 2020 CYDA held the inaugural National Youth Disability Summit online. The summit was established with the vision to create an inclusive environment where young people with disability from across Australia could come together as a community and use their voices to shape the future. The summit was designed by and for young people with experience of disability. Over nine months the co-design Committee consisting of 20 young people with disability from across Australia designed the vision, content and delivery of the summit. Hosted over five days the summit was an entirely online conference that offered young people a range of sessions and workshops and the opportunity to meet other young people, share their ideas, insights and expertise and develop new skills and knowledge. Over 250 young people attended the summit, with four of the five days being youth only.

Each day of the summit had a focus topic as chosen by the co-design community. The topics were: education; employment; mental health and wellbeing; the NDIS and housing; and access, awareness and inclusion. Many of the findings from our education and employment sections of the summit are relevant to the Committee's terms of reference, particularly around the social benefits of improving access to TAFE, experiences of young people with disability in accessing TAFE and other forms of education, and the barriers and enablers for creating more inclusive learning environments. So it is from the summit and direct quotes from young people that we will be drawing our evidence and answering our questions today.

In closing, I thought I would finish with a quote from a young person who spoke at our summit on their thoughts of inclusive education:

Inclusive education lets us decide what we want from our education. It will do anything in its power to achieve that. It would ask me, us, disabled young people, what is it doing wrong, and it would listen to our answers. It would act on what we have told it. It would consider me the key stakeholder not only in my life but the education system overall. It would like me being viewed as somebody people could learn from.

Thanks.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. I might actually throw it to Juliana Addison, who is the Ballarat member, to ask the first question. Sorry; I caught you by surprise there, Juliana.

Ms ADDISON: You did—but just really, really interesting statistics in your report. That 80 per cent figure really resonated with me—of the students who did not feel they received adequate information in career planning. So I guess what I would be really interested in learning is—I am a former schoolteacher and I know that expectations are so important. So we know that low expectations result in people and children and young people and students not receiving the support, but what do we need to do as a community to shift to a culture of high expectations for young people with a disability?

Ms KENNEDY: That is such a good question. Thank you very much. That is something that we spend much of our time—almost most of our time—working on here at CYDA. I think that is fair to say. So for us, I guess, what the evidence shows is that inclusion has to begin early and begin at the start, and building positive community attitudes has to start early—and building diversity. So we are currently working on a project around inclusive early childhood education and previously have done a lot of work around inclusive primary school education and secondary school and the overwhelming benefits that come.

Ms ADDISON: Maeve, can I just jump in there?

Ms KENNEDY: Yes.

Ms ADDISON: As a three-year-old, I did three-year-old kinder at the spastic centre kindergarten in Ballarat because my mum was the physio.

Ms KENNEDY: Wow. Yes—absolutely. Integration but even more, you know, moving further than integration to genuine inclusion is really what we advocate for very strongly and what we see coming through with the human rights approach—so having children with disability being able to learn alongside children without disability, building that exposure, that culture of inclusion and understanding, from a very early age. We commissioned an evidence review a couple of years ago around inclusive education, and we would be happy to send that through to the Committee, that overwhelmingly shows positive benefits of inclusive education genuinely—with everybody being in the same room, you know, with the supports they need to be able to participate—benefits not only to students with disability but students without disability as well and parents and teachers and the broader school community. There are a lot of flow-on benefits when we start to bring genuine inclusion into the picture, and we know there is a lot of work to be done in terms of changing community attitudes. One of the first things we need to do is to know what they are—so some measurement and some insight around community attitudes. Similar work has been done in the gender equity sector with prevention of violence against women and surveys of national community attitudes for a very long time. So we are really advocating for more visibility around attitudes towards people with disability as well and being able to sort of measure our baseline and then deliver some targeted programs and work that can get us further ahead in that respect. Did you have anything to add to that one, Miranda?

Ms CROSS: No, I think that is well covered.

Ms KENNEDY: Yes, perfect. In terms of community attitudes data that we know already, Amaze, which is the peak body for autistic people here in Victoria, commissioned some research I think a few years ago into attitudes towards autistic people, including in the education environment. So we have some information so far, but we really need more. We know there are stereotypes and some negative biases around disability and a lack of understanding in general and there are some real systemic barriers in the way that our systems are set up, but we need more information, and then we need, you know, targeted resources and investment to be able to address those things and to build inclusion and inclusive attitudes from a really young age.

Ms CROSS: I will add one other thing. There was another really good survey that Melbourne Uni did with I think VicHealth—it was a Victorian-based one—and it gave a really good understanding of community attitudes, but I guess one thing that we need is these surveys more often so we can see if there is change and if interventions are working and things like that. Because it is really good to get this point-in-time understanding, but we then need to know whether it is changing or it is improving. So yes, that is something we also advocate for, the frequency.

The CHAIR: Excellent. We might go to the Deputy Chair, Gary Blackwood, next and then Christine after that if that is all right.

Mr BLACKWOOD: Thanks, John. Could I just take you to the post-school transition side of the problem and to the older age group that you deal with and ask: what makes a really good post-school transition program for students that you deal with?

Ms KENNEDY: Thank you very much. One of the things that we highlighted in the submission we provided as well was around starting career planning early. From the information that we got through the survey we conducted, and that was a couple of years ago—it would be interesting to see how things are looking now, although my gut feel would be that it is a similar picture—we heard that 50 per cent of students started receiving career planning support in year 11 and year 12. For us, I guess, and based on what young people are telling us and also based on evidence around careers advice, that is too late. So we really advocate very strongly for that to start early. Similar to the previous question around building high expectations from the beginning, if we are starting with a culture of inclusion and where there are high expectations for all students, including those with disability, then we are creating an environment where young people feel empowered and have the support to think about and pursue options that they want from an early age.

We are also hearing from our members that there is very little accessible career planning support from teachers at school and that parents and families are doing a lot of that with the young person themselves but also in some cases that young people are being funnelled or encouraged into particular avenues after their schooling. We really see that it should start from a more person-centred approach, so it should start from strengths—‘What are your strengths and your interests and how can we support you to get to where you want to go?’—rather than an assumption that a student might end up in particular pathways because they have a disability. We would really be advocating for career planning I guess to start earlier and to be more accessible and inclusive and to include young people and their families as well, so we do not want it just delivered at school but we want families and the households where young people are living to be included in those conversations as well. We say that post-school planning should start by at least the age of 15, so that is bringing it back down a little bit earlier. Then we also need better outcomes measurement. I guess that is something that we would advocate for as well, but I might hand over to Miranda, if you have anything else?

Ms CROSS: Yes, something else that we would add, and I think the evidence suggests is incredibly helpful for looking for employment post school, is work experience. We know a lot of young people in our community can be excluded from work experience or they are provided work experience that is not really in line with their interests, or that the family is out of pocket so that the young person can participate in work experience. So I think better supports to get that real work experience, employability skills and support the person to engage with local employers and make those connections early so when they are transitioning into the labour market they do have those skills and those experiences.

I guess the one other thing I would add to what Maeve was saying about what we would want from career support is we know that across the country there is a real ad hoc approach in some areas and there is no real standardisation in the supports a young person would get or any framework around what is evidence-based and things like that, so I guess we would want some improved consistency so it does not matter what area you are from or what school you are going to, you would get the same supports.

Mr BLACKWOOD: Thanks, Miranda. Thanks, Maeve.

The CHAIR: Chris, did you want to ask a question?

Ms COUZENS: Yes. Thank you both very much for your submission and your evidence today. We really appreciate your time. Just developing on that transition issue and the transition into employment, for example, what are some of the key learnings out of that that you think need to be focused on given that often, and from what I hear in my own electorate, it is around the advocacy for people with disabilities to get employment, but also, secondly, to ensure that their employers have a good understanding of the needs of the individual as well? So some sort of learnings from you around what that would mean would be great.

Ms CROSS: Yes, absolutely. Thank you very much. The first question about what would improve those transitions I will answer from a CYDA perspective and then I will hope to bring in some quotes and things like that from the summit, because young people really did have strong opinions on what they wanted from educators and employers that would make it more accessible. I guess really relevant to the TAFEs is that what would help young people when they are entering the workforce is having formal qualifications, and we know they are under-represented in studying higher qualifications and tertiary education. So I think to promote that

and to get more young people enrolled but then also supported so they can complete those courses would be incredibly beneficial.

In terms of employers and educators and what young people would want them to know, I will just pull up some notes if that is all right because this was a question that we specifically posed to young people. For some context, we had consultation sessions to ask these questions. One was specifically about employment; one was specifically about education. The theme was generally the same across both sessions: they really wanted employers and educators to be the ones that reached their hands out and ask the questions. It is really burdensome for young people when they are entering different settings to have to lay out everything they need straightaway. I have got some good quotes from young people about what it feels like. They wanted educators and employers to proactively ask students what they need and advertise reasonable adjustments, so this is, I guess, in both the education and the employment settings. As commented by a young person who attended the summit:

You can't ask for things you don't know about.

In the context of employers and educators practically asking about accessibility-related support and encouraging authentic discussion about disability, a young person shared:

It feels so much more welcoming and that you're not the big elephant in the room.

Educators reaching out first also helps break down power imbalances between educators and students. As shared by a young person:

Why would I ever want to put myself in that vulnerable position when they hold all of the authority to making my learning time with them a living hell?

So yes, I guess the resounding theme that came across from young people was: when employers and educators put it out first and reach that hand out it is incredibly helpful, and they know it is a safe space.

Ms KENNEDY: And knowing what they can ask for I think as well was something that came through really strongly, and that is in a TAFE setting but also in employment, giving young people information or providing accessible information around what reasonable adjustments are, what inclusion in a workplace looks like, 'What are your rights at work?' and 'What are the legal requirements?', because we do hear that there can be a lot of discrimination in the workplace for young people with disability, so around understanding that legislative framework.

I think another thing that comes through pretty strongly for us is what Miranda touched on before around work experience and workplace training and on-the-job training as well. CYDA as an organisation is currently part of a community traineeship pilot program through VCOSS—the Victorian Council of Social Service—as well, and I believe VCOSS has put in a submission with points on the traineeship program. But I think providing accessible ways for young people to gain real-world experience, from what we hear, is incredibly helpful in bridging that gap between TAFE and then employment. I think there are relatively high employment rates for the traineeship model that VCOSS is using for their cohorts, because there is wraparound tailored support. From what we hear it is all about providing the supports that people need along the way. And also transition points, we know, are really difficult for young people in general but particularly for young people with disability—all of the key transition points as they grow up—so the exit from school and then the exit from TAFE. That is another key transition point where often, if you are lucky, you have supports set up in a particular way, and then you suddenly end your time in that particular system and you face a cliff again and sort of have to approach that process of getting supports as well. So anything that could smooth that transition path in terms of providing support, helping young people to feel safe, knowing what they can ask for greater communication along that process, is what comes through from our community as well.

Ms COUZENS: Were there any key learnings from your experience during COVID particularly, obviously for people with disabilities, that we could take on board for this Inquiry?

Ms KENNEDY: Thank you. Do you want to speak on it?

Ms CROSS: Yes. It came through both in the education and the employment consultations that we did. A lot of young people actually shared how COVID opened up a lot of opportunities for them, so in terms of education it was really beneficial for some young people to be able to relisten to a class when they were recorded or be able to pause them and take a break or listen to them at a later time that was more appropriate,

whereas they were never really given that option before. So they really appreciated being able to have recordings of the classes. Also sometimes, for some young people—not all—just getting to the place can be a difficulty, so that helps a lot. And then it came through in the employment session as well that it really opened up a lot of opportunities. People could work more flexibly, they really appreciated being able to work on a part-time basis if that suited, and a lot of young people hoped, I guess, that a lot of the changes would hang around because they did help them engage with employment a lot more.

Ms COUZENS: Thank you. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Excellent. Just in relation to what makes a good post-school transition program for students with disability, what is that transition and how could TAFEs do it better in terms of accepting more people with disability, particularly young people with disability? Also, just to follow up from that previous question about COVID—and that has been devastating to all of the communities but particularly young people with disability—we have all learned to adapt to a different style of working, like we are now, for example, and a different style of, I suppose, remote learning. Various areas have different challenges, and you experienced one just before with digital technologies and access to proper wi-fi or connection. Is there something that, for example, in the future the government can do to have a package in place for those students that want to learn by remote means?

Ms KENNEDY: Thank you for those questions. I think starting with digital inclusion, I guess, that is certainly something that we would be advocating for—greater access to digital technologies and greater inclusion. They can have a really big impact and benefit for people with disability. Different forms of technology can provide different ways of communicating, for example, for people who have complex communication needs. So we would certainly advocate for greater access to the internet. Certainly, as all government services are really moving that way and there is a great reliance on the internet for the NDIS as well, for example, we definitely recognise and hear about the additional barriers for young people with disability living in rural communities and regional communities. More broadly, I guess, around digital inclusion and digital technologies as well, some of the particular programs on computers and on iPads and phones can really assist in learning as well. We have heard from people—less so in the TAFE environment but I think it is fair to say that it probably applies, but we hear about this in the secondary school environment—that there can be a lack of understanding by schools and by inclusion staff at schools around those technologies and that that can really be a barrier if young people need assistance, you know, in that technological space. That would provide them with the opportunity to engage—so greater awareness and understanding of those technological opportunities as well, particularly in a post-COVID world.

In terms of your earlier question about the transition from school, I will say one quick point and then Miranda might have more to add and will have some quotes from young people. One of the things that comes through to us in a lot of different ways is the number of services and systems that are in the lives of young people with disability and the intersection of those systems. So for many young people there is the NDIS, there is the education system and getting the appropriate supports is probably interaction with health professionals as well. So there are a lot of professionals involved in people's lives. I think one of the things we hear about those transition points is just around when people have a supportive environment—when you have, for example, school staff with whom you feel safe. If TAFEs are able to do some inclusive inreach and, you know, work closer with schools in the school environment and work closer with career planners, if there was able to be some of that—

Because we hear a lot as well about, I guess, the psychosocial impacts of new environments, and anything to reduce the overwhelm and the degree of change there is from the school environment to the TAFE environment would be really helpful. So anything that can be done to promote crossover—for TAFEs to come into schools and talk about what they do and what a day would look like, and for students who are at TAFE to come and speak to students at school and sort of talk about some of the access requirements. We have heard a lot as well, similar to what Miranda said before, about needing to know what support is available. You cannot ask for what you do not know, so making it clear that support can look really different for different people. It does not just have to be Auslan interpreters or captioning, which is really important for people who do need those things, but that is not what everybody's support looks like, so making it clear that there is a whole range of supports, making things able to be pretty person centred but sharing that information with everyone in a really accessible way or creating an environment where people feel like it is okay to ask for things, you know, like they are not being singled out or stigmatised if they are asking for reasonable adjustments or supports.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Next question. Yes, Chris. Chris first, then Juliana.

Ms COUZENS: Yes, thank you. How can TAFEs encourage more learners with a disability to disclose their condition and seek relevant support? Have you got any key points that you can raise there?

Ms KENNEDY: Thank you, we do.

Ms CROSS: I guess number one, and I think we spoke about it before, is that proactive reaching out and asking students, initiating that conversation was highlighted by young people who attended the summit as being clearly important, so I guess I would reiterate that point. But I guess also the culture of the TAFE itself, not just the learning aspects but the entire culture, contributes to whether that young person feels safe and feels like it is an inclusive place where they can disclose their disability. So we know a lot of social activities and things like that are a big part of that journey. You know, there is the learning but then there are also the social aspects that come with going to TAFE and all the things that come with that, and we know that due to disability you are often excluded from that purely because they are not accessible, so I guess making an effort to make those activities accessible as well as the learning in the classroom really supports that environment as well.

A theme that came through from young people as well is okay, it is great to offer those ad hoc supports when students need them, but they would really like to see a more inclusive TAFE in general where the classroom is already inclusive and you do not have to come in and ask for X, Y, Z because it is already there and it is already considered. A young person in our community made a really good point that I will share because there is merit in their words. They said, 'There's no standard for accessible classrooms or space unless there is that one person, but who actually wants to be that one person?'. They then further added that being that one person makes them feel singled out for their differences. So they were wanting to see an increased standard rather than just on an ad hoc basis.

Ms COUZENS: Yes. A follow-on from that. How can the TAFEs better support the wellbeing of those young people as well?

Ms KENNEDY: Yes, absolutely. Miranda might jump in as well. One of the things that we hear a lot is around building trusted relationships but bringing a trauma-informed approach. Something that we hear from our community quite often is discrimination and exclusion over many years in the lives of young people has a really significant impact and can have a really big impact on mental health and wellbeing but also can really cause some complex trauma. The impact of stigmatising environments and feeling unsafe or unwelcome in an environment can have a really big impact, so we would advocate for trauma-informed environments and training for TAFE staff to be able to bring that approach in all aspects so that there can be that sort of psychological safety I guess or the feeling that you can ask for help and that people will understand where you are coming from and be able to meet you where you are at in that way as well. Do you have other things, Miranda?

Ms CROSS: At the summit young people had strong opinions about what educators could do to make them feel more comfortable. I have got quite a few quotes that I can share with you from young people. I guess to preface it, young participants who attended the summit see the education of educators as a key step towards making education settings more inclusive and accessible for students with disability. This includes providing education to teaching, school and education staff about the experiences of young people with disability, different disability types and diverse learning needs and strengths. And the group were pretty passionate about that—education that is designed for educators should also be co-designed by those with lived experience of being both a young person and a young person studying at TAFE. Some quotes from young people will get this point across. One young person added:

Attitudes can be a big barrier. If you have a teacher that you're afraid of or doesn't understand you, you don't want to go to those classes.

Another young person added:

I feel like my idea of inclusive education would be more training and awareness for teachers and how to be inclusive in the classroom, better strategies in dealing with students who have overloads or breakdowns in the class and training on how to support students who are not understanding, because we can hide very well.

And a couple more if that is all right. They were all very passionate about this area, so I want to get that passion across.

All the barriers I face came down to a lack of education and a lack of access to resources to be educated upon. Lots of the time my teachers wouldn't understand how to respond to situations, or like help to overcome the barriers, because they didn't know you didn't have the resources to handle those situations.

One young person also added:

I think there's generally no framework available for even teachers and staff with the best intentions.

And then lastly, a suggestion from a young person:

Running training courses for teachers on how to help students with disability learn, how to recognise how people learn and how to notice when people need help. Noticing when people are reaching out for help, because so many students are doing it and it often goes unnoticed.

Ms COUZENS: And so I would suggest that you would support the concept of co-design.

Ms KENNEDY: Absolutely.

Ms CROSS: One hundred per cent.

Ms COUZENS: Is it a critical part of developing those supports for people with disabilities?

Ms CROSS: I think young people would really advocate for that for that too. They often said throughout the summit, through every day, that no-one understands young people's needs better than young people. If they are not in the process, it is not going to be right.

Ms KENNEDY: One hundred per cent. Thank you.

Ms COUZENS: Thank you. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Juliana?

Ms ADDISON: I think that is a really good segue to the next question that I was interested in following up, because the lived experience of our young people—they can articulate it best. Their voice needs to be heard. Whilst we talk about the need for adults to be trained to respond better, what are your views on how young people with a disability could be assisted to build self-advocacy skills? Because it sounds like at this summit they were desperate to share their ideas. How do we get them when they are not in perhaps such a comfortable and encouraging space to be strong advocates for themselves and other kids with disabilities?

Ms CROSS: You are right; it was a comfortable and an inclusive space and they could bounce off each other's ideas. I think it was a great space, so I would say create more spaces like that. I think we often ask young people, especially at CYDA, in systemic advocacy. We engage a lot with governments and departments and other services, and the consultation processes are often very formal. It is quite hard for young people to engage, and it is quite daunting to do a formal process. So one of the strategies that we have used that has been successful is helping young people create the content of these engagement processes themselves so that it is in language that is relevant to them, it is asking the key questions that are relevant to them, and engaging young facilitators to deliver the sessions as well. I think it helps to take away that formal feeling of someone—I do not know—perhaps in a suit behind a screen that can be a bit more intimidating than a young person their age, their peer. What you think, Maeve?

Ms KENNEDY: Yes, absolutely. I agree with Miranda's points, and that comes through really strongly from our community around creating safe environments where people do feel comfortable and supported to speak up and where they feel like they will be genuinely listened to. I think being listened to was something that came through really, really strongly in the summit and in pretty much everything we do with young people. But there is also, I think, probably not to talk about it over and over again, but going back to sort of the idea that we were talking about right at the beginning around building inclusion from the start, so a young person with disability just like any young person feels like their voice will be listened to, feels like their opinions are valued and important, and so creating environments and supporting kids from that really young age to be able to talk about their feelings and their opinions, and then creating environments.

CYDA is running some leadership programs at the moment to develop leadership capacity and support young people with disability across the country, but you know, in an ideal future we would not need to be doing that or you would not need a different program for young people with disability, because there would be inclusion from the beginning and there would be those opportunities in mainstream ways along the way. So they are sort

of for upstream first and then the immediate downstream work as well, which is more about sort of safe environments on the ground at this point in time.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much. It has been very insightful. Thank you for your contribution in joining us today and for your submission. You filled in 45 minutes, which is great.

Ms KENNEDY: Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: Thank you again.

Witnesses withdrew.