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Strategic Plan



Our Values

In everything we do, the Office of the Children’s Commissioner for Jersey (OCCJ) will strive to uphold and demonstrate the following values:

Child-centred

Children and young people are at the centre of all that we do. We will, at all times, seek to act in the best interest of the child. As part of achieving this, we will seek their views and their participation in our work.

Accountable

We are open, honest and responsible in everything we do.
We will act with integrity at all times.

Fair

We treat everyone with respect, dignity and compassion. We will counter discrimination of any kind in our work.

Authoritative

We will always seek to be informed, confident and trustworthy in our views and opinions, thereby building and enhancing respect for the authority of the OCCJ.

Dedicated

We will use our powers and functions to protect and promote the rights of children and young people in Jersey, accepting the difficulties and challenges involved.

Constructively Critical

We will be constructively critical in our work for children and young people, and welcoming of constructive challenges to our work. This will promote a solutions-focussed, reflective and continuous improvement approach in ourselves and others.

Independent

We will champion children’s rights in all circumstances. We will not be unduly influenced by people in power, through politics, the media, or any other setting.

INTRODUCTION

My name is Carmel Corrigan, and I am delighted to have been made Children’s Commissioner for Jersey. I took up this post in March 2024.

My job, and the job of everyone who works in the Office of the Children’s Commissioner for Jersey (OCCJ), is to promote and protect the human rights of children and particular groups of young people up to the age of 25. This is no small task, as it involves a large number of rights under several international conventions, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the European Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

Without doubt, though, the most significant international agreement for our work is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This was extended to Jersey in 2014 and provides all children under the age of 18 with over 40 substantive rights. These include survival, development, protection, and participation rights.

This plan sets out our priorities for the coming four years. This does not mean that we will work on nothing else or that we will not take up other opportunities or challenges to promote and defend children’s rights or address new and emerging issues. It simply means that this is where we expect a good deal of our resources will be directed.

The thematic areas that we will focus on have been informed by our consultation with children and adults which took place between April and June 2024. In this consultation, Your Island, Your Rights, we heard from over 800 children and 300 adults aged 18 and over about what is important to them and what they think we should focus on. We also met with over 300 children in schools around the Island. We are grateful to those who took part for sharing their views and ideas with us. We will publish the detailed results of this consultation shortly. We could not create individual priorities for every issue that was raised but we hope that, by working on the priorities below, we will have a positive impact on many children and young people and how they experience their rights in Jersey.

This Strategic Plan is also informed by a range of other sources. These include the Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child issued to the UK State Party, including Jersey, in 2023; the Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on Human Rights issued to the UK State Party, including Jersey, in 2024; our previous casework and the issues that have come up there; consultation with key stakeholder organisations; previous, ongoing and forthcoming Government of Jersey plans,

strategies, policies and legislation; and advice from our own advisory panels.

This consultation and consideration of other sources has identified six thematic areas and groups that we will focus on in the next four years (see pages 4-5). These are:

- Educational inequality
- Children experiencing poverty
- Play and leisure
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Children in care
- Children in the youth justice system

The OCCJ has already been active on a number of these issues and this work will continue to be developed. Some of these areas, however, will present new opportunities and challenges for us in engaging with children and young people, organisations and the Government of Jersey.

I am still learning about children’s and young people’s lives in Jersey and about how their rights are upheld through services, policy and the law. I know that there is much more to learn, and I am looking forward to meeting and talking to children, adults, professionals, organisations, and the Government, each of whom have a role in making children’s and young people’s rights a reality. To paraphrase the famous words of the American writer Maya Angelou, *only when you know better, can you do better*. My commitment during these first years of my term as Children’s Commissioner is to keep learning, keep listening and keep working, in order to do the best job I can for Jersey’s children and the young adults under my remit.



Carmel Corrigan

Carmel Corrigan
Children’s Commissioner for Jersey

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND THE UNCRC

CHILDREN EXPERIENCING POVERTY

Survival Rights

These include children's right to life, good food, water, and healthcare. These rights are important and relevant to the thematic areas identified above including children in poverty and mental health.

Protection Rights

Children have the right to have their best interest considered in all decisions about their lives, to be safe from all forms of harm, including abuse, the effects of war and discrimination in the justice system.

CHILDREN IN CARE

CHILDREN IN THE YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEM

EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY

Development Rights

These include the right to an education, time to relax and play and develop talents and abilities.

Participation Rights

Some of the rights included here are that children must be given the opportunity to express their views, be listened to, and taken seriously, as well as to information to help children form a view and to associate with their peers.

PLAY AND LEISURE

"Prices of everything its to much for parents."

"Address poverty for families, housing."

"unaccessible education."

"...students facing racism, even if the people being racist just think it's banter or whatever."

"...students being able to access laptops for exams and classwork..."

"... for us teenagers there is really nothing to do. We can go in shops in town but then get accused of stealing or followed around shops by the workers when all we want to do is shop peacefully."

"people are removing fun things such as tamba park, cinema or the arcade."

"Better facilities for families to go to in wet weather...to suit all ages and something for everyone to get involved in."

"They need places to go and things to do that don't cost money!"

"Staying safe, too many children are out on the streets through the night which opens them up to be potential victims of child criminal and sexual exploitation."

"We should stop placing children off island for their care."

"Children in care need to know their rights and their adults need to support them to best understand their rights and entitlements."

"Young people in care get forgotten about. The focus is on kids that are in care now but forget about the ones that aged out and are approaching 25 with no help at all."

"...focus...on how to improve living standards...and financial costs on the island."

"I would make sure that everyone that all children and young people in poverty would be helped and have a nice home to live in and have nice food to eat without worrying if they have enough money to pay for bills."

"Suicide and panic attacks they don't seem to be cared about often."

"mental health be considered more important than school."

"Quicker access to mental health support for children especially at senior school level"

"Address the waiting times for children being assessed of additional needs and mental health issues."

"If involved with the care system, then have a consistent staff member that doesn't change all the time and who is contactable."

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND THE UNCRC

Children's rights are the commitments that the world's governments have made to children. Children under 18 have a special set of rights in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The United Nations is made up of 193 countries from across the world.

The Children's Commissioner's work is rooted in the UNCRC. This convention was first open for signatures in 1989, and since then, 196 countries have ratified it (so-called State Parties) and one has signed it. The UNCRC was extended to Jersey in 2014 and the Island has become part of the UK State Party. This means that Jersey has committed to respect, protect and fulfil children's rights to survive and thrive, learn and grow, make their voices heard and reach their full potential.

All children have the same rights. All rights are interconnected and of equal importance. The rights in the UNCRC can be grouped into four categories – survival, development, participation and protection rights. The UNCRC and the General Comments from the Committee on the Rights of the Child also provide guidance on how governments should and must work to implement the UNCRC, and how organisations like the OCCJ can hold them to account.

All children experience their rights in different ways in their everyday lives. They live their rights at home, in school and in their communities through their family lives, their friends, and a wide range of education, care, health and other services. Some of the main places and services where children live their rights every day are reflected in the thematic areas we will focus on in the coming years.

OUR STRATEGIC PILLARS 2024-2027

PILLAR ONE: Promoting awareness of children's rights and the OCCJ

All children and young people should be able to enjoy all of their rights, but some find this more difficult than others, for a variety of reasons. These include not knowing about their rights, not having an adult in their life who knows that they have rights, and a lack of understanding of, and attention to, rights in the services and systems that support them. Raising awareness of, and providing education on, human rights is one of our statutory functions, and our first strategic pillar is to continue to build on our work in this area. To achieve this, we will:

- Continue to build children's and young people's awareness and understanding of their rights and of the OCCJ through a variety of means and initiatives.
- Engage with parents, carers and professionals to increase their understanding of children's and young people's human rights, how they can be applied every day, and to hear their concerns.
- Collaborate with key stakeholder organisations to raise awareness of children's rights among their staff.
- Promote a greater awareness of children's and young people's rights through events and activities that will engage the general public.
- Use a wide range of media to raise awareness of, debate and discuss children's and young people's rights.

PILLAR TWO: Demonstrating and promoting best practice in the involvement of children

A fundamental right for any child is to have their views heard and considered in decisions that affect them. This is in every sphere of their lives, including in their family, at school, by support services and at government level. Not all adults are comfortable with or know how to involve children in their work. Additionally, not all children know how to access the OCCJ to have their views heard. We will address this by:

- Ensuring that we are accessible to children and young people by providing appropriate resources, space and opportunities to engage with us, both in person and online.
- Undertaking and/or commissioning consultations with groups for children and young people to highlight their views and experiences.
- Further developing our Youth Advisory Group as child rights advocates.
- Creating opportunities for children and young people to speak directly to decision-makers.
- Working collaboratively with other stakeholders to promote and support the involvement of children in relevant decision-making processes.

PILLAR THREE: Protecting children's rights

Every year the OCCJ receives requests for information and advice in cases where either a child themselves or an adult is concerned that a child's rights have not been upheld. In all cases we offer advice and information, while some complex cases need further attention and longer involvement. Over the life of this Strategic Plan, we will prioritise building awareness of our casework function and facilitating early, effective and collaborative resolutions where possible.

- To increase awareness of our information, advice and casework function to support children, young people and adults to raise rights-based concerns to the OCCJ.
- To seek, promote and support early resolution of concerns raised by, or on behalf of, children or young people.
- To use the full range of our powers to address complex cases where early resolution is not possible or appropriate.
- To work collaboratively, where appropriate, with all key stakeholders to secure best practice and outcomes in relation to upholding children's and young people's rights.

PILLAR FOUR: Monitoring and advising Government

As an independent human rights institution, one of our functions is to monitor how well children's and young people's rights are respected and protected in Jersey. We do this by holding different organisations, including the Government, to account for how their services, policies, regulations and laws operate for children and young people. In this Strategic Plan we will:

- Continue to monitor the achievement of children's and young people's human rights in Jersey through review and analysis of relevant Government of Jersey policies, regulations and legislation.
- Identify and consider, in particular, opportunities to influence services, policy and legislation in relation to the thematic areas and groups identified through the consultations and review that informed this Plan.

PILLAR FIVE: Progressing incorporation of the UNCRC

As set out in the introduction to this Plan, the Government of Jersey has committed to gradually incorporating the UNCRC into Jersey law. This is an important commitment and one that the OCCJ is keen to see progress on. This will involve both proactive and reactive work by the Office. Under this pillar, we will:

- Identify priority areas of legislation to be progressed over the four years of this Plan that give effect to the UNCRC.
- Support commencement of the next phases of the Children (Convention Rights) (Jersey) Law 2022.
- Continue to provide high-quality advice to the Government on policy and legislative proposals.

PILLAR SIX: Engaging at international level

The UNCRC is the most widely ratified international agreement. A consequence of this is that there is a wealth of international knowledge and expertise which Jersey and the OCCJ can draw on, and contribute to, in the pursuit of children's rights. In addition, it is essential that we continue to participate in the relevant international human rights systems, including in the treaties reporting mechanisms, as a means of holding the Government of Jersey to account. We will:

- Actively contribute to the shared learning and activities of our UK and Irish colleagues through the British and Irish Network of Ombudsmen and Children's Commissioners, as well as working collaboratively with our European counterparts through the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children.
- Engage with the relevant international human rights systems.
- Contribute to international awareness, discussions and debate on the progression of children's rights through international conferences, events and publications as appropriate.

PILLAR SEVEN: Being an effective and efficient independent human rights institution in Jersey

The OCCJ is Jersey's only human rights institution. While we are independent of Government, we are accountable to the States Assembly and to the public. It is important that we are effective, efficient and accountable, and that our internal processes support this. It is also important that we continue to grow our knowledge and skills in order to deliver on our functions. To do this, we will:

- Ensure that we are meeting our regulatory and statutory responsibilities under relevant legislation, including the Data Protection (Jersey) Law 2018, Freedom of Information Law (2011), as well as our safeguarding duties.
- Use the experience and expertise of our Audit and Risk Advisory Panel to make sure that we are financially compliant and that we have a regularly reviewed and appropriate register of our risks.
- Review our existing internal processes and develop new ones to ensure that we are transparent in our strategic decision-making.
- Review with stakeholders the options available to ensure and enhance the independence of the OCCJ in line with international standards.
- Constantly strive for improvement and development through the creation of a self-reflective and learning environment for staff of the OCCJ.

Delivering on the strategy

Each of the pillars of work identified above will be underpinned by a detailed implementation plan. This will identify the key pieces of work to be delivered to meet the objectives set out above and will include a timeframe for each piece of work, key milestones and relevant performance indicators, who we aim to work with and the anticipated opportunities and challenges. This implementation plan will help us track our progress on delivering on this strategy.

THE OFFICE OF THE CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER FOR JERSEY

The OCCJ is an independent human rights institution created by the Commissioner for Children and Young People (Jersey) Law 2019.

The main role of the Children's Commissioner is to promote and protect the rights of all children under the age of 18, and those of all young people under the age of 25 if they have care experience, have a disability or have been in contact with the youth justice system.

The Functions, Duties and Powers of the OCCJ

The OCCJ has a wide range of functions, duties and powers.

Functions

- To make sure children, young people and adults know about and understand the rights of children and young people.
- To ensure that people in power and with influence in Jersey respect, protect and fulfil the rights of children and young people.
- To provide advice to the Government of Jersey on improvements to laws and policies to enhance the realisation of children's and young people's rights.
- To encourage adults to listen to and consider children's and young people's views when decisions are made that affect their lives.
- To monitor how Jersey laws comply with the UNCRC and other international human rights treaties and conventions, and to make recommendations that bring Jersey laws into line with them.
- To encourage the Government of Jersey to sign and implement any other European or international treaties or conventions that will protect the rights of children and young people.

Duties

- Using the UNCRC and other relevant human rights instruments, including those already signed up to by Jersey, as the basis for their work.
- Involving children and young people and the people who work with them in the work of the OCCJ.
- Publishing a strategic plan explaining the work of the OCCJ at least every four years.
- Making sure children and young people know about the role of the Children's Commissioner and how to contact the OCCJ.
- Publishing an annual report every year that sets out what we have done to promote and protect the rights of children and young people.

Powers

When the rights of children and young people are not or may not be upheld, the Children's Commissioner has the power to:

- Provide children and young people with information about their rights.
- Support children and young people to complain to the relevant organisation.
- Bring concerns and complaints to the attention of people and organisations who provide services to children, request relevant information and seek to help them to solve any problems or complaints.
- Investigate cases where the rights of children and young people have not or might not have been upheld and make recommendations about how things could be improved.
- Take legal cases to court on behalf of children and young people or, in certain circumstances, support children and young people who are going to court.
- Publishing an annual report every year that sets out what we have done to promote and protect the rights of children and young people.

A range of factors must be considered before the Commissioner exercises many of these powers. When considering the most appropriate approach, the Commissioner also takes advice from their staff, their advisory panels and, where necessary, legal advice.

While aiming to serve the best interest of the child and afford due process to all involved, the OCCJ seeks to support local, early resolution of concerns brought to it.

HIGH-LEVEL SURVEY RESULTS

For a ten-week period, between 22 April and 30 June 2024, we asked Islanders what they felt we should focus on in our next strategic plan. We grouped the responses into three broad age brackets: under-13; 13-17; over-18.

Our engagement took place online and in person, giving children and adults the chance to volunteer their views on the issues that affect children and young people the most in our Island.

Some high-level results from our online survey of children, young people and adults are briefly presented here. We will publish more details from the online survey, along with a child-friendly version of our Strategic Plan, in Autumn 2024.

MORE THAN
1,000
SURVEY RESPONDENTS.

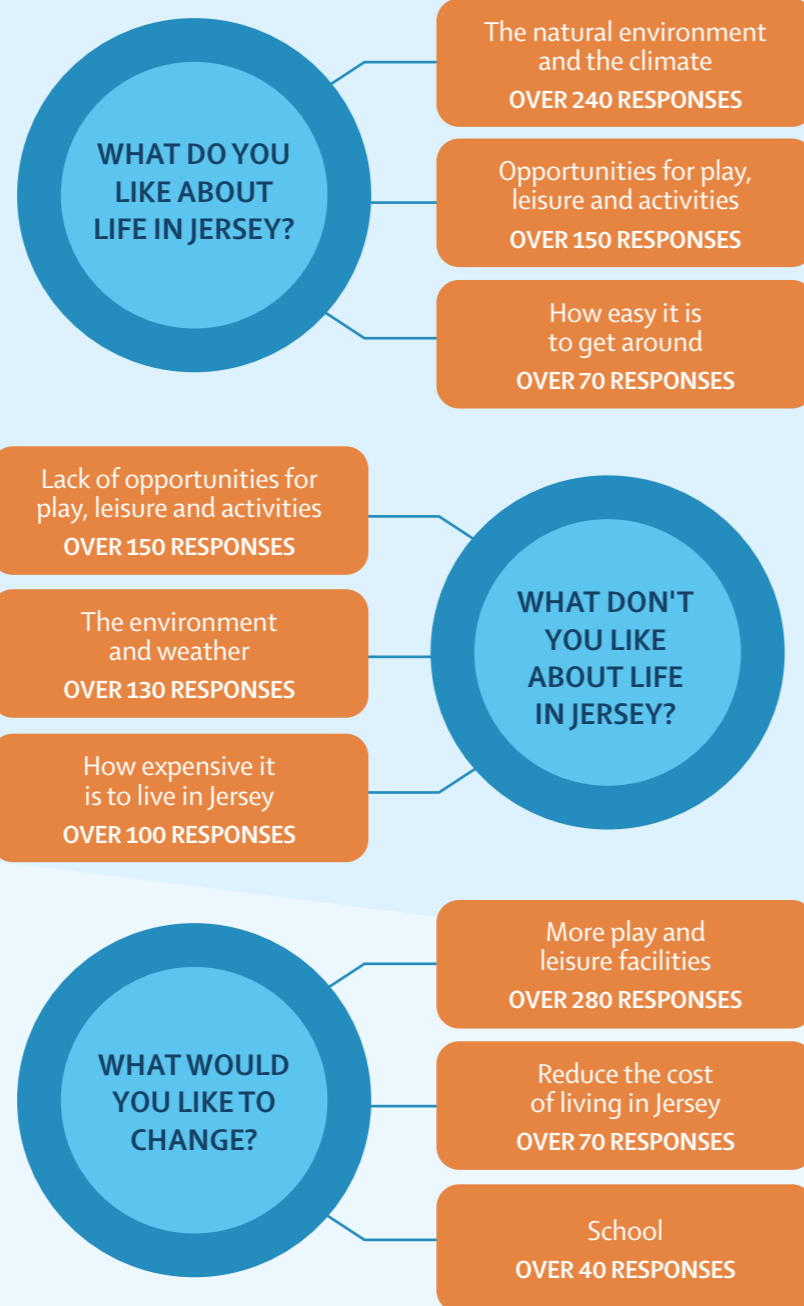
UNDER 13s:
319

13-17s:
516

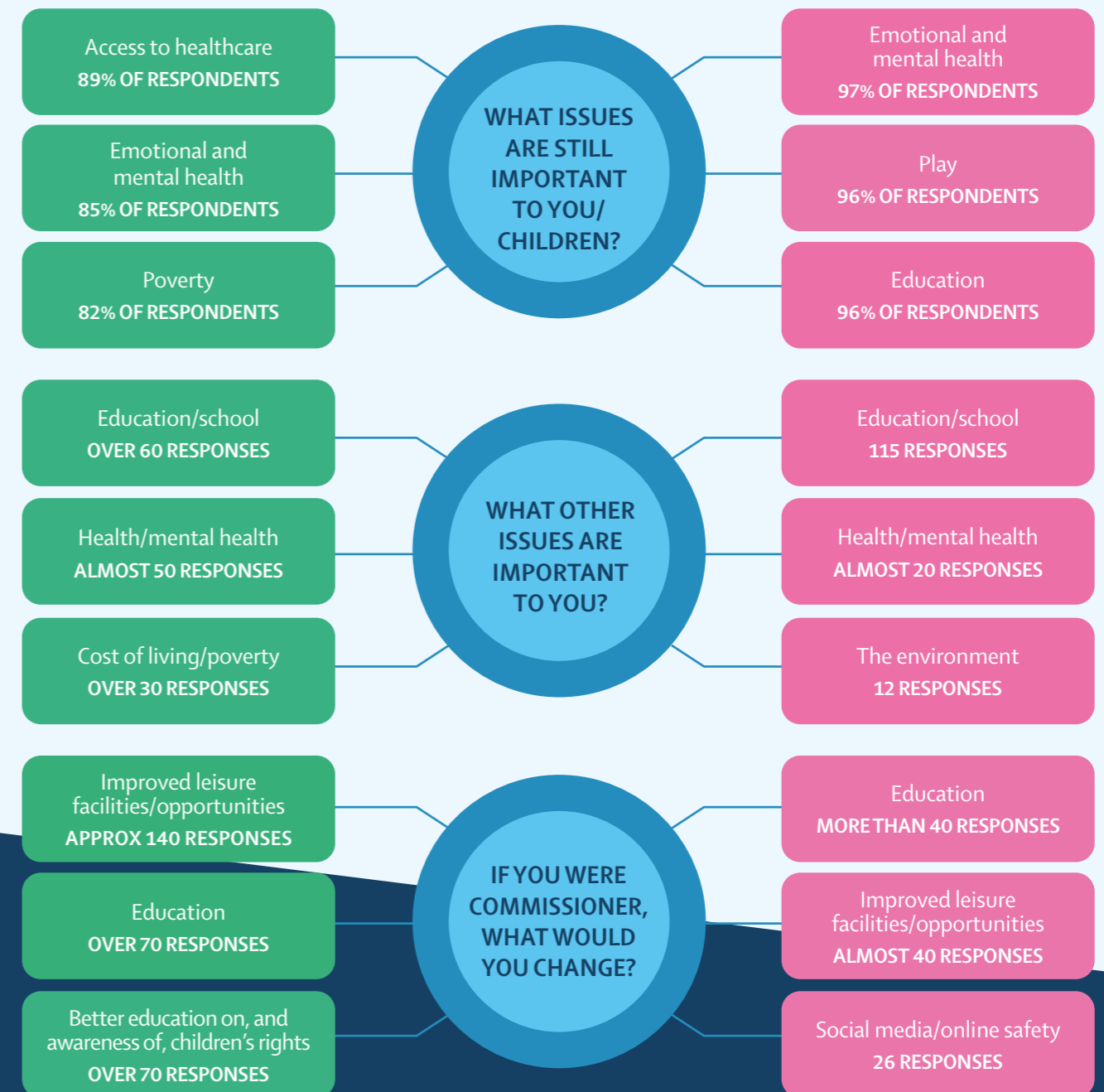
OVER-18s:
230

VISITED
16
SCHOOLS, HEARING
FROM MORE THAN
300
CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE.

CHILDREN AGED UNDER 13 YEARS



YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 13-17





For advice, resources and information on all aspects of our work and on child rights more generally, visit our website or follow us on social media.



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