



**Message from the National Children's Commissioner, Megan Mitchell as
National Ambassador Children's Week 2016**

I am delighted to once again be the National Ambassador for Children's Week in 2016. Last year marked an historic milestone in children's rights as we celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. A lot has been achieved in that time, but there is still much more that needs to be done to ensure all children in Australia can realise all of their rights.

The theme of National Children's Week this year is Article 17 of the Convention - the right to reliable, diverse information and enriching media. This is a very important right to be focussing on in 2016. Today, all kinds of information are available to children at the click of a button, the blink of an eye, the sound of a voice or the touch of a finger.

The digital world and the information gateways it opens up are now a natural part of the of lives of children. The Australian Bureau of Statistics has reported that 86% of households had access to the internet in 2014/15 and that 90% of children aged 5-14 accessed the internet in the twelve months prior to April 2012, reflecting a steady increase from 65% in 2006. Online, kids can do their homework, chat with their friends, read news, seek out help and support, share jokes and ideas and buy things with greater ease than they ever have before. This development represents an unprecedented opportunity to enhance mechanisms for the participation of children and their access to information.

A whole new generation of children have grown up with social media as an essential part of their social lives and friendships. However, greater connectivity also presents many risks for young players. Not everything we read on the internet is reliable or fact-checked, and new forms of social media can be a source of escalating harm. The proliferation of new communication technologies and the increased use of them also increases the risk that children may be exposed to harmful on line content, bullying, exploitation and abuse, and invasions of privacy.

In my discussions with children they often say they come across information and images that concern them. They also report that online bullying is ever present in their lives, a fact confirmed by recent research which revealed that one in five Australian children aged 8 to 17 has been the target of cyberbullying in the past year.

A human rights approach to protection from these types of harms requires a balancing of rights.

Used appropriately, digital tools and platforms can help promote human development, close gaps in access to information, speed up service delivery, and support educational and health outcomes. The key lies in age appropriate engagement and education of children and young people to build their digital literacy and knowledge of their rights and responsibilities, both online and offline. It is only in partnership with

children and young people that we can create a safe, open, accessible, affordable and secure digital world.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child not only gives to children the rights to seek and receive information, it also encourages media outlets to provide information that children and young people can understand and utilise for their benefit. That is why I was delighted to be involved in the launch this year of Australia's first national newspaper in hard copy and on line just for young Australians, Crinkling News. In the spirit of Article 17, Crinkling provides news in a format that is accessible and easily understandable for children. It also features input and content from regular Australian kids, giving them a voice and an opportunity to express themselves.

Technological advancement and change has also opened up additional avenues for children to enjoy books and reading. Reading helps foster children's imaginations and deepens their understanding of the world and people around them. In books we find role models and friends that stay with us forever and who help to shape our values and perspectives on life. I encourage children everywhere to read more and more, and especially to explore some of the fantastic Australian children's literature produced every year.

As we look to an ever evolving future where the line between on and offline fades into the past and where boundless technological opportunities await us and our children, our objective must be to deliver equity of access to information and connections that promote and enhance children's rights, wellbeing and active citizenship.

Yours sincerely,



Megan Mitchell
National Children's Commissioner