



AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL RESEARCH
ORGANISATION FOR WOMEN'S SAFETY
to Reduce Violence against Women & their Children

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

“Children and young people are incredibly clear about what they need”: National conference puts young voices at the centre of solutions.

From 14–16 May 2025, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) hosted its national conference under the theme Listen, Learn, Act: Centring Children and Young People to End Violence.

Bringing together over 60 speakers - including youth advocates, researchers, frontline practitioners and policymakers – the conference marked a powerful shift in Australia's national conversation: from asking young people to share their experiences, to recognising them as essential partners in designing effective, evidence-informed responses.

"Children and young people are incredibly clear about what they need. They know what real support feels like, and what it takes to heal. If we want real change, we must do more than listen, we must act on what they tell us and make their experience the starting point when designing policies and frameworks."

– Dr Tessa Boyd-Caine, CEO, ANROWS

Young people are not just witnesses — they are leaders

Throughout the three-day event, children and young people shared bold, thoughtful and solutions-oriented perspectives on what true safety and healing looks like, and what needs to change in the systems meant to support them

"Don't ask us to speak if you're not willing to act," said one young advocate, capturing a shared call for genuine participation, not symbolic consultation.

Speakers challenged the assumption that young people are passive recipients of services. Instead, they urged organisations and governments to view them as *experts in their own lives*, capable of shaping safer, more inclusive responses to domestic, family and sexual violence.

What children and young people are asking for

Across panels, workshops and youth-led sessions, participants identified consistent priorities:

Clear and accessible language — not clinical or bureaucratic jargon

Continuity of care — not fragmented, crisis-driven interventions

Genuine co-design — not tokenistic consultation

Safety that is relational, not procedural — built on trust, consistency and connection

One speaker asked a confronting but essential question:

“What happens when your mum or dad are the ones perpetrating violence? Children are taught to go to their parents, but what if that isn't a safe option?”

This question reflects the complexity of children's lived experience, and the need for systems that are trauma-informed, flexible, and responsive to real contexts.

Insights from research and frontline practice

Researchers and practitioners reinforced these insights with evidence and lived expertise. Professor Leah Bromfield noted that more system contact does not necessarily lead to better outcomes — particularly when services are fragmented or reactive.

There were strong calls for:

- Early intervention models grounded in stability and trust
- Investment in community-led, place-based responses
- A greater focus on the intersection of trauma, racism, poverty, housing precarity and climate stressors

“Learn to ask the right questions,” said youth speaker Ariel. “Instead of ‘Are you safe at home?’ ask, ‘What happens when you get into trouble in this house?’”

From insight to action

The conference closed with a shared commitment: to embed children and young people at the centre of Australia’s efforts to end violence — not occasionally, but consistently and meaningfully.

“Ending domestic, family and sexual violence hinges on getting it right for children and young people — and we cannot do that unless they are involved at every step, on their own terms,” said Dr Tessa Boyd-Caine.

A young delegate summed it up simply:

“I want to see lawmakers and organisations include us in designing the systems that are meant to help us.”

Next steps

ANROWS will continue to centre the voices and experiences of children and young people through its research, partnerships, and knowledge translation work as an ongoing priority. These insights will also be shared to inform policy-makers, services, and community attitudes, helping to shape responses that are evidence-based, child-informed, and grounded in lived experience.

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For more information, interviews, or to request quotes from participants, please contact:

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About ANROWS

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) is a not-for-profit independent national research organisation. ANROWS is an initiative of Australia's National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022. ANROWS was established by the Commonwealth and all state and territory governments of Australia to produce, disseminate and assist in applying evidence for policy and practice addressing violence against women and their children. ANROWS is the only such research organisation in Australia. www.anrows.org.au