



Policy Platform: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young People

Youth Coalition of the ACT

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures hold a unique and important place in the Canberra community. The 2011 Australian Census found that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in the ACT was 5184.¹ Of these 1622 were young people aged 12-25.² This makes young people 31% of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in the ACT.

The Youth Coalition recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures form the longest continuing cultures in the world. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to make a variety of valuable contributions to the community and their continued and strengthened involvement is vital to us all.

The Gap

There continues to be clear disparities across all indicators of health and quality of life between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians. For example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attending Year 10 fell by 8% in the ACT between 2008 and 2011.³ In 2012, Indigenous students had an apparent Year 12 retention rate of 51.1% up from 47% in 2010.⁴ However this is still significantly below the 79.9% for all students.⁵ Further, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are still 23 times more likely to be detained than non-Indigenous young people, a significant overrepresentation.⁶ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are also over-represented in the child protection system. The rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the care and protection system is 10 times the rate of non-Indigenous children. In the ACT at 30 June 2012 there were 68 Indigenous children per 1000 aged 0-17 in the out of home care system, compared to 5.3 per 1000 for non-Indigenous children.⁷

The disparity in outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and non-Indigenous young people is a product of long-term systemic disadvantage and discrimination, actions including colonisation, dispossession from land and the Stolen Generations, inequitable and inadequate provision of resources and supports; and continued experiences of racism by the broader community. In particular, Indigenous young people face challenges that affect their health and wellbeing, including threatened or actual loss of cultural identity; removal from family of origin; family conflict and disruption; violence and assault; mental health issues; juvenile crime; and imprisonment.⁸

Racism

Despite the valuable diversity of our society, racism and discrimination are common occurrences for many young people.⁹ Racism in our community comes in a variety of forms including: overt, covert, structural, institutional and individual forms. A study by Mansouri et al reported that 63.2% of Aboriginal participants had experienced at least one racist incident.¹⁰ It is of concern that most incidents reported in the study occurred within the educational setting.¹¹ Racism in all its forms needs to be urgently and strategically addressed in order to ensure that all Australians experience the best possible quality of life.

Support services

The high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the ACT emphasises the need to focus resources, programs and supports towards the younger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population and their families. While there have been some increases in funding and services to support this target group, service providers report that further investment needs to be made in the area of early intervention and prevention; rather than only the tertiary end.

The ACT has a small number of services that work specifically with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people aged 12 – 25. These services provide a holistic approach working with young people and their families. However, despite providing essential support services and trying to meet an increasing demand, the Youth Coalition is concerned that these services continue to experience significant and on-going funding limitations.

The Youth Coalition supports recent and current community-based initiatives that seek to build the capacity of community services in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities such as the Cultural Awareness Self-Assessment Toolkit,¹² Reconciliation Action Plans,¹³ and continuation of cultural training for community workers. While the Youth Coalition supports these initiatives that aim to build capacity in existing resources, we also advocate for these initiatives to be complemented by adequate and on-going funding to increase programs, services and supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the ACT.

Commitments:

1. Advocating for increased funding to existing services that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the ACT.
2. Advocating for resources to support the development of additional programs, services and supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the ACT, particularly those with an early intervention and prevention focus.
3. Advocating for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.
4. Advocating for the development and implementation of mechanisms that seek to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander to remain engaged in education and employment opportunities.
5. Supporting initiatives that seek to build the capacity of existing services to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

6. Advocating for the active supported involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in designing, planning and evaluating youth policy and service delivery frameworks.
7. Advocating for the active and supported participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in their individual care planning and case management.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012) 2011 Census Counts — Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islander Peoples, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra <online>
<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2075.0main+features32011>
 Accessed 13 March 2013.

² Aggregated from Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012) *2011 Census Community Profiles: Australian Capital Territory – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (Indigenous) Profile*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra <online>
[http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/CensusOutput/copsub.NSF/All%20docs%20by%20catNo/2011~Community%20Profile~8/\\$File/IP_8.zip?OpenElement](http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/CensusOutput/copsub.NSF/All%20docs%20by%20catNo/2011~Community%20Profile~8/$File/IP_8.zip?OpenElement) Accessed 13 March 2013.

³ COAG Reform Council (2012) Education 2011: Comparing performance across Australia, COAG Reform Council, Sydney.

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012) *Schools, Australia Report 2012*. Cat. no. 4221.0. Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra <online>
<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4221.0Main%20Features302012>

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012) *Schools, Australia Report 2012*. Cat. no. 4221.0. Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra <online>
<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4221.0Main%20Features302012>;

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2011) *Young Australians: Their health and wellbeing 2011*. Australian Government, Canberra, p.100 <online> <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=10737420537> Accessed 13 June 2013 citing Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011) *Schools, Australia Report 2010* Cat. no. 4221.0. Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra.

⁶ Australian Institute of Criminology (2013) *Australian Crime: Facts & Figures 2012* Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra, p. 134 <online> http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/current_series/facts/1-20/2012.html Accessed 14 June 2013; Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (2011) *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2011*, Productivity Commission, Canberra, p.5, Chapter 4, p.136-9 <online> <http://www.pc.gov.au/gsp/indigenous/key-indicators-2011> citing Australian Bureau of Statistics (2010), *Prisoners in Australia*, Cat. no. 4517.0 Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra and Australian Institute of Criminology; Richards and Lyneham (2010); AIC Juveniles in detention (unpublished)
http://www.aic.gov.au/statistics/criminaljustice/juveniles_detention.html
www.aic.gov.au/publications/current_series/tandi/401-420/tandi416.html

⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2013) *Child Protection Australia: 2011-12* Australian Government, Canberra, p. 42 <online> <http://aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=60129542755>.

⁸ McDonald, in Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2012) *Young Australians: Their health and wellbeing 2011*. Australian Government, Canberra.

⁹ Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (Australia) (2011) *Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN: Policy Briefing Paper, November 2011*, Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network, Victoria <online> <http://www.myan.org.au>.

¹⁰ Fethi Mansouri, Louise Jenkins, Les Morgan and Mona Taouk (2009) *The Impact of Racism upon the Health and Wellbeing of Young Australians*, Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network, Victoria, p. 46 <online> http://www.fya.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/Impact_of_Racism_FYA_report.pdf

¹¹ Fethi Mansouri, Louise Jenkins, Les Morgan and Mona Taouk (2009) *The Impact of Racism upon the Health and Wellbeing of Young Australians*, Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network, Victoria, p. 3 <online> http://www.fya.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/Impact_of_Racism_FYA_report.pdf

¹² ACT Council of Social Service (2009) *Cultural Awareness Self-Assessment Toolkit*, Canberra

¹³ Reconciliation Australia (Accessed October 2010) *Reconciliation Action Plans*, Canberra.