



Policy Platform: Young People and Social Inclusion

Youth Coalition of the ACT

For information on arts, sport and recreation, refer also to the Arts, Sport and Recreation Policy Platform. For information on transport, refer also to the Transport Policy Platform.

Young people participate in, contribute to, and engage with the ACT community in a variety of ways, including through their families, friends, education, and employment opportunities; but also through formal activities such as arts, sport, recreation and volunteering.

Access issues can cause some barriers to young people's participation in the community, including affordability and availability of services and facilities, transport, and public space. Young people's participation in community supports, services and activities is often predicated on their ability to access affordable and quality facilities and programs. Most laws, policies and programs produced by government will impact in some way on young people, yet young people are sometimes overlooked in the process of government, for example when decisions are made about the design of bus routes, or the development of public space.

Public space has a particularly important significance to the lives of young people. Young people use public space for a variety of reasons, such as: to sustain friendships, to socialise, to entertain themselves, to act as an alternative to paid events and places, to make new friends and social contacts, and to act as an escape.¹ Young people do not always possess their own private spaces, therefore they seek to use public spaces for a majority of their activities.

A 2007 report on public space issues for young people in shopping centres highlighted initial responses to young people gathering in shopping centres were predominantly coercive approaches in the form of tighter security, increased policing powers, loitering / trespass provisions and the introduction of banning notices. It identified the need to move towards problem-solving approaches that include young people in the consultation and planning process of their local public spaces.² The Youth Coalition supports initiatives and strategies that aim to make public spaces more accessible and safe for young people in the ACT.

In recent years two significant initiatives changed the landscape of the youth sector. These include the implementation of the Children, Youth and Family Services Program, which combined youth and family support services; and the significant reforms in youth housing and homelessness services. One of the reforms involved a reduction in hours of youth drop-in centres, representing a loss of both the opportunity to build rapport and a significant referral method. A loss of public space specifically dedicated to young people means that a cohort of young people must find other public spaces to frequent.

It is important for appropriate consultation to take place when significant changes will be made that affect young people. Benefits of youth participation for organisations

and communities include: bringing new perspectives, ensuring programs are responsive and effective, community capacity building, promoting inclusive and cohesive communities, and developing social competence and social responsibility.³

Participation should be meaningful and this can only occur when young people are adequately informed and supported in their involvement; their contributions are valued, they believe the work they are doing has a purpose, and they see the change occur and are provided with feedback.

Being socially included means that people have the resources, opportunities and capabilities they need to learn, work, engage and have a voice.⁴ Vulnerable young people, including young people in poverty, young people with disabilities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people face many hardships and are often excluded from opportunities that others have access to. The youth sector plays a vital role in facilitating services and opportunities for vulnerable young people, however there is much more support needed from government in the form of resourcing, to address these inequalities.

Commitments

1. Advocating for dedicated and adequate resourcing to support youth participation, including the development of a 'Child Friendly City' in the ACT.
2. Advocating for young people to have equitable access to participate in their communities.
3. Promoting participation and engagement strategies that engage young people in supportive and meaningful ways.
4. Advocating for accessible dedicated youth spaces around Canberra.
5. Advocating for the provision of facilities, including public space and transport, that are accessible and affordable for young people.
6. Advocating for the provision of dedicated youth spaces across the ACT.
7. Supporting positive images of young people in the media and society, and combating negative stereotypes; including through National Youth Week.
8. Advocating for the active involvement of young people in designing, planning and evaluating youth policy and service delivery frameworks.

¹ Hatzopoulos and Clancey (2007) *Where People and Places Meet Approaches to Public Space Management*, Youth Action and Policy Association, NSW

² Clancey, G; Usien, O (2007) *Considering Youth Issues in Shopping Centre Development Applications*, Youth Action and Policy Association and the Western Sydney Area Assistance Scheme of the Department of Community Services, New South Wales

³ Australian Infant, Child, Adolescent and Family Mental Health Association (2008) *National Youth Participation Strategy Scoping Project Report*

⁴ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (2012) *Social Inclusion in Australia: How Australia is Faring*. Australian Government, Canberra.