



youth coalition

of the ACT

Submission to the *ACT Government*
2011/2012 Budget

December 2010

www.youthcoalition.net

The Youth Coalition of the ACT acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as the traditional owners and continuing custodians of the lands of the ACT and we pay our respects to the Elders, families and ancestors.

We acknowledge that the effect of forced removal of Indigenous children from their families as well as past racist policies and actions continues today.

We acknowledge that the Indigenous people hold distinctive rights as the original people of modern day Australia including the right to a distinct status and culture, self-determination and land. The Youth Coalition of the ACT celebrates Indigenous cultures and the invaluable contribution they make to our community.

Submission to the *ACT Government 2011/12 Budget*
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December 2010

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1. Introduction

Section 1 of this submission provides contextual information about the Youth Coalition of the ACT, young people in the ACT, and the process for developing and format of this submission.

1.1 About the Youth Coalition of the ACT

The Youth Coalition is the peak youth affairs body in the ACT. Comprised of 100 members, programs, and individuals the Youth Coalition is responsible for representing and promoting the interests and wellbeing of young people aged 12 to 25 years and those who work with them.

The Youth Coalition is represented on many ACT Government advisory structures and provides advice to the ACT Government on youth issues, along with providing information to youth services about policy and program matters.

A key role of the Youth Coalition is the development and analysis of ACT social policy and program decisions for young people and youth services. The Youth Coalition facilitates the development of strong linkages and promotes collaboration between the community, government and private sectors to achieve better outcomes for young people in the ACT.

1.2 Young People in the ACT

Young people are a distinct, and often discrete, population group aged between 12 and 25 years. Young people frequently experience systematic and systemic disadvantage, discrimination and unequal access to resources.

Canberra has one of the youngest populations of any Australian State or Territory, with approximately 70,000 young people residing in the ACT, representing almost 22% of Canberra's population.¹ With over one fifth of Canberra's population comprised of young people, it is important that the wellbeing of young people be regarded as an indicator of the ACT's future population health and development.

1.3 Process for Developing and Format of this Submission

The Youth Coalition welcomes the opportunity to input into the development of the ACT Government 2011/2012 Budget. This submission has been developed based by ACT Government department, and includes recommendations for:

- ACT Health;
- Chief Minister's Department;
- Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services (including the Office of Multicultural Affairs, Housing ACT and the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support);
- Justice and Community Safety; and,
- Department of Education and Training.

This submission is one of many made over a 14-year period by the Youth Coalition and is based on the following:

- The priority areas highlighted in the *Youth Coalition Strategic Plan 2007-10*;
- The policy positions outlined in the *Youth Coalition Policy Platform*;
- The issues raised at consultations on the 2010/11 ACT Government Budget and 2011/12 ACT Government Budget;
- The issues raised at consultations on the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 - 2014;
- Previous Youth Coalition submissions to the ACT Government;
- One-on-one consultations with member services and organisations; and,
- Current and topical research on youth affairs.

2. Summary of Recommendations

Section 2 provides a summary of the recommendations this submission makes to the ACT Government 2011/2012 Budget. It is vital that these recommendations be referred to in the context of the broader submission.

ACT Health

Recommendation 1

That the ACT Government provide funding to ACT Health towards implementing the outcomes of the ACT Health Young People Feasibility Study in the 2011/12 ACT Government Budget.

Recommendation 2

That the ACT Government provide recurrent funding to headspace ACT, a key component of the youth mental health sector, to support them to meet increasing demand and provide timely early intervention supports to young people.

Recommendation 3

That the ACT Government provide recurrent funding to support the continuation of the Comorbidity Bus Tours, a key training and professional development and induction tool for youth, alcohol and other drug and mental health services in the ACT.

Chief Minister's Department

Recommendation 4

That the ACT Government provide Chief Minister's Department (CMD) with funding to develop and implement a planning, approval and registration mechanism which requires all ACT Government agencies planning community engagement activities, to seek approval from CMD. CMD would be responsible for assessing the impact of the activity upon its target groups, in line with other planned community engagement activities.

Recommendation 5

That the ACT Government provide Chief Minister's Department and the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services with funding to develop and implement strategies to assist young people in the ACT to have equal access to private housing, that could include measures such as a 'tenancy ready' program for vulnerable young people aged 16 – 25, and create opportunities for dialogue with private real estate agencies.

Recommendation 6

That the ACT Government commit to funding any increase in community sector wages as a result of the Pay Equity case, relating to ACT Government contracts, to ensure that vulnerable young people and their families, and those that work to support them, are not adversely affected.

Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services

Office of Multicultural Affairs

Recommendation 7

That the ACT Government provide recurrent funding of \$20,000 per annum to support the continuation of the Multicultural Youth Affairs Network, representing a key opportunity for the ACT Government to significantly support multicultural young people in the ACT.

Housing ACT

Recommendation 5

That the ACT Government provide Chief Minister's Department and the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services with funding to develop and implement strategies to assist young people in the ACT to have equal access to private housing, that could include measures such as a 'tenancy ready' program for vulnerable young people aged 16 – 25, and create opportunities for dialogue with private real estate agencies.

Recommendation 8

That the ACT Government provides funding to build upon the work of the Youth Coalition of the ACT's Living Skills Toolkit Pilot Project and ensure its ongoing development and sustainability.

Office for Children, Youth and Family Support

Recommendation 9

That the ACT Government increase the total funding for the Youth and Family Support Program by at least 10%, to support the increase in service delivery and ensure that young people aged 18 – 25 also receive adequate supports.

Recommendation 10

That the ACT Government ensure a comprehensive workforce development strategy is developed and implemented for the child, youth and family support sectors, in partnership between the government and non-government sectors. The 1 – 2% professional development funding allocation in the Youth and Family Support Program could inform the basis of this strategy; but the strategy should be for the broader youth and family support sectors.

Recommendation 6

That the ACT Government commit to funding any increase in community sector wages as a result of the Pay Equity case, relating to ACT Government contracts, to ensure that vulnerable young people and their families, and those that work to support them, are not adversely affected.

Recommendation 11

That the ACT Government develop a comprehensive and evidenced based Diversionary Framework for young offenders aged 12 – 25 in the ACT, with the underlying principles including:

- A whole of government approach,
- Strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and multicultural people,
- A whole of community collaboration focus, which includes community agencies and education providers.

Recommendation 12

That after care support is provided to young people transitioning out of care until the age of 25, or as needed until the age of 25.

Department of Justice and Community Safety

Recommendation 11

That the ACT Government develop a comprehensive and evidenced based Diversionary Framework for young offenders aged 12 – 25 in the ACT, with the underlying principles including:

- A whole of government approach,
- Strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and multicultural people,
- A whole of community collaboration focus, which includes community agencies and education providers.

Department of Education and Training

Recommendation 13

That the ACT Government allocate resources to support a framework for re-engaging young people disengaged or at risk of disengaging from education or training. This would include:

- Development of the framework and gap analysis;
- Support to the work of the Re-engaging Youth Leadership Group, and Re-engaging Youth Regional Networks;
- The provision of programs of resources to address any gaps in current service delivery, both in government and non-government settings.

3. ACT Health

This section of the Budget Submission outlines those items the Youth Coalition is calling for the ACT Government to provide funding to ACT Health for, including:

- Funding the outcomes of the ACT Health Young People Feasibility Study;
- Funding for headspace ACT; and,
- Funding for the Comorbidity Bus Tours.

3.1 Funding the Outcomes of the ACT Health Young People Feasibility Study

In our budget response to the 2009/2010 ACT Government Budget, the Youth Coalition welcomed the announcement of funding from ACT Health towards a feasibility study into the establishment of a Centre for Adolescent Health.

While this was initially rolled over to the 2010/11 financial year, the Youth Coalition is pleased that the feasibility study, now titled the ACT Health Young People Feasibility Study will be implemented by the end of June 2011 by LeeJenn Health Consultants.

The Youth Coalition calls for ACT Health to allocate funding towards implementing the findings of the feasibility study, in the 2011/12 ACT Government Budget. In order to ensure that the findings remain relevant, and that the ACT continues to work towards meeting the diverse health needs of young people aged 12 – 25; it is vital that there is no delay between the completion of the feasibility study and the implementation of its findings.

Recommendation 1

That the ACT Government provide funding to ACT Health towards implementing the outcomes of the ACT Health Young People Feasibility Study in the 2011/12 ACT Government Budget.

3.2 Funding for headspace ACT

headspace ACT was established in 2008 as an early intervention service for young people experiencing low to moderate level mental health issues, and/or alcohol and other drug issues. headspace ACT works under a unique consortium model where a variety of local services are brought together to support young people and seek to fill a significant gap in the service system for young people.

Youth workers and services in the ACT consistently report that mental health is one of the top three issues for young people in the ACT, alongside housing and homelessness, and alcohol and other drugs.

Mental health issues are likely to be significant in many young people's lives with 25% experiencing a mental health issue in any given year²; and the median age of onset being under the age of 24³. In addition, the issues associated with 20% of the population experiencing a mental disorder in 2006/07⁴. Anxiety and depression, alcohol abuse and personality disorders account for almost 75% of the burden attributable to mental illness⁵.

headspace ACT is a key component of the mental health service system for young people in the ACT, and currently receives no funding from the ACT Government. headspace ACT does not have enough staff to meet their ever-increasing demand, which is resulting in longer wait times for young people seeking to access their services. As headspace ACT has an early intervention focus, it is vital that young people seeking support receive timely access to the service.

In light of this, the Youth Coalition urgently calls for ACT Health to provide recurrent funding to headspace ACT, to support the key role that they provide to young people with mental health issues.

Recommendation 2

That the ACT Government provide recurrent funding to headspace ACT, a key component of the youth mental health sector, to support them to meet increasing demand and provide timely early intervention supports to young people.

3.3 Funding for the Comorbidity Bus Tours

The Comorbidity Bus Tour Pilot Project is currently implemented in partnership between the Youth Coalition of the ACT, the Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drug Association ACT (ATODA) and the Mental Health Community Coalition ACT (MHCC ACT).

The aim of the Comorbidity Bus Tours are to increase the capacity of frontline workers to support people experiencing co-occurring alcohol, tobacco and other drug and mental health issues (comorbidity). Three different tours provide workers from youth, alcohol and other drug and mental health services to visit a range of services working with people experiencing comorbidity. The tours are highly popular, and have a range of outcomes, including:

- Increasing workers' knowledge of the diversity of services provided to people experiencing comorbidity in the ACT and effective referral processes;
- Increasing workers' understanding of the issues experienced by those with comorbidity;
- Providing networking opportunities for participants to increase effective partnerships and working relationships;
- Increasing workers' knowledge of tools relevant to support people experiencing comorbidity;
- Providing an opportunity for host services to share information about their service model and referral pathways; and,
- Improving partnerships between services and sectors.

The Comorbidity Bus Tours operated on at least a monthly basis since 2004, initially by ACT Health; and then by the Youth Coalition of the ACT since 2005, through funding received by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Since their commencement, the Comorbidity Bus Tours have become an important capacity building initiative of the youth, alcohol and other drug, mental health and allied sectors.

In April 2010, the funding measure ceased, resulting in the discontinuation of the Comorbidity Bus Tours. Their absence as a sector development activity was missed by many community and government agencies. In response to this identified need,

the Youth Coalition, ATODA and MHCC ACT re-established the Comorbidity Bus Tours through a pilot project, which has currently been running for 3 months. While the pilot project has been successful, it is unfortunately run on a cost-recovery basis, which incurs a significantly higher cost to workers and services than their previous implementation.

In light of this, the Youth Coalition recommends that ACT Health provide recurrent funding to support the continued implementation of the Comorbidity Bus Tours, to support the sustainability of this key training and professional development and induction tool for youth, alcohol and other drug and mental health services in the ACT.

Recommendation 3

That the ACT Government provide recurrent funding to support the continuation of the Comorbidity Bus Tours, a key training and professional development and induction tool for youth, alcohol and other drug and mental health services in the ACT.

4. Chief Minister's Department

This section of the Budget Submission outlines those items the Youth Coalition is calling for the ACT Government to provide funding to the Chief Minister's Department for, including:

- Development of a Whole-of-Government Approach to Community Engagement;
- Affordable Housing; and,
- Community Sector Pay Equity.

4.1 Development of a Whole-of-Government Approach to Community Engagement

The Youth Coalition recently developed a submission to the draft *Engaging Canberrans: A Guide to Community Engagement*, in which we commended the ACT Government on its commitment to progressing best practice in engaging with individuals, groups and communities.

The Youth Coalition submission strongly emphasised the need for the ACT Government to work towards a whole-of-government approach on community engagement, to be led by the CMD; in response to increasing demand placed upon the youth and community sectors to participate in ACT Government policy activities. The Youth Coalition submission has been provided as an attachment.

While we commend the CMD on its existing community engagement website (www.communityengagement.act.gov.au), which provides an overview of current and recent policy activities, the Youth Coalition recommends that CMD develop and implement a planning, approval and registration mechanism. This mechanism would require all ACT Government agencies that are planning community engagement, to register an 'expression of interest' with CMD. CMD would be responsible for assessing the impact of the activity upon its target groups, in line with other planned community engagement activities, and provide approval on the timeframes for planned activities.

This type of 'whole-of-government' approach, and staggering of community engagement activities would greatly reduce the burden currently experienced by key target sectors and the community.

In addition, the Youth Coalition recommends that the community engagement website include information on upcoming policy activities, including intended dates of release. This would support the youth and community sector to plan their consultation processes.

Recommendation 4

That the ACT Government provide Chief Minister's Department (CMD) with funding to develop and implement a planning, approval and registration mechanism which requires all ACT Government agencies planning community engagement activities, to seek approval from CMD. CMD would be responsible for assessing the impact of the activity upon its target groups, in line with other planned community engagement activities.

4.2 Affordable Housing

On any given night in Canberra, data indicates that 1,364 people are homeless. 60% of those people are under 25 years of age. Whilst the topic of youth homelessness can invoke images of 'street kids', many homeless young people are invisible. 47% live with relatives and family, or even complete strangers, often couch surfing, while another 47% are in boarding houses or refuges.

There are three types of homelessness defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, including primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness. The majority of young people experiencing homelessness fall into secondary and tertiary homelessness categories.⁶

The private rental market in the ACT is amongst the highest in Australia. Many young people report difficulty in gaining entry to private rental properties, due to cost, availability and discrimination. The Youth Coalition argues that more work needs to be done by the ACT Government in the area of housing affordability, and supporting young people to rent privately. This could ease some of the burden on youth support agencies to provide property and property management, and also create a positive pathway away from homelessness in the future. Measures to address the issue of affordable housing in other jurisdictions could be looked at, to inform the ACT's response, and these include:

- Increasing the level of rent assistance for vulnerable young people who access private housing;
- Better promoting ACT Housing's current bond assistance scheme to young people;
- Developing a dialogue with private rental property managers, to better understand the barriers to young people accessing private rental properties, and subsequent to those discussions, providing education and training to young people as to ways to positively engage with private landlords; and,
- Developing an accredited or industry recognised program for young people to provide evidence of their ability to sustain private housing tenancy.

Recommendation 5

That the ACT Government provide Chief Minister's Department and the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services with funding to develop and implement strategies to assist young people in the ACT to have equal access to private housing, that could include measures such as a 'tenancy ready' program for vulnerable young people aged 16 – 25, and create opportunities for dialogue with private real estate agencies.

4.3 Community Sector Pay Equity

A range of professionals work within the youth sector, including (but not limited to): generalist youth workers, specialist youth workers, mental health workers, alcohol and other drug workers, counsellors, statutory workers, nurses and doctors, educators, psychologists, health workers, family workers, lawyers, volunteers, and management staff.

The youth sector sees some highly skilled and experienced workers, who engage in extremely complex, innovative work with young people, and the Youth Coalition notes the importance of supporting these workers to remain in the sector. The Youth

Coalition developed a profile of the youth sector workforce in 2010, which identified that over 50% of workers hold tertiary qualifications⁷. This supports the argument that the youth sector is a highly skilled and motivated workforce.

The ACT Government has previously indicated its in-principle support for the Australian Services union's case before Fair Work Australia. This Pay equity case is based on the recognised disparity of remuneration between the government and non-government community sector workforce, and is informed by the successful significant wage increases to Queensland Community Services and Crisis Assistance Award in 2009.

People working in the community have historically been underpaid, primarily due to the majority of workers in the sector being women. This case seeks to redress that imbalance. The Pay Equity campaign is being lead by the Australian Services Union and supported by many community sector organisations.

The Youth Coalition believes that the ACT Government needs to continue to engage with the community sector in discussion regarding the potential outcomes of this of this case, in order to be prepared if it is successful. We believe that the need for a strategic community workforce development plan in the ACT, as discussed in Section 5.5 of this submission, needs to be prepared for the potential impacts of the Pay Equity case being deemed successful.

Recommendation 6

That the ACT Government commit to funding any increase in community sector wages as a result of the Pay Equity case, relating to ACT Government contracts, to ensure that vulnerable young people and their families, and those that work to support them, are not adversely affected.

5. Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services

This section of the Budget Submission outlines those items the Youth Coalition is calling for the ACT Government to provide funding to the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services for, including:

- Funding for the Multicultural Youth Affairs Network;
- Affordable housing;
- Living skills;
- An increase in funding for the YFSP;
- Workforce development;
- Community Sector Pay Equity;
- Criminal Justice Diversion Framework for Young Offenders in the ACT; and,
- Young people transitioning to independence from care.

Each of these items has been categorised by the relevant office within DHCS, including the Office of Multicultural Affairs, Housing ACT and the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support.

OFFICE OF MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS

5.1 Funding for the Multicultural Youth Affairs Network

The Multicultural Youth Affairs Network (MYAN) began in 2008 as a partnership between the Youth Coalition of the ACT and Multicultural Youth Services (MYS). It seeks to improve supports for multicultural young people, strengthen multicultural youth services in the ACT, strengthen connections between 'mainstream' and multicultural youth services, and raise the profile of multicultural youth issues in the ACT. There are currently over 80 individual members of the MYAN, comprised of youth and community service representatives, government representatives, and other stakeholders.

While a role of the MYAN is to identify systemic gaps and issues for multicultural young people, it has a strong focus on building the capacity of the existing support sector and community through collaboration and partnerships; in recognition that there are limited funding opportunities for a significant investment in multicultural young people by the ACT Government.

Between 2008 and 2010, the MYAN was supported through in-kind support by both the Youth Coalition and MYS. The Youth Coalition recently received funding in partnership with the Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (Australia); from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) to progress the work of the MYAN in the ACT. With this funding the Youth Coalition employed Atem Atem as coordinator of the MYAN for one day per week over 12 months.

Key activities that have occurred during the initial funding period to date include:

- A Planning Day held in June 2010 with members of the MYAN to identify strategic priorities for the 2010/11 financial year;

- Establishment of a Reference Group, which provides strategic guidance and oversight to the MYAN Coordinator and the Youth Coalition. The Reference Group includes membership from specialist multicultural services, generalist youth services, the Office of Multicultural Affairs, the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support, and the Department of Education and Training;
- Establishment of the Multicultural Youth Engagement and Participation Working Group, which seeks to progress strategies to engage with multicultural young people and support them to participate in various activities;
- Developing a one-year work-plan for the MYAN;
- Mapping all ACT Government departments' policies, services and supports for multicultural young people in the ACT;
- Developing an Issues Paper for public distribution, which outlines key issues and recommendations to support multicultural young people in the ACT (provided as an attachment to this submission);
- Contributing to policy activities and submissions, including the Youth Coalition Policy Platform, Budget Submission, and submission to the draft YFSP Service Delivery Framework 2010 – 2013; and,
- Providing advocacy and representation through existing Youth Coalition activities, including forums, networks, and meetings with ACT Government departments and MLAs.

The funding received from DIAC is one-off funding until 30 June 2011, and was provided with a view to supporting the MYAN to build its sustainability and seek on-going funding from another source after the 2010/11 financial year.

The Youth Coalition strongly recommends that the Office of Multicultural Affairs provide a small amount of recurrent funding to support the continued employment of a part-time MYAN coordinator, to progress the work of the MYAN. This is a key opportunity for the ACT Government to significantly support multicultural young people in the ACT, with minimal investment.

Recommendation 7

That the ACT Government provide recurrent funding of \$20,000 per annum to support the continuation of the Multicultural Youth Affairs Network, representing a key opportunity for the ACT Government to significantly support multicultural young people in the ACT.

HOUSING ACT

5.2 Affordable Housing

On any given night in Canberra, data indicates that 1,364 people are homeless. 60% of those people are under 25 years of age. Whilst the topic of youth homelessness can invoke images of 'street kids', many homeless young people are invisible. 47% live with relatives and family, or even complete strangers, often couch surfing, while another 47% are in boarding houses or refuges.

There are three types of homelessness defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, including primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness. The majority of young people experiencing homelessness fall into secondary and tertiary homelessness categories.⁸

The private rental market in the ACT is amongst the highest in Australia. Many young people report difficulty in gaining entry to private rental properties, due to cost, availability and discrimination. The Youth Coalition argues that more work needs to be done by the ACT Government in the area of housing affordability, and supporting young people to rent privately. This could ease some of the burden on youth support agencies to provide property and property management, and also create a positive pathway away from homelessness in the future. Measures to address the issue of affordable housing in other jurisdictions could be looked at, to inform the ACT's response, and these include:

- Increasing the level of rent assistance for vulnerable young people who access private housing;
- Better promoting ACT Housing's current bond assistance scheme to young people;
- Developing a dialogue with private rental property managers, to better understand the barriers to young people accessing private rental properties, and subsequent to those discussions, providing education and training to young people as to ways to positively engage with private landlords; and,
- Developing an accredited or industry recognised program for young people to provide evidence of their ability to sustain private housing tenancy.

Recommendation 5

That the ACT Government provide Chief Minister's Department and the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services with funding to develop and implement strategies to assist young people in the ACT to have equal access to private housing, that could include measures such as a 'tenancy ready' program for vulnerable young people aged 16 – 25, and create opportunities for dialogue with private real estate agencies.

5.3 Living Skills

Independent living skills are personal skills considered necessary for an individual to function on a day-to-day basis. The key word is 'skills' – inherent resources. Living skills training encompass a range of models, methods and toolkits that aim to encourage self-sufficiency. These skills are a range of attributes that help a young person to maintain aspects of independent living. These living skills are often the taken-for-granted skills of those that have acquired them over a prolonged period of stable and reliable learning that begins from a very young age and continues into adulthood.

The Youth Coalition believes that many vulnerable young people in the ACT transitioning into independent living may not have the required level of living skills to successfully negotiate this period of change with out support. There is currently little consistency amongst the various existing Living Skill Programs. We believe it is important that vulnerable young people in the ACT have access to consistent, evidence based, and comprehensive living skills training, where appropriate, which is delivered in a wide range of settings by skilled and experienced youth and specialist homelessness sector workers.

In October of 2010, the Youth Coalition was awarded a contract by ACT Social Housing and Homelessness Services to develop and pilot a living skills tool kit for vulnerable young people in the ACT. This project is informed by research undertaken

by the Youth Coalition in 2009, the *Living Skills and Youth Supported Accommodation Scheme Consultation Project Paper*.

The Living Skills Toolkit Pilot is an action research based project aimed at developing a sustainable method of embedding living skills development for young people in the youth housing and homelessness, and broader youth services sector in the ACT.

The outcomes of the project will include:

- A comprehensive report analysing existing models and delivery of Living Skills training to young people in the youth housing and homelessness and broader youth sector in the ACT and other jurisdictions;
- Engagement of youth housing and homelessness, and other youth services in the development of the package and a commitment to delivery;
- A toolkit for the delivery of Living Skills training to young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, trialed in the youth housing and homelessness, and other youth services sector in the ACT;
- A process and impact evaluation of the Project and toolkit; and,
- Recommendations on future implementation and sustainability of the toolkit.

Recommendation 8

That the ACT Government provides funding to build upon the work of the Youth Coalition of the ACT's Living Skills Toolkit Pilot Project and ensure its ongoing development and sustainability.

OFFICE FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILY SUPPORT

5.4 Increase in Funding for the YFSP

During 2010, the ACT Government has commenced the process of aligning the current Youth Support Program (YSP) and Family Support Program (FSP), within the Office of Children, Youth and Family Support (OCYFS), to form the Youth and Family Support Program (YFSP), which will formally begin in July 2011.

The Youth Coalition and the youth sector have been heavily engaged in this process, through informal and formal processes with the ACT Government, since late 2009. Previous Youth Coalition submissions (including a joint sector submission that was coordinated by the Youth Coalition) relating to the alignment have been included as Attachments to this submission to provide further background information.

The Youth Coalition is concerned that the development of the YFSP through aligning two funding streams may result in a significant loss of direct services for young people aged 12 – 25. The YFSP seeks to significantly change the scope of the youth and family support sectors, and provide additional services to target groups who did not receive support in the YSP or FSP (such as children aged 8 – 12 year olds), without providing additional funding to support this.

Although the ACT Government previously committed to ensuring that the ratio of funding delivered to children, young people and their families through the YSP and FSP (i.e. \$5.2 million through the YSP to support young people and their families;

and \$3.2 million through the FSP to support children and their families), the draft *Service Delivery Framework 2010 – 2013*⁹ does not commit to maintaining this ratio, and in fact indicates that direct services to young people will be significantly decreased.

The draft Service Delivery Framework primarily focuses on children and young people aged 0 – 17 years of age; with supports for young people aged 18 – 25 years only focusing on their transition to independence and engagement with the adult service system. The Youth Coalition recognises that a key role for youth services is to support young people aged 18 – 25 years to transition to independence and adult services; and notes that this support work also requires specific resourcing and recognition. This vital support role has been recognised in other sectors, such as mental health (for example, through the development of CAMHS to support young people aged 12 – 25 years), and more recently through the out-of-home-care sector (with a recent focus on supporting young people to transition out of care, beyond the age of 18).

Additionally, the Youth Coalition notes the importance of supporting young people aged 18 – 25 years in a family context, particularly in light of the increasing role of the family to support young people who are staying at home longer and/or relying on their family for financial support. National policy has clearly articulated the responsibility of families to support young people beyond the age of 18, and the Service Delivery Framework should also reflect this.

The Youth Coalition notes that the focus on children and young people aged 0 – 17 years does not align with the *ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014*¹⁰, which clearly defines young people as being aged 12 – 25 years. Additionally, it does not recognise the many transition points young people aged 18 – 25 years experience, particularly in relation to education, employment and housing; that were identified by young people who participated in the development of the ACT Young People's Plan.

Recommendation 9

That the ACT Government increase the total funding for the Youth and Family Support Program by at least 10%, to support the increase in service delivery and ensure that young people aged 18 – 25 also receive adequate supports.

5.5 Workforce Development

The youth sector in the ACT is both diverse and unique in its composition and delivery of services to young people aged 12 – 25 and their families. The Youth Coalition considers the youth sector to be comprised of over 90 programs and services, many of which deliver cross-sectoral services to young people and their families.

The youth sector has strong linkages and cross over with a range of other sectors in the ACT, including (but not limited to): housing / homelessness, mental health, alcohol and other drugs, education, employment, justice, family support, disability, health, arts and recreation, out-of-home-care, and the broader community sector. The youth sector also works with a range of population groups, including (but not limited to) young people who identify as: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, multicultural and newly arrived, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and/or intersex, carers, homeless or at risk of homelessness, young women, young men and parents.

Workforce development aims to ensure that responses stem from, and are implemented and sustained by, a well-informed and highly skilled workforce that operates within supportive environments and systems designed to sustain and optimise efforts. Changes and development should concentrate and be addressed on three separate levels:

1. Systems (legislation, policy, funding, recruitment and retention, resources, support mechanisms and incentives);
2. Current workers (formal education, training, workplace training, mentoring, on-the-job learning, on-line learning and best practice guidelines); and,
3. Future workforce (recruitment strategies, offers of education and training, affordable and accessible education and training, ensuring adequate service funding to employ staff and supporting and facilitating policies).¹¹

We believe that current work being undertaken by the Children and Young People Sharing Responsibility Committee, Workforce Development Sub-group, should inform a comprehensive workforce strategy for the youth and family support sectors.

Recommendation 10

That the ACT Government ensure a comprehensive workforce development strategy is developed and implemented for the child, youth and family support sectors, in partnership between the government and non-government sectors. The 1 – 2% professional development funding allocation in the Youth and Family Support Program could inform the basis of this strategy; but the strategy should be for the broader youth and family support sectors.

5.6 Community Sector Pay Equity

A range of professionals work within the youth sector, including (but not limited to): generalist youth workers, specialist youth workers, mental health workers, alcohol and other drug workers, counsellors, statutory workers, nurses and doctors, educators, psychologists, health workers, family workers, lawyers, volunteers, and management staff.

The youth sector sees some highly skilled and experienced workers, who engage in extremely complex, innovative work with young people, and the Youth Coalition notes the importance of supporting these workers to remain in the sector. The Youth Coalition developed a profile of the youth sector workforce in 2010, which identified that over 50% of workers hold tertiary qualifications¹². This supports the argument that the youth sector is a highly skilled and motivated workforce.

The ACT Government has previously indicated its in-principle support for the Australian Services union's case before Fair Work Australia. This Pay equity case is based on the recognised disparity of remuneration between the government and non-government community sector workforce, and is informed by the successful significant wage increases to Queensland Community Services and Crisis Assistance Award in 2009.

People working in the community have historically been underpaid, primarily due to the majority of workers in the sector being women. This case seeks to redress that

imbalance. The Pay Equity campaign is being lead by the Australian Services Union and supported by many community sector organisations.

The Youth Coalition believes that the ACT Government needs to continue to engage with the community sector in discussion regarding the potential outcomes of this of this case, in order to be prepared if it is successful. We believe that the need for a strategic community workforce development plan in the ACT, as discussed in Section 5.5 of this submission, needs to be prepared for the potential impacts of the Pay Equity case being deemed successful.

Recommendation 6

That the ACT Government commit to funding any increase in community sector wages as a result of the Pay Equity case, relating to ACT Government contracts, to ensure that vulnerable young people and their families, and those that work to support them, are not adversely affected.

5.7 Criminal Justice Diversion Framework for Young Offenders in the ACT

Most young people do not have contact with the criminal justice system, however many of those young people who do are amongst the most vulnerable in the ACT. It is impossible to address issues of young people's involvement with the criminal justice system, without also considering the social and economic factors that contribute to offending or involvement. Research has identified significant associations between offending and risk factors including: being the subject of Care and Protection orders, substance use, early school leaving age, and/or disengaging with education providers, abuse, unemployment, and parental criminal behaviour.¹³

The Youth Coalition believes that addressing these factors, and developing strong social policy to better respond to the needs of vulnerable young people, is the best policy the justice system in the ACT can adopt. The Youth Coalition supports engaging with young people, where-ever possible, to participate in research and consultation regarding these programs and policies, and strongly believes young people have much to offer in positively shaping these.

Much has been written about the impact on young people of exposure to police, courts, bail and detention. The Youth Coalition strongly supports the adoption of evidence-based and evaluated programs that seek to reduce recidivism, work towards resolution for both young offenders and young victims, and provide meaningful alternatives to detention if appropriate, such as alcohol, tobacco and other drug treatment services or community reengagement programs, which may assist in addressing underlying issues of criminal behaviour. A 2010 report entitled *Review of Effective Practice in Juvenile Justice* had recommendations that included:

*Avoidance of Youth Incarcerations wherever possible:
Evidence suggests that the majority of incarcerated juvenile offenders could be treated safely and more effectively outside of custody. Therefore, tertiary responses to youth offending should emphasise community-based programs rather than incarceration. Effective juvenile justice systems should set guidelines to reduce the population of juveniles in custody.*¹⁴

The Youth Coalition believes that enough evidence has been collected from other jurisdictions to allow for the ACT to move forward on juvenile justice issues.

Recommendation 11

That the ACT Government develop a comprehensive and evidenced based Diversionary Framework for young offenders aged 12 – 25 in the ACT, with the underlying principles including:

- A whole of government approach,
- Strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and multicultural people,
- A whole of community collaboration focus, which includes community agencies and education providers.

5.8 Young People Transitioning to Independence from Care

The child protection system must ensure that young people are treated with dignity, offered all possible supports and that they are meaningfully involved in decisions that affect their lives. We believe that this is most effectively achieved through the ongoing monitoring role of the Office of the Public Advocate and the independence of the Commissioner for Children and Young People.

In recognising the diversity of young people involved in the care and protection system, the Youth Coalition believes that while some young people may be highly independent and able to transition easily out of the system, this is not the case for others. As such, these times should be viewed as key opportunities to develop living skills. In the current system, young people are exited out of care once they reach the age of 18, sometimes without adequate supports in place for their independent living. This could be one of the contributing factors to the high rates of homelessness, unemployment, contact with the justice system and lower health indicators experienced by young people who have been in care.

Of particular concern is the over-representation of young people from out of home care backgrounds in detention. In a 2003 report from the Australian Institute of Criminology, tracking over 1000 young people, 91% of the juveniles who had been subjected to a care and protection order, as well as a supervised justice order, had progressed to the adult corrections system, with 67% having served at least one term of imprisonment².

Carers often describe providing support far beyond the age of 18. While the support needs may not always be intensive, or long term, the fact is many young people require flexible and responsive episodes of support as they transition to independent living and adulthood, and may not have the family or social support structures outside of service providers or foster carers.

The Youth Coalition believes that young people in care need to be offered transitional supports beyond the age of 18 in order for them to make more successful transitions into other living arrangements, and that this could reduce their vulnerability after leaving Care. This must also include practical exit plans.

Recommendation 12

That after care support is provided to young people transitioning out of care until the age of 25, or as needed until the age of 25.

6. Department of Justice and Community Safety

This section of the Budget Submission outlines those items the Youth Coalition is calling for the ACT Government to provide funding to the Department of Justice and Community Safety for.

6.1 Criminal Justice Diversion Framework for Young Offenders in the ACT

Most young people do not have contact with the criminal justice system, however many of those young people who do are amongst the most vulnerable in the ACT. It is impossible to address issues of young people's involvement with the criminal justice system, without also considering the social and economic factors that contribute to offending or involvement. Research has identified significant associations between offending and risk factors including: being the subject of Care and Protection orders, substance use, early school leaving age, and/or disengaging with education providers, abuse, unemployment, and parental criminal behaviour.¹⁵

The Youth Coalition believes that addressing these factors, and developing strong social policy to better respond to the needs of vulnerable young people, is the best policy the justice system in the ACT can adopt. The Youth Coalition supports engaging with young people, where-ever possible, to participate in research and consultation regarding these programs and policies, and strongly believes young people have much to offer in positively shaping these.

Much has been written about the impact on young people of exposure to police, courts, bail and detention. The Youth Coalition strongly supports the adoption of evidence-based and evaluated programs that seek to reduce recidivism, work towards resolution for both young offenders and young victims, and provide meaningful alternatives to detention if appropriate, such as alcohol, tobacco and other drug treatment services or community reengagement programs, which may assist in addressing underlying issues of criminal behaviour. A 2010 report entitled *Review of Effective Practice in Juvenile Justice* had recommendations that included:

Avoidance of Youth Incarcerations wherever possible:

Evidence suggests that the majority of incarcerated juvenile offenders could be treated safely and more effectively outside of custody. Therefore, tertiary responses to youth offending should emphasise community-based programs rather than incarceration. Effective juvenile justice systems should set guidelines to reduce the population of juveniles in custody.¹⁶

The Youth Coalition believes that enough evidence has been collected from other jurisdictions to allow for the ACT to move forward on juvenile justice issues.

Recommendation 11

That the ACT Government develop a comprehensive and evidenced based Diversionary Framework for young offenders aged 12 – 25 in the ACT, with the underlying principles including:

- A whole of government approach,
- Strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and multicultural people,
- A whole of community collaboration focus, which includes community agencies and education providers.

7. Department of Education and Training

This section of the Budget Submission outlines those items the Youth Coalition is calling for the ACT Government to provide funding to the Department of Education and Training for.

7.1 Re-Engaging Young People Disengaged or At-Risk of Disengaging from Education or Training

The Youth Coalition welcomes the ACT Government's 'recognition that there is a unique opportunity presented by the Youth Attainment and Transitions National Partnership... to secure a significant change in the approach being taken to support young people and to entrench that approach for all Canberrans'.¹⁷

The Youth Coalition is committed to working with the ACT Department of Education and Training and the youth sector to meet the goals under the Youth Commitment of:

- Ensuring that no young person is lost from education, training or employment;
- Establishing a shared responsibility between stakeholders who serve young people including government/non-government schools, Canberra Institute of Technology, registered training organisations, community organisations, employers, parents, related government (Commonwealth and ACT) and non-government agencies;
- Enhancing the ACT's significant record of excellence in educational achievement; and,
- Working to make the transition through education and on to further education and training and/or employment a positive experience for each young person.

In particular the Youth Coalition highlights the work being undertaken under the Youth Commitment by the Re-engaging Youth Leadership Group to bring a greater level of understanding, cooperation and coordination across all providers and agencies working to support young people disengaged from education and training or at risk of disengaging.

'The aim of this group is to connect providers with each other and with schools to enable a coordinated, innovative synergistic approach to the reengagement of young people and to support the positive transition of those reengaged young people through education, training and/or work.'¹⁸

The Youth Coalition supports the findings of the first Re-engaging Youth Regional Network Forum, held in Tuggeranong in November 2010, which further highlighted the need to invest in a framework, coordination, and innovative models of partnership and service delivery, to support the ACT's goal of ensuring that no young people are lost from education, training or employment.

Recommendation 13

That the ACT Government allocate resources to support a framework for re-engaging young people disengaged or at risk of disengaging from education or training. This would include:

- Development of the framework and gap analysis;
- Support to the work of the Re-engaging Youth Leadership Group, and Re-engaging Youth Regional Networks;
- The provision of programs of resources to address any gaps in current service delivery, both in government and non-government settings.

8. Attachments

The following attachments were provided electronically with this submission:

- The Youth Coalition submission to the draft *Engaging Canberrans: A Guide to Community Engagement*;
- The Multicultural Youth Affairs Network Issues Paper, December 2010;
- Joint Sector submission to the *Discussion Paper on Developing a Service Delivery Framework for OCYFS funded services working with vulnerable children, young people and their families*, March 2010;
- Youth Coalition submission to the draft *Service Delivery Framework 2010 – 2013*, December 2010;
- Youth Coalition submission to the ACT Government Discussion Paper *Maximising Potential: Improve Life Transitions for Young People in Care*.

9. Reference List

- ¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2008) Population by Age and Sex, Australian States and Territories, Canberra.
- ² Australian Bureau of Statistics (March 2009) Australian Social Trends: Mental Health, Australian Government, Canberra.
- ³ Kessler et al, cited in: McGorry P, et al (2006) Youth Mental Health Services, Department of Psychiatry, University of Melbourne and ORYGEN Research Centre
- ⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2007) National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing, Australian Government, Canberra.
- ⁵ Begg S, Vos T, Barker B, Stevenson C, Stanley L & Lopez A 2007. The burden of disease and injury in Australia, 2003. AIHW cat. no. PHE 82. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.
- ⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2008) Census of Population and Housing, Canberra.
- ⁷ Youth Coalition of the ACT (2010) Motivation, Money, Making a Difference: A Profile of the ACT Youth Sector Workforce, Canberra
- ⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2008) Census of Population and Housing, Canberra.
- ⁹ Office for Children, Youth and Family Support (2010) Draft Service Delivery Framework 2010 – 2013, Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, ACT Government, Canberra.
- ¹⁰ Office for Children, Youth and Family Support (2010) ACT Young People's Plan 2009 - 2014, Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, ACT Government, Canberra.
- ¹¹ Ann Roche (2006) 'What is this thing called workforce development?' McDonald, J. Roche, A. (pd) Systems, Settings, People: Workforce Development Challenges for the Alcohol and Other Drugs Field.
- ¹² Youth Coalition of the ACT (2010) Motivation, Money, Making a Difference: A Profile of the ACT Youth Sector Workforce, Canberra
- ¹³ Attorney General's Department (Accessed November 2010) National Community Crime Prevention Programme, Australian Government, Canberra.
- ¹⁴ Noetic Solutions (2010) Review of Effective Practice in Juvenile Justice, NSW Government, NSW.
- ¹⁵ Attorney General's Department (Accessed November 2010) National Community Crime Prevention Programme, Australian Government, Canberra.

¹⁶ Noetic Solutions (2010) Review of Effective Practice in Juvenile Justice, NSW Government, NSW.

¹⁷ ACT Department of Education and Training (Accessed December 2010) ACT Youth Commitment, ACT Government, Canberra.

¹⁸ ACT Department of Education and Training (2010) Re-Engaging Youth Leadership Group Terms of Reference, ACT Government, Canberra.