



Submission to the ACT Government 2010/11 Budget

September 2009

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 Ngunnawal culture and the invaluable contribution it makes to our community.

Submission to the ACT Government 2010/11 Budget
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September 2009

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1. Introduction

Section 1 of this submission provides an overview of the Youth Coalition of the ACT, the process by which this submission was developed, and the format of this submission.

1.1 About the Youth Coalition of the ACT

The Youth Coalition of the ACT (the Youth Coalition) is the peak youth affairs body in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). Comprised of 75 members, programs, and individuals the Youth Coalition is responsible for representing and promoting rights, interests and wellbeing of people aged between 12 and 25 years and those who work with them.

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. As the peak body for youth affairs, 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 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people represent about 2% of young people in the ACT; and young people born overseas represent approximately 13% of young people².

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 Format and Development of the Youth Coalition 2010-11 ACT Government Budget Submission

The Youth Coalition welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the ACT Government Budget. The 2010/11 Budget Submission is the Youth Coalition's eleventh contribution to the development of the ACT Government Budget, 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 views of participants of the Youth Coalition's Biennial Policy Forum;
- The results of the *Youth Coalition 2009 Budget Stakeholder Survey*;
- The issues raised at consultations on the 2010/11 ACT Government Budget;
- One-on-one consultations with member services and organisations; and,
- Current and topical research on youth affairs.

This submission represents an opportunity for the Youth Coalition to identify and advise ACT Government of areas in need of additional resources and emerging issues; provide a central point for members to raise issues and access the public submission process; and ensure that the ACT Government is accountable to election promises and other commitments.

This submission has been divided into 15 sections, which include the following:

1. Introduction (this section)
2. Summary of Recommendations
3. Overview
4. Youth Sector
5. Mental Health
6. Alcohol and Other Drugs
7. Comorbidity
8. Sexual Health
9. Health Services for Young People
10. Multicultural Young People
11. Education
12. Employment
13. Housing and Homelessness
14. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young People
15. Justice
16. Disability
17. Reference List

2. Summary of Recommendations

Section 2 of this submission provides a summary of the Youth Coalition's recommendations to the ACT Government 2010 – 11 Budget. For further information, please see the relevant sections.

Overview

Recommendation 1

That the ACT Government does not look to community sector funding cuts in order to find savings in the 2010/11 Budget, maintaining current levels of funding as a minimum.

Youth Sector

Recommendation 2

That the ACT Government implement the recommendations outlined in the ACT Council of Social Service report, *Finding Solutions, Towards the long term viability of the ACT Community Sector*.

Recommendation 3

That the ACT Government invest in workforce development strategies for the youth and community sectors.

Recommendation 4

That the ACT Government commit to no reduction in the funding level supporting young people aged 12-25 years within the new service framework that will come into effect during the 2010/11 Budget.

Recommendation 5

That the ACT Government develop an updated social and demographic profile of young people in the ACT.

Recommendation 6

That the ACT Government contribute funds to enable the Youth Centres Network to progress modelling to:

- Further develop Youth Centre practice;
- Contribute to the evidence base informing Youth Centre practice; and
- Inform future funding of youth services.

Recommendation 7

That the ACT Government provide funding to further develop a Code of Ethics for Youth Work in the ACT.

Recommendation 8

That the ACT Government ensure that the Youth Coalition is able to continue to support specific networks within the youth and community sector which aim to strengthen supports and services for young people aged 12-25 years.

Recommendation 9

That the ACT Government ensure that funding is available to support the continued production of The Big Red Book.

Mental Health

Recommendation 10

That the ACT Government work towards building the capacity of ACT Government schools to provide mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention support to young people.

Recommendation 11

That the ACT Government ensure the development and implementation of a multidisciplinary response to enable young people with eating disorders to access comprehensive treatment and support through existing services based in the ACT.

Alcohol and Other Drugs

Recommendation 12

That the ACT Government resource strategies to progress the key findings of the report: *'Who Cares? Young People living with a Family Member who has an AOD Issue'*, developed by the Institute of Child Protection Studies.

Recommendation 13

That the ACT Government provide core funding for the ACT AOD Sector Peak Body (to be established in 2010) to ensure a viable peak body for the AOD sector.

Comorbidity

Recommendation 14

That the ACT Government provide increased funding for existing programs, such as headspace ACT, that focus on comorbidity early intervention and prevention support for young people.

Recommendation 15

That through the development of the draft *ACT Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Strategy 2009 – 2012*, the draft *ACT Mental Health Services Plan 2008 - 2013* and the new *ACT Comorbidity Strategy*, the ACT Government seeks to provide more integrated service responses for young people.

Sexual Health

Recommendation 16

That the ACT Government provides funding to community-based specialists to work with schools to deliver evidence-based sexual health and healthy relationships promotion and education.

Health Services for Young People

Recommendation 17

That the ACT Government fund a community-based *Youth Health Network* to collaboratively improve access to and health services for young people.

Multicultural Young People

Recommendation 18

That the ACT Government provide funding to Multicultural Youth Services to meet the high demand from multicultural young people requiring support in the ACT.

Recommendation 19

That the ACT Government providing funding for the secretariat and project management support for a *Multicultural Youth Affairs Network* in the ACT

Education

Recommendation 20

The ACT Government use existing resources in schools to progress:

- Adequate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education staff in schools; and
- The implementation of appropriate cultural awareness training for all education staff.

Recommendation 21

The ACT Government work towards building the capacity of existing school welfare teams within ACT Government schools, to provide early intervention support to young people.

Recommendation 22

That the ACT Government increase funding for:

- Numeracy and literacy support programs in alternative settings including Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation; and,
- Existing alternative education settings with student waiting lists.

Employment

Recommendation 23

That the ACT Government invests in developing and maintaining supported pathways to employment for young people, through:

- Innovative education, training and retraining opportunities for young people;
- Building the capacity of schools to support young people to develop pathways to employment; and,
- Resourcing youth services to support young people to access and maintain employment.

Housing

Recommendation 24

That the ACT Government fulfil its target of 10% public housing stock by 2012, and that capital injections into Housing ACT increase supply.

Recommendation 25

That the ACT Government immediately develop and implement strategies with youth and related services to address homelessness for young people aged 12 - 14 as a matter of urgency.

Recommendation 26

That the ACT Government provide funding to the Youth Housing and Homelessness Forum to progress the recommendations of the Living Skills Project, including resourcing the coordination and provision of living skills training for young people experiencing homelessness.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young People

Recommendation 27

That the ACT Government increase funding to Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation to meet the high demand from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people requiring support in the ACT.

See also 'Education' for additional recommendations relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young People.

Justice

Recommendation 28

That the ACT Government implements an evaluation of the Human Rights Framework in Bimberi Youth Justice Centre.

Recommendation 29

That the ACT Government develops, supports and evaluates policies and strategies focussed on early intervention and prevention, including justice, situational, community, developmental and educational approaches, in recognition of the goals of affecting positive change in both communities and individuals.

Recommendation 30

That the ACT Government develops, implements and evaluates policies and strategies that ensure throughcare is an integral component of both Bimberi Youth Justice Centre and the Alexander Machonochie Centre.

Recommendation 31

That the ACT Government develop, support, resource and evaluate strategies with the youth and community sector to ensure the implementation of individual, planned and supported exits for young people exiting detention, including planning for supported accommodation, living skills training and employment and skills training.

Recommendation 32

That the ACT Government ensures programs for detainees in the Alexander Maconochie Centre include specific and targeted initiatives for young people aged 18– 25 years.

Disability

Recommendation 33

That young people with disability are identified as key stakeholders in the implementation of the ACT Disability Framework 2009 – 2014 and that all strategies are resourced and have separate actions for young people with disability.

3. Overview

Young people contribute vitality, honesty, innovative thinking, cultural expression and critical perspectives to the communities in which we live. Communities should honour and respect these contributions. Although their voices are often unheard, young people have the right to be involved. We all have a responsibility to ensure that young people have full membership in our community. This is a matter of social justice.

Our community has a responsibility to provide the resources and opportunities that young people need in order to build their lives. As the cliché goes, young people will create the society of the future – but let us not forget they contribute to our society now.

The Canberra Social Plan includes the following goals:

- **Invest** in children and young people;
- **Increase** participation, engagement and the achievement of children and young people; and
- **Improve** the transition between school, further study, and the workforce.³

The Youth Coalition supports the ACT Government's vision that the ACT '*become a place where all people reach their potential, make a contribution and share the benefits of our community*', as expressed in the Canberra Social Plan, and further the notion that the Social Plan is an expression that captures the Government's commitment to the principles of access, equity and participation, and it's belief that we must:

- Value and invest in our people as the ACT's most precious asset;
- Ensure that every citizen has a decent standard of living; and,
- Safeguard the freedoms necessary to allow all to live a life of dignity and value.⁴

The Youth Coalition welcomes the ACT Treasurer's invitation to interested community and business groups, unions, individual Canberrans and other stakeholders to share their views and suggestions for future priorities and savings the Government may consider in framing the 2010-11 Budget.

What services do you value most in the Territory?

Youth and community services in the ACT are highly valued, utilised and essential services that providing valuable contribution to the ACT community and in particular support to disadvantaged, marginalised or otherwise excluded members of the community.

In ongoing consultation with youth service providers in the ACT, the Youth Coalition continues to identify the following broad priority areas of support need for young people in the ACT:

- Housing and Homelessness;
- Alcohol and Other Drugs;
- Mental Health;
- Education;
- Employment; and,
- Justice.

What services do you use the most?

Youth Coalition consultations undertaken in 2009 to inform our submission to the development of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009/14 identified that many youth and community services are at capacity (or over) and that the sector continues to experience a high demand for service. Additionally many service providers have reported an increase in demand as the effects of global financial crisis have come in to play.

The youth and community sectors continue to identify the need to strike a balance between mainstream and specialist services in ensuring an adequate continuum of support is provided to young people in most need of support in or community.

Is the Government delivering these services in an effective and efficient way?

The Youth Coalition believes that all government service delivery should be subject to quality improvement processes and always welcomes the opportunity to contribute to discussion with specific departments regarding effective and efficient service delivery in relation to services affecting young people.

It is essential that as the youth and community sectors increasingly look to account to evidence based practice in their service delivery that government services are also held to this standard.

The Youth Coalition also advocates that it is essential that the ACT community is effectively engaged in decisions about government service delivery, and that young people are supported to be able to participate equally in these processes.

Do you have any ideas about how services could be delivered more efficiently?

In 2009 Youth Coalition submissions have included the following;

- Submission to the Inquiry on the Education Achievement Gap, September 2009
- Submission to the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 Discussion Paper, July 2009
- Letter responding to the Mental Health Suicide Prevention Strategy and Building a Strong Foundation: A Framework for Promoting Mental Health and Wellbeing in the ACT 2009–2014, July 2009
- Submission to the Policy Framework for People with Disability in the ACT Strategic Priorities 2009–2014, June 2009
- Analysis of the ACT Budget 2009–10 Part 1: Media Releases, May 2009
- Analysis of the ACT Budget 2009–10 Part 2: Expenditure Initiatives, May 2009
- Analysis of the ACT Budget 2009–10 Part 3: Capital Initiatives, May 2009
- Submission to the Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012, March 2009

The Youth Coalition is also currently working on the following:

- Submission to the draft Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014;
- Submission to the ACT Women's Plan; and
- Submission to the Working with Vulnerable People Checks.

With the development of these key policy responses, and the many changes occurring across the youth and community sector as a result of changes to Australian Government funding, the Youth Coalition has advocated that there be synergies across key government policy, and believe that improvement to whole of government response and cohesion will lead to more efficient service delivery.

Some areas of service delivery for young people, in government services, community based services and schools could be delivered more efficiently with better coordination of services and commitment to sector development. The Youth Coalition has outlined a number of specific ideas in this submission, and looks forward to the continued discussion with ACT Government in the coming months.

Should the Government maintain its current suite of services?

The Youth Coalition welcomes the ongoing discussion regarding the range of services, models, and delivery; that is occurring in the youth and community sectors. Projects such as the Future Directions for the Youth Services Program Project will assist the youth sector to continue to be responsive and meet the support needs of young people in the ACT.

While the youth and community sector is engaged in this discussion, it is essential that any re alignment of service types or models does not result in a reduction in funding levels supporting young people aged 12-25 years in the ACT.

*Would you be willing to pay more to maintain this level of services?
Are there any services you think the community should make a direct contribution to (a fee for service)?*

Any increase in cost for service or introduction of a fee for service, where there has not previously been a cost needs to take into account the impact of this action on people experiencing disadvantage and poverty. It is essential that the ACT Government does not take actions that will further add to disadvantage and poverty, and therefore support safety nets and policies that ensure people receive essential services.

Financial disadvantage is particularly an issue for young people who are more likely to be unemployed, underemployed, or being paid inadequate wages to enable them to pay additional money for services. The Youth Coalition believes that the principles of access and equity need to underpin any decisions regarding fee for Government services.

The Government needs to find savings to ensure budget integrity. Which government services would you be willing to find savings in?

The Youth Coalition recognises the pressures facing the ACT Government as it looks to bringing the ACT Budget into balance. The Youth Coalition also recognises the pressures facing the youth and community services who provide essential support to the ACT community, and the safety net in times of economic instability.

The Youth Coalition also believes that essential services for young people, such as education, health and housing should not be compromised at this time, as these investments provide young people with the supports to be full contributors to the ACT community, both now and through economic recovery.

Recommendation 1

That the ACT Government does not look to community sector funding cuts in order to find savings in the 2010/11 Budget, maintaining current levels of funding as a minimum.

4. Youth Sector

Youth services continue to play a critical role in the lives of young members of the ACT community providing many young people, particularly those experiencing disadvantage, risk, or marginalisation access to resources to support their social, political, cultural, spiritual, economic and educational development.

It is important that youth services meet the needs of young people at each developmental stage of adolescence: early (12 – 14 years), middle (15 – 18/19 years) and late (19/20 – 25 years). Young people may experience many different needs during each of these stages of development, and so require specific supports from youth services⁵.

Like many sections of the community sector, community based youth services continue to experience significant challenges with regard to workforce development, recruitment and retention of workers, while also facing increased demand for service provision. The increasingly complex nature of the issues youth services and workers are supporting young people with also highlights the challenge of skill development in a sector that must be both pre-emptive and responsive to the changing needs of young people, and have such a broad range of response knowledge.

The viability of the ACT youth and community sectors is important, to ensure that the service system is set up to support young people, able to further develop to address emerging issues and provide targeted support to young people. The Canberra Social Compact states:

In working with the community sector, the ACT Government should recognise the importance of and support the sustainability and long term capacity of the community sector⁶.

Additionally, a key goal of the Canberra Social Plan is to recognise and support the role played by community organisations in the ACT⁷.

The ACT Government has made significant commitment to the community sector with both the introduction of a portable long service leave scheme, and in the Industrial Relations Review of community sector arrangements. However with the Industrial Relations Review in progress and youth and community services funding and delivery also being affected by: changes to Commonwealth funding streams; discussion around changes to service purchasing frameworks in ACT Government; and a move to 'outcomes' as opposed to 'outputs' in the way service delivery is funded, reported and conceptualised, the Youth Coalition believes that the following issues need to be urgently addressed.

4.1 Youth and Community Sector Viability

The myriad of issues impacting on the viability of the youth and broader community sector are outlined in the ACT Council of Social Service report, *Finding Solutions: Towards the long term viability of the ACT Community Sector*. The Youth Coalition of the ACT strongly supports all of the recommendations outlined within the report.

Recommendation 2

That the ACT Government implement the recommendations outlined in the ACT Council of Social Service report, *Finding Solutions, Towards the long term viability of the ACT Community Sector*.

4.2 Workforce Development

'Workforce development' provides a framework for organisations, sectors and the government to approach sector wide development in Australia. Much of the workforce development literature focuses on the alcohol and other drug (AOD) sector in Australia. However, it is important to consider the relevance of this framework for the youth sector as both the AOD and youth sectors have a focus on early intervention and holistic approaches.

Workforce development is a holistic, evidence-based approach that the Youth Coalition and many stakeholders have agreed is a highly valuable concept as effective sector development is rarely confined to addressing one of the elements in isolation. Sector development interventions need to be designed with an awareness of all the forces that operate within systems to facilitate or inhibit the changes that are desired, and should address as many of these as possible in a comprehensive fashion⁸.

Therefore the shift to a 'workforce development' approach is timely for youth sector development initiatives pursued by the ACT Government, the youth sector and the Youth Coalition.

Recommendation 3

That the ACT Government invest in workforce development strategies for the youth and community sectors.

4.3 Merging the Youth Services Program and Family Support Programs

With the recent announcement by the ACT Government of intent to merge the Youth Services Program and the Family Support Programs following the end of the current funding cycle (June 2010), it is crucial for the ACT Government to confirm its commitment to no reduction in the total funding across these programs. In addition, the Youth Coalition believes that it is essential that the current levels of funding directed at supporting young people aged 12-25 years is maintained within the new expanded framework.

Recommendation 4

That the ACT Government commit to no reduction in the funding level supporting young people aged 12-25 years within the new service framework that will come into effect during the 2010/11 Budget.

4.4 Developing an Evidence Base for Youth Service Delivery

It is crucial that the that the provision of youth services in the ACT has both a policy context and an evidence base in order to meet the current and emerging needs of young people. With the ACT Young People's Plan 2009-2014 due to be released in

December 2009, and the ongoing release of many other plans and frameworks affecting young people, including (but not limited to) the ACT Disability Framework 2009-2014, the ACT Women's Plan, and the ACT Multicultural Strategy 2010-2013, many resource have gone in to developing the policy context this year. The Youth Coalition urges the ACT Government to adequately resource the implementation of all key frameworks, plans and strategies developed in the 2009/10 period.

The Youth Services Program Future Directions Project, due to be completed by the end of 2009, will go some of the way to informing youth service delivery within the merged Youth Services Program and Family Support Program framework. However there are some gaps in the research and evidence informing youth service delivery in the ACT.

Social and Demographic Profile of Young People in the ACT

The Youth Coalition calls for the development of an updated social and demographic profile of young people to be a priority action for the ACT Demographer. The previous profile, *Youth in the ACT: A social and demographic profile* was released in 2002, primarily using now out of date data from 1996.

Relevant and updated demographic analyses and population forecasting are crucial to inform the ACT Government and youth services about the changing nature of Canberra's youth population, and help agencies efficiently plan and deliver infrastructure and services to young people and their families.

Therefore, the Youth Coalition calls for a new profile to be developed updating the statistics used in this document to ensure that the ACT Government and community sector is able to use the best possible data when making decisions about service provision to young people in the ACT.

Recommendation 5

That the ACT Government develop an updated social and demographic profile of young people in the ACT.

Youth Centres Modelling Project

There are nine multi functioning youth centres in the ACT and surrounding region. Youth centres provide safe, youth friendly spaces where young people can access a range of programs and activities. Youth Centres are often the first point of contact for young people accessing the service system, meaning that they are generalist services that can act as a gateway to other services.

Youth centres work with young people aged 12 – 25 years, which is not a homogenous group. The diversity amongst this group is as diverse as that in the broader population. Furthermore the need of, and issues affecting, young people are changing all the time. Therefore it is crucial that youth centres have the capacity to adapt to the changing needs of their client group and are routinely reflecting on their practice.

The *Youth Centres Modelling Project* was developed as part of the *Youth Centres Network* to research existing youth centres models and practices to provide youth centres in the ACT and Queanbeyan with an evidence base upon which to improve

their practice.

Work in 2008 included policy and procedure manual reviews, literature searches, and practice and models documentation. However the Project was not able to progress without consultancy support.

Recommendation 6

That the ACT Government contribute funds to enable the Youth Centres Network to progress modelling to:

- Further develop Youth Centre practice;
- Contribute to the evidence base informing Youth Centre practice; and
- Inform future funding of youth services.

4.5 Youth Sector Development

The Youth Coalition is committed to ensuring that those who work with young people are able to access quality support and resources to assist them in their work. Sector development activities such as networking opportunities, provision of resources, training and individual support to youth services are vital to ensure young people in the ACT have access to high level, professional, and knowledgeable support.

Ethics of Youth Work

The Youth Coalition of the ACT has been conducting the *Ethics of Youth Work Project* since late 2007. The Project aims to advance understanding of, and good practice in, youth work; and has examined questions concerned with the nature, values and goals of youth work; and how practice might best be made accountable to these.

The project has involved engaging a professional ethicist to work with the Youth Coalition, several workshops, seminars and lectures conducted with youth services throughout 2008, including the *Professional Ethics and Youth Work Symposium* in December 2008.

The Project is unique and is able to place the ACT on the map regarding this crucial area of work. However, unfortunately resources for the Project have expired.

Following the symposium youth services stated that they wanted to continue to improve their practice through the Project and that the ACT Government should be lobbied for funding so that this crucial initiative can continue.

Recommendation 7

That the ACT Government provide funding to further develop a Code of Ethics for Youth Work in the ACT.

Networks

In addition to the broad networking, training and development opportunities that the Youth Coalition provides to the ACT youth sector, the Youth Coalition also supports a number of specific networks within the youth and community sector which aim to strengthen supports and services for young people ages 12-25 years. These include:

Youth Centres Network

The aim of the Youth Centres Network is to provide a forum for youth centres to as a collective, continuously improve their practice in supporting young people in the ACT and surrounding region.

Youth Sexuality and Gender Diversity Network

The aim of the Youth Sexuality and Gender Diversity Network (YSGDN) is to strengthen supports and services for young people aged 12–25 in the ACT, who identify as Gay, Lesbian, Bi-Sexual, Transgender, Intersex and/or Queer (GLBTIQ); and raise the profile of GLBTIQ youth issues in the ACT.

Youth Housing and Homelessness Forum

The Youth Housing and Homelessness Forum has evolved from the Youth SAAP (Supported Accommodation Assistance Program) Pathways Project and aims to support services working in the area of youth housing and homelessness to identify opportunity and need across the sector, participate in the ACT Government change agenda, and improve their practice and support for young people experiencing housing crisis or homelessness in the ACT.

Multicultural Youth Affairs Network

The Multicultural Youth Affairs Network Network seeks to improve supports for multicultural young people, strengthen multicultural youth services (locally and nationally), strengthen connections between ‘mainstream’ and multicultural youth services and raise the profile of multicultural youth issues in the ACT.

Recommendation 8

That the ACT Government ensure that the Youth Coalition is able to continue to support specific networks within the youth and community sector which aim to strengthen supports and services for young people aged 12-25 years.

The Big Red Book

The Big Red Book is the first handbook and directory for people who work with young people in the ACT. It has been designed for use by a range of professionals who may have contact with young people including youth workers, general practitioners and teachers. In addition to providing service profiles, this handbook also provides strategy-based information for workers, key service contacts and other helpful resources. The services in The Big Red Book were actively involved in its development and young people's voices are reflected throughout it.

Now in its 5th version, with a major update underway, this resource is a key tool for not only for the youth sector but the broader sectors providing service to young people in the ACT, such as Health, Education, and Family Support.

Recommendation 9

That the ACT Government ensure that funding is available to support the continued production of The Big Red Book.

5. Mental Health

Mental Health is defined in the *National Mental Health Plan 2003 – 2008* as:

*A state of emotional and social wellbeing in which the individual can cope with the normal stresses of life and achieve his or her potential. It is not simply the absence of mental illness.*⁹

According to the Mental Health Council of Australia, 70% of mental health issues manifest between the ages of 15 and 25, with early intervention increasing the chances of recovery for these young people.¹⁰ Mental health issues are also likely to affect more than one quarter of young people aged 18 - 25 in any given 12 month period.¹¹

This highlights the importance of developing early intervention and prevention strategies with young people; and the valuable placement of youth services that work with young people. The Youth Coalition is pleased with the development of the *Four Stage Developmental Model* in the draft *ACT Mental Health Services Plan 2008 - 2013*, in which young people are highlighted as a key target group who warrant unique, targeted strategies.

The Youth Coalition acknowledges the ACT Government's recent investment of funds into community-based mental health services for young people. We also support the ACT Government Election commitment to allocate 12% of the health budget to mental health by 2012.¹² However, this raises the importance of building on existing mental health initiatives to ensure early intervention and prevention strategies are developed and implemented.

5.1 Mental Health Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention for Young People in Schools

The Youth Coalition calls on the ACT Government to allocate targeted resources to the early intervention and prevention of mental health issues in young people.

The Youth Coalition acknowledges the need to allocate resources to acute services in the ACT, and appreciates the challenges of balancing the provision of funding across mental health. We welcome the commitment in the 2009/10 ACT Government Budget to establish a Mental Health Inpatient Unit specifically for young people. However, the effectiveness of promotion, prevention and early intervention has been highlighted through research and evaluation in addition to the cost effective nature of these programs.¹³

The Youth Coalition also highlights the importance of implementing promotion, prevention and early intervention mechanisms within other services, and in particular, schools. Building the capacity of existing school welfare teams to provide mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention support to young people will contribute towards building an effective service system.

Recommendation 10

That the ACT Government work towards building the capacity of ACT Government schools to provide mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention support to young people.

5.2 Young People with Eating Disorders

Eating disorders are psychological disorders characterised by dieting and thoughts of body shape and weight becoming a distressing focus of one's life. Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia and Binge Eating Disorder are the most commonly recognised forms of eating disorders. All of these have serious physical and mental health implications.¹⁴

Young people are the group most commonly at risk of experiencing eating disorders,¹⁵ with approximately 2% of young women suffering from an eating disorder.¹⁶

In November 2008, the Youth Coalition hosted a consultation for the *Review of Services for People with Eating Disorders*. This consultation highlighted difficulties for young people in accessing treatment and support for eating disorders, with many young people unable to find appropriate treatment in the ACT. The effects become accumulative as young people are forced to travel interstate due to the lack of services in the ACT, which causes delays in accessing treatment and increases the risk of harm.

Recommendation 11

That the ACT Government ensure the development and implementation of a multidisciplinary response to enable young people with eating disorders to access comprehensive treatment and support through existing services based in the ACT.

See also *Section 7: Comorbidity* and *Section 9: Health Services for Young People* for additional strategies and recommendations relating to mental health and young people.

6. Alcohol and Other Drugs

People often experiment with alcohol and other drugs (AOD) when they are young. While the majority of young people do not develop problematic AOD issues, some do. Youth services consistently report alcohol and other drugs as one of the top three issues for young people in the ACT.

6.1 Supporting Young People in Families affected by AOD Issues

In 2009, the Institute of Child Protection Studies released a report titled 'Who Cares? Young People living with a Family Member who has an AOD Issue'. The report aims to examine the specific needs of children and young people who have a parent with an alcohol or other drug issue, and how these are similar or different to other children and young people with caring responsibilities.

The report aims to grasp the implications for the range of services that might come into contact with these families (including young carer, AOD, family support and care and protection programs) and the ways that supports might be provided.

The report explores the key needs of young people, barriers to support, and implications for services. The Youth Coalition encourages the ACT Government to develop strategies to progress the key findings of the report.

Recommendation 12

That the ACT Government resource strategies to progress the key findings of the report: '*Who Cares? Young People living with a Family Member who has an AOD Issue*', developed by the Institute of Child Protection Studies.

6.2 Funding for the Alcohol and Other Drug Sector Peak Body

In July 2007, the Youth Coalition received funding to provide sector support activities to the ACT alcohol and other drug sector, through the ACT Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) Sector Project.

The ACT AOD Sector Project (the Project) aims to build the capacity and identity of the AOD sector in the ACT, foster intra and cross-sectoral relationships, and improve outcomes while maintaining respect for the diversity of services and for people who are affected by AOD. Sector support activities provided to the AOD sector have included:

- ACT AOD Workers' Group: A group made up of one nominated representative from each ACT AOD Service that provides input into sector development activities;
- Representation on the ACT AOD Executive Directors Group;
- Coordination of Drug Action Week in the ACT; including two conferences for the AOD sector;
- ACT AOD Services Directory, which is updated twice a year;
- Monthly forums for the workers in the ACT AOD sector;
- Bimonthly Training and Professional Development Calendar;
- Training and professional development opportunities;
- Monthly eBulletins for workers in the ACT AOD sector and allied sectors;

- Coordination of the Minimum Qualification Strategy for workers in the ACT AOD sector;
- ACT AOD Workforce Qualification and Remuneration Profiling Project;
- Review of AOD Written Materials for Young People Project; and,
- Implementation of the Comorbidity Project, which aims to provide support to AOD services in the ACT to build their capacity to work with existing clients experiencing comorbid AOD and mental health issues.

At governance workshops held during 2009, the ACT AOD sector and ACT Health agreed to work towards progressing the ACT AOD Sector Project to become the incorporated ACT AOD peak body in the 2010 – 2011 financial year.

The Youth Coalition strongly supports the work by the ACT AOD sector and the ACT Government towards establishing a peak body for the ACT AOD sector. However, we acknowledge that currently, the Project is resourced through project-based funding, and that core funding is required to ensure a viable peak body.

Recommendation 13

That the ACT Government provide core funding for the ACT AOD Sector Peak Body (to be established in 2010) to ensure a viable peak body for the AOD sector.

See also *Section 7: Comorbidity* and *Section 9: Health Services for Young People* for additional strategies and recommendations relating to young people and alcohol and other drugs.

7. Comorbidity

Comorbidity is the co-occurrence of alcohol and other drugs, and mental health issues. A critical period for developing comorbidity is throughout adolescence.¹⁷ Although comorbidity affects a range of age groups, young people have been identified as at significant risk of poor treatment outcomes as a result of comorbidity.¹⁸

7.1 Comorbidity Services for Young People

headspace ACT was established in 2008 as a youth mental health and alcohol and other drug service in the ACT, with a focus on early intervention and prevention for young people who are experiencing low to moderate mental health 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.

However, in 2010, headspace ACT will receive a significant reduction in funding, which will result in the loss of 4 key positions. This may considerably reduce headspace ACT's capacity to support young people. Additional funding to existing youth mental health services that have a focus on early intervention and prevention will work towards ensuring that the ACT can continue to effectively support young people with mental health issues.

Recommendation 14

That the ACT Government provide increased funding for existing programs, such as headspace ACT, that focus on comorbidity early intervention and prevention support for young people.

7.2 Integrated Comorbidity Policy and Services

The draft *ACT Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Strategy 2009 - 2012* and the draft *ACT Mental Health Services Plan 2008 - 2013* are key documents that will guide policy service delivery in the ACT over the ACT Government's term. The Youth Coalition also welcomes the work that is currently being done towards developing an *ACT Comorbidity Strategy*. The Youth Coalition hopes the development of these three key documents will seek to provide more integrated service responses for young people.

Recommendation 15

That through the development of the draft *ACT Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Strategy 2009 - 2012*, the draft *ACT Mental Health Services Plan 2008 - 2013* and the new *ACT Comorbidity Strategy*, the ACT Government seeks to provide more integrated service responses for young people.

See also Section 9: Health Services for Young People for additional strategies and recommendations relating to comorbidity and young people.

8. Sexual Health

Sexual health is a key aspect of young people's overall health and wellbeing. The median age of sexual intercourse is currently around 16, with over 25% of Year 10 students and just under 50% of Year 12 students having had sexual intercourse.¹⁹ Only 40% of Year 12 students regularly use condoms when having sexual intercourse²⁰, and young people are at an increased risk of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI)²¹. Therefore, it is vital that young people are informed about sexual health and safe sexual behaviours.

Research suggests that many young people have low levels of knowledge in relation to sexual health. Accurate sexual health information and education within the school system is required so that young people can take responsibility for and make informed decisions about their sexual development.

It is the responsibility of both the ACT Government and the community to address this through increased quality education, information, early intervention and health promotion.

8.1 Sexual Health Promotion and Education

Sexual health promotion and education is important for young people in order to ensure their sexual development is positive and their exposure to risks, such as unwanted pregnancy and the contraction of STIs, is minimised. Studies consistently show that comprehensive and accurate sexual health education leads to a delay in the onset of sexual activity, or a decrease in overall sexual activity. In addition, research shows that sexuality education increases the adoption of safe sex practices by sexually active young people.

Sexual health promotion and education programs need to be inclusive of diverse cultural backgrounds, genders and sexual orientations, to ensure that young people have access to appropriate, relevant, non-judgmental and evidence based material.

Many of the services delivering effective, relevant, and accurate sexual health education to schools and other communities are suffering capacity constraints and are struggling to meet demand.

The Youth Coalition acknowledges that sexual health education is part of the ACT school curriculum. However it is crucial that community-based, skilled specialists are funded to work collaborative with schools to ensure the delivery of quality programs.

Recommendation 16

That the ACT Government provides funding to community-based specialists to work with schools to deliver evidence-based sexual health and healthy relationships promotion and education.

See also Section 9: Health Services for Young People for additional strategies and recommendations relating to sexual health and young people.

9. Health Services for Young People

Health services in the ACT can often be inaccessible to the whole community, with a shortage of general practitioners and the lowest bulk-billing rates in Australia. Young people face an increased range of barriers to accessing health services, including cost, discrimination, lack of transport options, a general unawareness that services exist, confidentiality concerns and possible stigma. Efforts need to be made to overcome these barriers, and youth services have a crucial role to play.

Youth services play a key role in facilitating access to health services through partnerships and referrals. Those who work with young people are well placed to recognise the needs of young people who experience systemic disadvantage in their access to quality health care, and are often involved in programs and initiatives that aim to rectify this.

The Youth Coalition has been advocating for the development of a *Youth Health Network*, encompassing mental health, alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, comorbidity, sexual health and primary health. The *Youth Health Network* would look at the health needs of young people, examine the coordination of the health system, and find ways to work within the existing system to improve health outcomes for young people. It would build on existing services, such as the Junction Youth Health Service, and would support existing community-based services to access mainstream health services and ensure young people are a key target group in the ACT.

Recommendation 17

That the ACT Government fund a community-based *Youth Health Network* to collaboratively improve access to and health services for young people.

10. Multicultural Young People

Cultural diversity is a proud and prominent feature of Canberra. It was recently estimated that 32 700 people of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds live in Canberra.²²

Over the past decade, there has been a marked increase in the proportion of people aged under 30 years, arriving through Australia's Humanitarian Program,²³ with young people accounting for 38.3% of the ACT's total humanitarian entrants between 2002 and 2007.²⁴ These young people may have been exposed to extreme poverty, conflict and violence in their country of origin, and many will have spent time in transit in other countries or in refugee camps where life is unpredictable, physically difficult and sometimes violent.²⁵

The impact of these experiences, including significant effects on psychological wellbeing, family relationships, and on adapting to a new environment, will continue for young people as they are settling in the ACT. These experiences are further complicated by experiencing similar issues to other young people around housing and homelessness, health, education and employment, lack of recreational opportunities, and family and peer relationships.²⁶

Limited multicultural and settlement services are available in the ACT. Community consultations for the *ACT Multicultural Strategy 2006 - 2009* found that young refugees and newly arrived young people have specific needs and are particularly affected by settlement, and identified the lack of programs to support young people.²⁷

The ACT Government has stated that all migrants should be able to gain access to targeted essential services and programs; and committed to providing the full range of essential settlement services, such as housing, transport, education, work experience programs, counseling and orientation assistance for newly arrived migrants.²⁸

The ACT Government's 2008 election commitments to multicultural young people included:

- Funding a campaign in the multicultural community to reduce community stigma associated with mental health issues experienced by young people;
- Funding a program to assist refugees in our community with living skills;
- Funding a campaign to increase awareness of consumer protection among multicultural youth to reduce exploitation and debt levels;
- Funding an orientation program for multicultural youth to learn about Australia's legal system with an emphasis on road use; and,
- Establishing a program to assist young multicultural women to understand their identity in the context of a cross-cultural environment.²⁹

The allocation of resources to the recommendations below will support the ACT Government to meet these election commitments.

10.1 Specialist Services for Young People

Multicultural Youth Services (MYS) is the only youth specific service in the ACT for refugee, newly arrived and multicultural young people. The service is a specialised organisation with a high degree of organisational knowledge and skill in working with multicultural young people. MYS has been repeatedly recognised for their practice and importance, winning an *ACT Early Intervention Award* (2006), an *ACTCOSS Diversity Award* (2008) and a *Yogie Award for Excellence in Organisational Practice* (2008).

In June 2008, project-based funding for MYS, received through the Community Inclusion Fund, ceased. Consequently, MYS has reduced capacity to operate their drop-in service for multicultural young people. The reduced capacity of this service has resulted in a significant gap in service provision and the loss of support to multicultural young people, whom the ACT Government has stated its strong commitment to and acknowledges as a particularly vulnerable group in our community.³⁰

The Youth Coalition supports the inclusion of provision of support to multicultural young people in Youth Services Program contracts; and believes multicultural young people should have access to a range of supports, including mainstream services. However, we are concerned that these services would require additional funding to be able to build their capacity to work with specific groups of multicultural young people.

Youth Coalition consultations with youth services indicate that they believe a range of services, including mainstream and specialist, should be available to young people. Multicultural young people and their families, as well as mainstream and multicultural services, rely on being able to access, work with and refer to MYS as a specialist service.

The Youth Coalition calls on the ACT Government to provide funding to existing specialist services that work specifically with multicultural young people in the ACT and support mainstream services to work with multicultural young people.

Recommendation 18

That the ACT Government provide funding to Multicultural Youth Services to meet the high demand from multicultural young people requiring support in the ACT.

10.2 Multicultural Youth Affairs Network

Over the 12 months, over 80 cross-sectoral individuals and services in the ACT have been involved in the development of a *Multicultural Youth Affairs Network* to seek to coordinate and connect resources for multicultural young people and their families. The foundational work has included stakeholder identification, a planning day, a stakeholder database, a workplan, two multicultural youth forums, a training day, an event held during Refugee Week 2009, and a newsletter. However, this work cannot continue without allocated resources by the ACT Government.

The *Multicultural Youth Affairs Network* would improve supports for multicultural young people, strengthen multicultural youth services (locally and nationally) and raise the profile of multicultural youth issues in the ACT. Network activities would aim to:

- Connect and coordinate of youth multicultural resources in the ACT;
- Build the capacity of mainstream services to become 'youth multicultural' competent;
- Map services and develop a directory;
- Provide opportunities for collaborations and partnerships;
- Distribute information and resources; and
- Promote training and professional development opportunities.

Recommendation 19

That the ACT Government providing funding for the secretariat and project management support for a *Multicultural Youth Affairs Network* in the ACT

11. Education

Access to education is a right, not a privilege. Education systems need to provide inclusive settings with opportunities for young people to learn and develop in ways that recognise and respond to their diverse strengths, backgrounds, learning styles and individual needs. Education also contributes to social inclusion, skill attainment and economic independence.

The ACT Year 12 or equivalent educational attainment is relatively good compared to other Australian states and territories³¹. However, school students from low socio-economic status homes are at an increased disadvantage in schools; and schools in low socio-economic areas are generally lower performing³². Evidence suggests disadvantaged young people are 10% more likely to either finish school late or drop out and up to 20% less likely to obtain a tertiary entrance rank³³.

There are many reasons why a young person may have difficulties at school, such as poverty, family difficulties, health and social and environmental factors. It is important to support young people, their families and schools to find solutions to these barriers. In its recent submission to the *Inquiry on the Educational Achievement Gap in the ACT*, the Youth Coalition identified a number of specific groups that may need targeted support to reduce the education gap. These include:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people;
- Young people with a refugee background;
- Young carers;
- Young people with disabilities;
- Young people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness;
- Young people in the justice system; and,
- Young people experiencing health concerns.

11.1 Supporting Young People within Schools

The ACT Government has previously highlighted the following factors in acknowledging that existing school structures can generate challenges that contribute to poor educational outcomes:

- Limited number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staffing in schools;
- Limited cultural awareness training and professional development for all staff in schools; and,
- Limited numeracy and literacy support resources.³⁴

The Youth Coalition believes that good practice in education within the ACT can also be developed through the development of holistic and early intervention strategies in student support services and staff within schools.

While referral pathways and schools' capacity to engage with the community sector is important, the Youth Coalition also identifies the need to build the capacity of school welfare team to work with young people in-house, and to identify appropriate points at which to refer. Community services are reporting increased referrals from schools, which is increasing demand placed on services. For more information, refer to Section 5.

Recommendation 20

The ACT Government use existing resources in schools to progress:

- Adequate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education staff in schools; and
- The implementation of appropriate cultural awareness training for all education staff.

Recommendation 21

The ACT Government work towards building the capacity of existing school welfare teams within ACT Government schools, to provide early intervention support to young people.

11.2 Supporting Young People within Alternative Education Settings

It is important to recognise that young people learn in different ways, and should therefore have access to a range of educational options. There are a number of alternative education settings in the ACT that aim to provide young people with a flexible and engaging education environment, that acknowledge the skills, experiences and life challenges of many young people.

The *Numeracy and Literacy Program* has been provided by Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation for a number of years and was developed to meet the needs of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (aged 12 - 18 years) who otherwise would not be able to complete studies successfully at a mainstream schooling institution. This program is delivered two days a week and has funded a teacher to coordinate the delivery, curriculum, integration and organisation of educational services and programs. Funding for this program ceased in June 2008, following the closure of the Community Inclusion Fund.

In its recent submission to the *Inquiry on the Educational Achievement Gap in the ACT*, the Youth Coalition identified that many existing alternative education options for young people have significant waiting lists, highlighting the need for these programs to be adequately resourced.

Recommendation 22

That the ACT Government increase funding for:

- Numeracy and literacy support programs in alternative settings including Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation; and,
- Existing alternative education settings with student waiting lists.

12. Employment

Employment in Australian society has significant cultural and economic importance and as such, young people require access to decent employment in order to achieve individual autonomy, social connection, and a reasonable standard of living.

Unemployment in the ACT during the current economic slow down has remained relatively low compared to the rest of Australia. However, young people in the ACT are more vulnerable than the wider community to experience unemployment or a reduction in working hours. In general young people are at a disproportionate level of the unemployed. Young people comprise approximately 20% of the population, but represent 40% of unemployment.³⁵

The Australian Bureau of Statistics identifies young people as a particularly vulnerable group to downturns in the economic cycle³⁶. A high proportion of young people employed in part-time, temporary or casual employment, and are often inexperienced workers. Many young people may be looking for work for the first time.

12.1 Supported Pathways to Employment for Young People

The Youth Coalition highlights the need for a strong service system to support young people to access employment opportunities and to ensure young people's rights in the workplace.

Youth services have reported limited options for young people at risk of disengaging and young people who are already disengaged from the workforce. Reengaging in employment is important for young people to gain new skills and personal development and because it may provide social inclusion and community participation opportunities. However, young people reengaging in education and employment often require extra support in a number of primary needs areas to enable work readiness³⁷.

The Youth Coalition believes there is an opportunity during the economic slowdown to innovatively invest in education, training and retraining opportunities for young people through the development of education institutions, vocational education and work places. Innovative support may include supporting young people's access to new skills acquisition as well as the support of businesses and work places to engage, train and employ young people.

Recommendation 23

That the ACT Government invests in developing and maintaining supported pathways to employment for young people, through:

- Innovative education, training and retraining opportunities for young people;
- Building the capacity of schools to support young people to develop pathways to employment; and,
- Resourcing youth services to support young people to access and maintain employment.

13. Housing and Homelessness

Appropriate, stable, affordable and safe housing options for young people remain one of the highest priorities for young people in the ACT. Lack of secure housing undermines young people's health, their relationships and their prospects in education and employment. Housing is one of the fundamental of determinants of the wellbeing of young people and should be given extremely high importance in any government policy development.

It is estimated that youth homelessness accounts for nearly 50% of all homelessness in Australia³⁸. Youth homelessness can affect physical and mental health, educational outcomes, access to services, increase the risk of physical and sexual violence, and increase the likelihood of involvement with the justice system.

There is a clear link between homelessness and a series of health issues. Mental health issues, alcohol and other drug dependence, and substance abuse are experienced by a significant group of young people in the homeless population, and often co-occur. Being homeless involves a lifestyle with many health risks. The gaps in drug and alcohol and mental health services for young people particularly affect young people experiencing homelessness, where obtaining stable accommodation is necessary for progress in any longer-term health treatments. Current systems have difficulty in handling young people with high and complex needs and comorbidity³⁹.

13.1 Public Housing for Young People

Young people are continually over-represented in figures highlighting housing stress.⁴⁰ The private rental market in the ACT is the most competitive and difficult to access, with rent rates in the ACT the highest of all the major capital cities.⁴¹ High average incomes for some ACT residents distort figures of affordability, and the disparities are easily overlooked.

The inaccessibility of the private market for young people further highlights the need for a robust public housing sector. Public housing is a key exit point for young people in the supported accommodation system, but long waiting lists lead to difficult transitions. Additionally, young people who may not have traditionally entered the homelessness service system are now doing so because public housing is difficult to access.

Increasing the supply of public housing is therefore both necessary given the demand, and is in the long term best interest of the ACT Government and those living in the ACT.

Recommendation 24

That the ACT Government fulfil its target of 10% public housing stock by 2012, and that capital injections into Housing ACT increase supply.

13.2 Addressing Homelessness for Young People aged 12 – 14

There is an urgent gap in housing options for young people aged 12 – 14 years with 26% of homeless young people in this age group⁴². The Youth Coalition calls for the ACT Government to address this as a matter of urgency.

Youth housing and homelessness programs cannot be accessed by young people under the age of 15, with young people aged 12 – 14 generally falling under the jurisdiction of Care and Protection Services in the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services (DHCS). At present, Care and Protection accommodation services, such as Marlow Cottage, are only available to young people under a Care and Protection Order. Homelessness, or being at-risk of experiencing homelessness, is insufficient grounds for being granted an order.

Currently, DHCS does not have any agreements or partnerships with related agencies or services regarding accommodation for young people in this age group.⁴³ This is in sharp contrast to agencies in other Australian States (with the exception of the Northern Territory), which have formal and non-formal agreements, partnerships and Memoranda of Understanding with Government Departments, agencies, housing providers, community sector services and other important stakeholders.⁴⁴ Notably, South Australia and Victoria are developing coordinated plans aimed at meeting service gaps for young people in this age group.⁴⁵

The Youth Coalition calls for a more coordinated approach to addressing homelessness for young people aged 12 – 14 years.

Recommendation 25

That the ACT Government immediately develop and implement strategies with youth and related services to address homelessness for young people aged 12 - 14 as a matter of urgency.

13.3 Living Skills Training

Young people living independently have few resources available to them for basic information regarding everyday living skills including skills such as basic home maintenance, financial management, information about insurance, healthy eating and nutrition and information regarding tenancy rights and responsibilities.

Living skills are personal skills considered necessary for an individual to function on a day-to-day basis. Living skills training encompass a range of models, methods and toolkits that aim to encourage self-sufficiency through assorted experimental and didactic programming delivered at various times throughout a young person's transition into independence.⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷

In 2008 and 2009, the Youth Coalition undertook a research project to explore the living skills training provided to young people transitioning into independent living from supported youth housing and homelessness services. The project identified a number of recommendations relating to progressing the living skills training provided to young people. In 2009, the *Youth Housing and Homelessness Forum* identified the need to work collaboratively to progress living skills training provided to young people.

Recommendation 26

That the ACT Government provide funding to the *Youth Housing and Homelessness Forum* to progress the recommendations of the Living Skills Project, including resourcing the coordination and provision of living skills training for young people experiencing homelessness.

14. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young People

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures hold a unique and important place in the fabric of the Canberra community and Australian society. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people face systemic disadvantage, discrimination and continue to be affected by actions of the past, including colonization and the stolen generation.

In 2006, it was estimated that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in the ACT was 4,300, with a median age of 21 years.⁴⁸ Given this, policies and programs need to be focused on this unique population structure, and on Indigenous young people and families if any headway is to be made in addressing inequity.

14.1 Increased Funding for Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation

Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation (Gugan Gulwan) has been operating successfully for many years as the only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth centre in the ACT. Gugan Gulwan provides a range of services for young people and their families including support, education, information, referral and advocacy.

Gugan Gulwan has developed a range of effective programs for working with Indigenous young people across the ACT and this has highlighted the importance of Indigenous youth centres in providing culturally appropriate and effective programs for Indigenous young people and their families.

Additional funding could be used by Gugan Gulwan to meet the current gaps they experience, contribute to increased capacity at their Erindale centre, provide Indigenous young people in the north of the ACT with a safe space to speak with youth workers and other professionals and implement early intervention and prevention programs designed to reduce the instances of risk factors in Indigenous young people in the ACT.

Recommendation 27

That the ACT Government increase funding to Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation to meet the high demand from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people requiring support in the ACT.

See also *Section 11: Education* for additional strategies and recommendations relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the ACT.

15. Justice

The Youth Coalition recognises that the ACT Government is committed to assisting children and young people to maximise their potential, within positive and supportive environments, to become valued members of the community by enhancing meaningful opportunities for rehabilitation balanced with community safety.⁴⁹

15.1 Human Rights Framework in Bimberi Youth Justice Centre

258 young people went through the youth justice system in the ACT in 2006-07.⁵⁰ This figure encompasses young people in detention, young people in community supervision and young people in youth justice supervision. Of these, about 80% were aged 10-17 years.⁵¹

Bimberi Youth Justice Centre (Bimberi) is the new youth custodial facility located in Mitchell, replacing the Quamby Youth Detention Centre, and is the first youth custodial facility in Australia to be designed, built and operated under Human Rights legislation.⁵² In light of this, it is important that an evaluation of the framework is under-taken.

Recommendation 28

That the ACT Government implements an evaluation of the Human Rights Framework in Bimberi Youth Justice Centre.

15.2 Early Intervention and Prevention Strategies

A number of social and economic factors may influence a young person to commit a criminal offence, including health, housing, education, social situation, family dynamic or breakdown, peer pressure, mental health and alcohol or other drug issues.

Statistics indicate that living in poverty, being unemployed or living in a disadvantaged area could increase the risk factors that may lead a young person to commit a criminal offence.⁵³ The 'differential association' theory purports that peer group pressure may have a strong link to offending, where offenders learn criminal behaviour from their family and friends.⁵⁴

The Youth Coalition is concerned that government priorities often reflect an emphasis on prosecution rather than early intervention and education. Alternative options for dealing with young people in the legal system, such as diversionary conferencing, should be given more attention and support. Existing evidence supports the need to invest in more early intervention and prevention strategies, and to direct efforts to address social issues impacting on families and young people, such as poverty, mental health and drug and alcohol issues.⁵⁵

Recommendation 29

That the ACT Government develops, supports, resources and evaluates policies and strategies focussed on early intervention and prevention, including justice, situational, community, developmental and educational approaches, in recognition of the goals of affecting positive change in both communities and individuals.

15.3 Throughcare for Young People

Throughcare has been defined as the continuous, co-ordinated and integrated management of offenders from the offender's first point of contact with correctional services to their successful reintegration into the community and completion of their legal order⁵⁶. Internationally, throughcare has existed for many years and is widely recognised as a 'best practice' approach to working with offenders to reduce recidivism and assist community integration.⁵⁷

Without successful implementation, policies are merely statements of intent.⁵⁸ In other words, unless the appropriate government agencies – namely custodial and community corrections - have undertaken the process of converting throughcare into reality, then these policies have neither substance, nor significance.⁵⁹ And unless there are evaluations of implementation it is impossible to know whether the policies are working.⁶⁰

Recommendation 30

That the ACT Government develops, implements and evaluates policies and strategies that ensure throughcare is an integral component of both Bimberi Youth Justice Centre and the Alexander Machonochie Centre.

15.4 Transitional Support for Young People Exiting Detention

Appropriate transitional support for young people exiting juvenile detention facilities is required if the possibilities of re-offending are to be reduced. The Youth Coalition remains concerned by the identified gap in post release options available to young people exiting Bimberi. Young people exiting Bimberi need to be identified by government as a specific target group for support.

It is imperative that young people being released from Bimberi have pre-planned exits from detention and services responsible for and accountable to supporting them upon their release. This planning should include strategies aiming to establish relationships with services prior to release, identify clear handover and follow up, accountability, and engage and support families where appropriate.

Given the over-representation of young people who have left detention in homelessness statistics,⁶¹ particular attention in the development of these programs needs to be paid to securing safe and stable housing options. It is also important to ensure there are support mechanisms in place to assist young people to live independently.

Recommendation 31

That the ACT Government develop, support and evaluate strategies with the youth and community sector to ensure the implementation of individual, planned and supported exits for young people exiting detention, including planning for supported accommodation, living skills training and employment and skills training.

15.5 Alexander Maconochie Centre

The Youth Coalition commends the ACT Government for the development of the 2008/09 \$10 million initiative for the development of new programs for detainees at

the Alexander Machonochie Centre, and strongly supports the development of comprehensive exit plans for prisoners exiting detention. This includes planning for supported accommodation, living skills training and employment and skills training. The Youth Coalition commends the ACT Government for the development of this initiative, and strongly supports the development of comprehensive exit plans for prisoners exiting detention. It is important that these initiatives include specific and targeted initiatives for young people aged 18 – 25 years.

Recommendation 32

That the ACT Government ensures programs for detainees in the Alexander Maconochie Centre include specific and targeted initiatives for young people aged 18– 25 years.

16. Disability

'Disabilities' refers to a broad range of circumstances in which someone has any limitation, restriction or impairment, which has lasted, or is likely to last, for at least six months and restricts everyday activities. The occurrence of disabilities in young people is high with almost 10% of young people experiencing a disability.⁶²

Young people with disabilities face significant barriers to accessing services, programs and opportunities available for other young people without disabilities. This can occur for a range of reasons that may include inadequate or inappropriate buildings and infrastructure, financial cost, discrimination or a general lack of support and belief in young people with disabilities. Young people with disabilities can easily become socially isolated, particularly in times of transition where opportunities, particularly those post-secondary, can be scarce and lead young people to become disengaged from social, recreational, educational and work-life interactions.

The Youth Coalition believes that it is the responsibility of society – through Government and the community sector –to work towards removing many of these barriers. Equitable access for young people with disabilities requires not only financial commitments towards upgrading infrastructure and providing additional support, but also requires a community willingness and capacity to be inclusive and a mind set that seeks to engage young people with disabilities. Public transport is a considerable barrier to young people with disabilities being able to access services. Transport is a key determinant of the capacity for young people with disabilities to participate in a range of social, educational and work related opportunities there must be safe, reliable, regular and affordable transport for those with disabilities.

The Youth Coalition commends the ACT Government on the development of the disability framework 2009 – 2014. The Youth Coalition is pleased that the Act Government has committed to producing an updated demographic profile of the needs of people with disability in the region. It is vital that young people with disability are identified as a key stakeholder in this profile. The Youth Coalition highlights the following commitments in the framework as priorities:

- Demographic and service mapping
- Focus on transitions - Service providers have highlighted the absence of meaningful employment and education choices and even fewer supports through key transitions for young people with a disability (Youth Coalition of the ACT 2009 The Youth Coalition Disability Framework Consultation)
- Meaningful choices
- Capacity of employers, workers and community organisations to support YPD
- Transport and inclusion

Recommendation 33

That young people with disability are identified as key stakeholders in the implementation of the ACT Disability Framework 2009 – 2014 and that all strategies are resourced and have separate actions for young people with disability.

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