

The Youth Coalition recognises the family as a vital part of many young people's lives. From emotional support to economic support, families are integral in the lives of the vast majority of young people contributing to their sense of belonging and identity. The Youth Coalition also recognises that families differ in structure and that the key element of all families is that they involve two or more people who consider their relationship to be one of a family. Families also face a range of stresses, particularly economic, that can put pressure on families that can be unsustainable and that families should be supported through early intervention and prevention programs before families reach a crisis point.

Family structures differ and the Youth Coalition recognises the fundamental value of families through the existence and expression of supportive and committed relationships, in accordance with Article 23 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The Youth Coalition also recognises that almost 13% of young people in the ACT live in single parent families.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the Youth Coalition recognises that some families are headed by same sex couples, foster parents and young people themselves, all of which are valuable family environments when bound by supportive and committed relationships.

The Youth Coalition also notes that 10% of young people live as couples in private dwellings and that these young people are unevenly distributed across Canberra with Gungahlin having three times the rate of young couples than the Canberra average.<sup>2</sup> The Youth Coalition recognises the current and future needs of these young people, particularly when they begin to develop their own families, to ensure that they have an adequate level of service provision that is accessible.

Families can be the subject of a range of pressures that result from unavoidable circumstances such as illness and unemployment as well as by structural issues such as inadequate income support and social isolation. The Youth Coalition recognises that Article 18 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child specifies that parents should receive appropriate assistance in raising children, including child care, and that they be given adequate levels of support through programs and services that ease the burden on families in times of need. Such services should revolve around family centred practises that offer individual support to each member of the family.

Young people are often dependent on their families for economic, emotional and social support. This is a result of a range of factors such as young people engaging in study, unemployment, underemployment, inadequate income support payments and youth wages. The Youth Coalition also recognises the role that young people play in supporting families as carers for parents or siblings and stresses the need for support services to target both parents and young people who need support to continue their role as carers.

<sup>1</sup> ACT Government (2002), *Youth in the ACT*, p 80

<sup>2</sup> ACT Government (2002), *Youth in the ACT*, p 79

While fertility rates in the ACT have been decreasing, almost 15% of births are to parents under the age of 24.<sup>3</sup> The Youth Coalition recognises that young parents have different needs to those of other age groups, for example many may be studying, and thus need to be supported with appropriate services and programs. The Youth Coalition is also concerned that many young parents face disadvantage through early school leaving, having no or low qualifications, unemployment or low paid work, living in poor housing, experiencing depression and social isolation and being dependent on income support.<sup>4</sup> The Youth Coalition therefore recognises some young parents' need to be given adequate support in order to be able to best fulfil their role as parents.

### **The Youth Coalition is committed to:**

- ◆ Advocating for families to have access to mediation and early intervention services that support and strengthen the family through difficult phases and assist in avoiding family breakdowns.
- ◆ Advocating for the recognition of same-sex couples as legitimate family units that provide children with the same level of care as heterosexual families.
- ◆ Advocating for programs and services specifically focused on young parents that aim to support them in staying engaged in study and training during pregnancy and after birth, including affordable and accessible child care.
- ◆ Advocating for support for families, to relieve pressures they experience, through early intervention and prevention programs.
- ◆ Advocating for mainstream services and programs to be inclusive, supportive and non-judgemental towards young parents.
- ◆ Advocating for young parents to become a priority for mainstream services as young parents often fall through gaps in service delivery.
- ◆ Combating negative stereotypes about non-traditional family types including young parents and same sex couples.

<sup>3</sup> ACT Health (2006), *ACT Chief Health Officer's Report 2006*, p168

<sup>4</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2003), *Australia's Young People: Their Health and Wellbeing*