

The Youth Coalition believes that in accordance with Article 13 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), accessible, affordable and high quality education is a right to be enjoyed by all members of Australian society. Education should foster respect for young people's own cultural identity, language and values, and for the cultural background and values of others. The Youth Coalition believes that education has an intrinsic value and is not just a process that prepares young people for the labour market. Further, the Youth Coalition believes that schools are an important community for both students and their families.

Young people's access to schools significantly impacts on their lives and the lives of their families. The Youth Coalition believes that students should not be required to travel unreasonable distances to access education as unreasonable travel distances affects the ability of students to be engaged in both extra curricular activities and with their neighbourhood communities and places an unnecessary burden on parents and carers to ensure safe and efficient transport to and from schools.

Research demonstrates that school communities have the potential to expose young people to a range of risk factors, including bullying, the stigmatisation of disability, illness, alcohol or other drug use and mental illness and exclusion through not being listened to, believed or treated with respect.¹ The Youth Coalition is particularly concerned with incidences of bullying against young carers, young parents, same sex attracted young people and young people in families affected by mental illness, alcohol and other drugs, disability and homelessness. The Youth Coalition supports strategies by schools aimed at reducing risk factors and promoting protective factors and building resilience in young people. The role for student support services in schools and other educational facilities is vital in ensuring students' experiences of education occur in safe, happy, healthy and supportive environments and enable them to develop resilience.

Similarly, the Youth Coalition recognises the value and importance of partnerships between schools and the wider community in exposing students to a wide variety of experiences and support networks. This aids in the development of life skills that schools must teach to enable students to successfully engage with the wider society. Thus, the youth sector plays an integral part in the broader school community and has expertise and skills that are invaluable in the school setting. These services must, therefore, be adequately recognised and funded for the innovative work they do and the invaluable supports they provide to students and staff in schools.

¹ Youth Coalition of the ACT (2004) *Telling it How it is: Listening to Young People about Youth Homelessness in the ACT and the Services that Support them* p7

It is important to recognise that young people learn in different ways, and should therefore have access to a range of educational options. Flexible delivery education programs, based outside of the school environment, are essential for those young people whose circumstances are not conducive to mainstream education. These services should be provided through government and non-government schools and alternative education facilities acting in cooperative partnerships. The Youth Coalition believes that alternative education options should be made available to all young people on the basis of their informed choice, and not limited for use as a behaviour management strategy. Young people who are accessing community based alternative education settings should also have opportunities equal to those in mainstream settings.

The United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (CROC) requires that education includes the development of respect for the child's parents, cultural identity, language, values, cultures other than their own and the broader social beliefs and attitudes of Australia. The Youth Coalition believes that schools have an important role to play in enshrining positive values such as inclusion and tolerance in addition to other skills necessary for young people's full participation in society such as civics education. Similarly, education should incorporate indigenous teaching of local history and culture.

The Youth Coalition is committed to:

- ◆ Advocating for the building of inclusive, safe and supportive school communities
 - ◆ Advocating for the building of inter-school linkages and community involvement in the educational experience of young people.
 - ◆ Advocating for the development of relevant curriculum that provides young people with a broad range of skills, including life skills foster flexibility and broader options for employment or further studies.
 - ◆ Advocating for the creation of options within the education system to fulfil the needs of different groups of young people, including through the delivery of flexible learning programs for those who wish to attend school part-time or to return to an educational environment after time away.
 - ◆ Advocating for programs currently being funded for mainstream education to be extended to alternative education providers.
 - ◆ Advocating for the provision of education about living and social skills – including sexuality and family planning, drug and alcohol harm minimisation and mental wellbeing, acknowledging the role that schools play in the social, physical and emotional development of students.
 - ◆ Advocating for the involvement of students, families and care-givers in the development of curriculum, goals and direction of school communities.
 - ◆ Advocating for student participatory mechanisms to meaningfully involve students.
 - ◆ Ensuring that school environments celebrate diversity and positive, healthy social interaction, and that they adopt inclusive structures to counteract all forms of discrimination.
 - ◆ Supporting partnerships, mutual understanding and respectful interaction between school and community based agencies.
 - ◆ A national policy for free education for all undergraduate courses in all universities, TAFE and CIT institutions.
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