

The Employment in Australian society has significant cultural and economic importance and as such, young people require access to satisfying employment in order to achieve individual autonomy, social connection, and a reasonable standard of living. This becomes even more important when considering evidence that suggests strong associations between young people's employment and mental and physical health outcomes.

The Youth Coalition is highly concerned about the impact that the Work Choices legislation will have on young people in the ACT and fear that young people will be some of the most significantly disadvantaged by this legislation. As many young people, particularly those between 15 and 18, are likely to be getting jobs for the first time, young people have limited experience in bargaining and industrial relations issues. This is illustrated by research suggesting that over 40% of 15-24 year olds do not know their applicable minimum wage¹ and that almost 30% of 12-16 year olds were paid \$4 or less an hour.² In order for young people to be able to operate successfully in the workforce, it is therefore essential that they possess adequate skills and knowledge regarding employment. The changes in the industrial relations system, with moves away from awards and towards more Australian Workplace Agreements, also poses many threats to young people's employment rights. With fewer safety nets in place and a stronger focus on bargaining and negotiations between individual young people and employers, the Youth Coalition is highly concerned that young people may be exploited in the workplace.

Young people are also likely to work in employment with environments that are detrimental to the wellbeing, even though this is specifically prohibited under Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CROC). Over 40% of young people sustain some type of injury at work of which 60% comprises of open wounds, burns and sprains and strains.³ Yet, 66% of 15-19 year olds who had been injured said that they did not report their injuries and just 14% said that they submitted a workers compensation form.⁴ Similarly, 42% of 12-16 year olds report to have been verbally harassed at work and 22% report to have been physically harassed at work.⁵ There is a need for young people to be adequately trained in occupational health and safety matters in their workplaces to ensure their safety and the safety of others. Young people are a vulnerable group within the workforce who are highly likely to be the subject of injuries and harassment but unlikely to report these problems for fear of losing their employment.

¹ Job Watch (2004) *Fast Food Industry: A Research Study of the Experiences and Problems of Young Workers* <http://www.jobwatch.org.au/jwinfo/fastfoodreport.pdf> (Accessed 10 February 2007)

² NSW Commission for Children and Young People (2005) *Children at Work*

³ Ibid

⁴ SA Unions (2005) *Dirt Cheap and Disposable*

⁵ NSW Commission for Children and Young People *Op Cit*

The Youth Coalition believes that the system of youth wages (also known as junior wages) is discriminatory and an injustice for young people and that this is direct contradiction to the principals set out in Article 7 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and Article 23 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) that equal work should be compensated with equal remuneration. The Youth Coalition believes it is false to suggest that all those who receive youth wages are just using this money for pocket money or for non-essential needs. Many young people live independently and work to support themselves, without any parental support. Therefore, their wages from employment are essential to their ability to support themselves.

There is also an unacceptably high number of young people who are unable to gain adequate employment. While the 12% of young people aged 15-19 unemployed is better than national average of 15.2%,⁶ it is still unacceptably high and the Youth Coalition believes that more must be done by all levels of government to address this problem. Unemployment leads to poor health with 65% of young unemployed males and 80% young unemployed females having only fair/poor health and serious chronic illness at 62% for males and 35% for females.⁷ Further, the figure of young people who are unemployed fails to account for many young people who are underemployed, working just a few hours a week. These young people also face serious disadvantage yet are often overlooked or ignored in statistics due to their employment, even though it may be completely inadequate.

The Youth Coalition is committed to:

- ◆ Advocating for all income support payments to meet people's basic level of need through a cost of living benchmark
- ◆ Advocating for the abolition of payment withdrawal for non-compliance.
- ◆ Advocating for increased education and support mechanisms for young people to appeal Centrelink decisions.
- ◆ Advocating for the removal of all aged-based criteria for payments and making young people's circumstance the most importance criteria for assessments of eligibility.
- ◆ Advocating for the reduction of activity tests and identification requirements for young people, particularly those who are homeless
- ◆ Advocating for the removal of parental means testing for homeless young people attempting to access Youth Allowance
- ◆ Advocating for more targeted information on payments to young people who who have statistically low uptake levels, such as young carers.

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2003) *Australian Capital Territory Statistical Indicators* (Cat. No. 1367.8)

⁷ National Health Survey 1989-90