

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.<sup>1</sup> The occurrence of disabilities in young people is high with almost 10% of young people experiencing a disability.

Opportunities that young people with disabilities are presented with should always aim to build upon young people's strengths and the young people themselves should meaningfully participate in all decisions that affect them. The Youth Coalition believes that all possible efforts should be made to ensure that these young people are afforded adequate support and equitable access to programs, services and opportunities that, in accordance with Article 22 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child, allows them to have a "full and decent life". The Youth Coalition also recognises that young people with disabilities are confronted with high levels of stigma and discrimination that can lead to their exclusion and social isolation.

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. 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.

Disability covers a wide spectrum of circumstances that require differing levels of care and support, as a result it is difficult to generalise about disabilities. However, evidence suggests that young people with disabilities have greatly improved life experiences when involved in the general community in supportive and inclusive ways. Partnerships and collaborations that seek to engage young people with and without disabilities can be highly successful and result in very positive experiences for young people. This is the case not only for social and recreational activities, but also in the fields of education and employment. However, all attempts for involvement must be accompanied by appropriate levels of resourcing that allows for this to occur in supportive ways. The youth sector presents many opportunities and examples of good practice for the involvement of both young people with and without disabilities.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2004), *Disability Ageing and Carers Australia 4430.0*

The impact of having a disability can often mean that young people face considerable discrimination in a range of areas. Young people with disabilities in employment can be exploited and undervalued in the workplace. The Youth Coalition believes that young people should not be stereotyped as being 'able' or 'unable' to perform various tasks on face value and all assessments of young people's abilities should be based on their actual ability.

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 the opportunities for young people with disabilities post-secondary education must be examined with a view to filling many gaps that currently exist in post-secondary options. As young people's disabilities are unique, the Youth Coalition believes that services should be provided across the spectrum of need which young people have.

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

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- ◆ The elimination of all forms of discrimination against young people with disabilities.
  - ◆ The reduction of stigma and stereotyping facing those with disabilities.
  - ◆ Advocating for young people with disabilities to be meaningfully involved in all decisions that affect their life, particularly through case planning.
  - ◆ Advocating for the provision of adequate respite programs and services for young people with disabilities and their families across the ACT.
  - ◆ Advocating for young people with disabilities to have access to affordable and high quality personal care options that are necessary for them to be independent and participate fully in their communities.
  - ◆ Advocating for young people with a disability to be adequately supported through the income support system.
  - ◆ Advocating for more a more holistic provision of programs and services for young people with disabilities in the ACT, particularly in regards to post-secondary options.
  - ◆ Advocating for the elimination of all barriers to participation that face young people with disabilities.
  - ◆ Advocating for ACTION to continue to acquire accessible buses and the upgrading of related infrastructure including bus shelters.
  - ◆ Advocating for the ACT to increase the number of young people they employ with disabilities.
  - ◆ Advocating for ACT Housing to consider individual circumstances when considering applicant's housing needs and the appropriateness of allocated housing.
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