

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.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's self determination has been forcibly denied and this continues to affect many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. As a process of choice to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are able to meet their social, cultural, spiritual, political and economic goals, self-determination is critical for the full and effective participation of Indigenous peoples in Australian society. Similarly, the loss of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' right to live according to a set of cultural values and beliefs, and to have that right respected by others, is at the heart of the disadvantage they currently experience. Without self-determination it is not possible for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to fully overcome the legacy of colonisation and dispossession.¹

Reconciliation is based on Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canberrans coming to an honest understanding of our shared history, a commitment to building cooperative partnerships based on trust and respect and recognition of the distinctive rights of Indigenous peoples. In order to move forward as a nation and as a territory we must recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the most disadvantaged of all Australians - there are clear disparities across all indicators of quality of life between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.² From here, we must be committed to repairing damage of the past and working together in the future.

We must also recognise the effects of past and contemporary separations of Indigenous children and young people from their families. Between 1910 and 1970 it is estimated that between one in three and one in ten Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families.³ Contemporarily, the ACT Care and Protection System has been found to systematically neglect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.⁴ Indigenous young people can sometimes represent up to half the children and young people in the Quamby Youth Detention Centre⁵ despite representing only 1.4% of the population of the Canberra's young people.⁶ As such, we have a responsibility as a territory to address these issues.

¹ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (2003) *Social Justice Information Sheet* p1

² Journey of Healing ACT (2002) *Are We There Yet? Bringing Them Home in the ACT*.

³ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (1996) *Brining Them Home: A National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* p31

⁴ Gwenn Murray (2004) *The Territory's Children Ensuring Safety and Quality Care for Children and Young People; Report on the Audit and Case Review*. pg. vi

⁵ need to find this citation

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001) *2001 Census Community Profile Series : Australian Capital Territory: Indigenous Profile*

Young people account for almost 40% of Canberra's Indigenous population⁷. Policies and programs need to be focused on this unique population structure, and need to be focused on Indigenous young people and include families if they are to make any headway in addressing inequality.

There are several key documents that provide us with guidance on ways forward, these include:

- *Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (1991)
- *Bringing them Home: The National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* (1997)
- *Are We Bringing Them home? Journey of Healing ACT Community Progress Reports* (1999 – 2002)
- *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (1991)
- *Social Justice Reports* (1993 – 2005)
- *Native Title Reports* (1994 – 2005)

It is the responsibility of all members of the community, including government, non-government services, the youth sector and individuals, to acknowledge responsibility and to take action on these recommendations in all aspects of our work and life.

The Youth Coalition is committed to:

- ◆ Advocating for the full implementation of the recommendations from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and Bringing Them Home Report.
- ◆ Advocating for the establishment of Indigenous specific action plans at the inter-governmental and departmental level in each area of responsibility (eg health, education, housing etc)
- ◆ Develop a Youth Coalition of the ACT Reconciliation Statement
- ◆ Promoting the Reconciliation Checklist development by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and the Youth Coalition.

⁷ ACT Government (2004) *A Social and Cultural Profile of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in Canberra*.