

The vast majority of young people in the ACT are active and engaged members of their communities and as such, the Youth Coalition supports the lowering of the voting age in recognition of young people's engagement in matters affecting their communities. The Youth Coalition also highlights Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CROC) on participation and article 21 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights which states that "everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives". The right to vote is therefore a fundamental right that should be accorded to young people as members of society.

The Youth Coalition believes that young people have a right to be involved in decisions that affect their lives and that this applies to being involved in the selection of their representatives to the ACT Legislative Assembly and the Australian Parliament. A large body research indicates that young people are competent in making complex decisions, for example Mann et al.¹ Decision making ability, while not the sole factor, has an important role in voting and is one of the key considerations for any decision to change voting eligibility. As evidence demonstrates that young people have this ability, many attempts to discredit young people's ability to vote are based on stereotyping and generalisations of a small minority which are represent in all age groups currently accorded voting rights.

As a great number of young people, particularly from the age of 16, have the ability to make decisions, the Youth Coalition believes that the only remaining forces which could constrain young people's ability to vote are related to their knowledge of electoral issues and systems and their willingness to vote. These responsibilities lie with society and specifically with the government and education systems in Australia. The Youth Coalition is concerned that there is not an adequate curriculum of civics and citizenship education in schools, leading to some young people reporting that they do not believe they know a sufficient amount of information to engage with the electoral system. The education of civics and citizenship needs to be significantly altered to engage young people and to facilitate the learning about civics and citizenship in Australian society. The Youth Coalition also notes that investment in civics and citizenship is important for both the present and in the future as informed and passionate citizens are vital to democracy.

Young people engage in a range of ways that enhance their understanding of democracy that do not involve voting and structured and formalised programs. These programs are valuable and should be encouraged, however, the Youth Coalition notes that many programs classified as 'politics', 'leadership' or 'debating' based often fail to engage many young people who often feel excluded from these programs for a variety of reasons.

¹ Leon Mann *et al* (1989), 'Adolescent Decision Making: The Development on Competence' *Journal Of Adolescence* 12 pp265-278

The Youth Coalition believes that more work is required to develop programs which fully engage young people in order to give them an opportunity to both express their views on a range of issues and also to continue to develop their understanding of current affairs. The Youth Coalition recommends that more resources are invested in developing a diverse and inclusive range of mechanisms for young people to participate in extra-curricular activities which increase their understanding and passion for current issues.

The Youth Coalition is committed to:

- ◆ Advocating for the voting age to be reduced to at least 16 years of age.
- ◆ Advocating for increased funding of youth participation mechanisms in the ACT, particularly those which engage marginalised young people.
- ◆ Advocating for significant reform in the school curriculum in order to facilitate young people's education of civics and citizenship matters in addition to increasing the focus of critical thinking, particularly on current affairs.
- ◆ Advocating for voting enrolment processes to be made as accessible as possible for young people and resources dedicated to ensuring young people are enrolled to vote.