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Acknowledgement of Country

The ACT Youth Advisory Council acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the Canberra region and that the region is also an important meeting place and significant to other Aboriginal groups.

The ACT Youth Advisory Council respects the continuing culture, and the contribution that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples make to the life of this city and surrounding region.



Introduction

The ACT Government is committed to youth engagement and participation.

The Youth InterACT Strategy (the Strategy) provides a platform to encourage young people from a range of backgrounds and experiences to have their say about the issues that affect them in Canberra. The Strategy engages young people through:

- ACT Youth Week;
- grants;
- scholarships;
- the ACT Youth Advisory Council (the Council); and
- recognising the outstanding contributions that young people add to our community through the Young Canberra Citizen of the Year Awards.

On 25 June 2021, the ACT Government partnered with the Council to host the ACT Youth Assembly where young people aged 12-25 were encouraged to participate in discussions about four key topics:

- Inclusive Society;
- Environment and Sustainability;
- Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships and
- Youth Employment.

This Report is written by young people for young people and highlights the key information from the day, including recommendations made by the young Canberrans who attended the 2021 ACT Youth Assembly.

Council members acknowledge “people-first” language emphasises putting the person first and the disability second: for example, saying a person with a spinal cord injury, or a person with a history of depression.

Many participants at the 2021 ACT Youth Assembly who identified as having a disability, including members of the Council, said their disability is not outside of them: they are not a ‘person with a disability’. Rather they are a ‘disabled person’, someone who is disabled by a world that is not equipped to support them to fully participate.



The Council is listening and taking their cue from the 2021 ACT Youth Assembly participants and Council members who are disabled.

For this reason, Council members have chosen to use 'disabled person' rather than a 'person with a disability', because they feel it is empowering and that 'person with a disability' implies the disability can (or should) be separated from the person.



Left to right: Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Ms Yvette Berry MLA, Ms Varshini Viswanath and Master Harry Labouchardiere



ACT Youth Advisory Council

The Council provides young people aged between 12 and 25 years with an opportunity to take a leading role in:

- participation and consultation activities on issues that affect their lives;
- raise awareness of the aspirations, needs, and concerns of young people within government and the community; and
- facilitate interaction between young people, the ACT Government, and the wider community.

The Council provides advice on youth issues to the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Ms Yvette Berry MLA, giving young people a voice in the ACT Government.

The Council is made up of up to 15 members who are all young people aged between 12 and 25 years (inclusive) at the time of their appointment. Membership of the Council reflects the diversity of young people residing in the ACT, including a gender balance, disabilities, and representation from Indigenous and culturally linguistically and diverse backgrounds.

The term of appointment to the Council is up to two years.

Council members conduct several consultation processes including think tanks, open meetings, face-to-face consultations, and youth surveys.

Council members also participate in other committees, working parties, taskforces, and other ACT Government agencies.



ACT Youth Advisory Council members



2021 ACT Youth Assembly

On 25 June 2021, the 2021 ACT Youth Assembly (the Assembly) was held at the Marie Reay Teaching Centre (Building 155), the Australian National University. The Assembly is a deliberative democracy process to draw out key ideas, policy recommendations, and encourage direct participation of young Canberrans aged 12 to 25 years to have their voices heard in a full-day forum on the four contemporary issues that are important to them:

- **Inclusive Society**: this forum aimed to explore safety, discrimination, culture, and identity for young Canberrans. The forum facilitators collaborated with young people about factors that impact social interactions, their experiences, and their understanding of what makes an inclusive community.
- **Resilience, Rights, and Respectful Relationships**: this forum aimed to explore ideas around resilience, rights, and respectful relationships for all young Canberrans and the issues surrounding these concepts. The forum also aimed to explore what effective respectful relationship programs look like for young people.
- **Youth Employment**: this forum aimed to improve, promote, and advocate for fair and respectful employment opportunities and conditions for young workers in the ACT. This forum aimed to identify key issues that affect young people when looking for, or during employment, and establish effective strategies and avenues young people can utilise when facing any of these issues.
- **Environment and Sustainability**: this forum aimed to address the question of how young people can be active citizens in schools and in their community, to contribute to a safer, cleaner environment. The Council worked with young people to provide recommendations on better management of food waste, recycling, innovative transport options, and sustainable schools.

One hundred and nine young people attended the Assembly. The Assembly provided young people from diverse ages and experiences a platform to speak on issues that are important to them and have their views and opinions heard.

Council members Co-facilitated each Forum to explore creative solutions through group work and discussions. Council members were mentored with subject matter experts:

- Ms Jodie Griffiths-Cook, Public Advocate and Children and Young People Commissioner (Inclusive Society);
- Dr Sheridan Kerr, Senior Director, Organisational Development and Quality Improvement, Sexual Health and Family Planning (Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships);
- Dr Justin Barker, Executive Director, ACT Youth Coalition and Ms. Grace Flanagan, NSW/ACT Political Organiser, United Workers Union (Youth Employment); and
- Ms Hannah Ford, Project Officer, Sea Change (Environment and Sustainability).



Young people selected the Forum they wanted to contribute their thoughts and advocate for themselves through a series of interactive sessions.

After morning tea, young people broke into their Forum groups to explore the key issues and develop recommendations to present back in the session after lunch.

In the session after lunch, each Forum group presented their recommendations to the young people who attended the Assembly.

The final session was a Q and A Panel, which provided the opportunity for young people to ask questions of Panel members: Ms Jodie Griffiths-Cook, Dr Justin Barker, Dr Sheridan Kerr, and Ms Hannah Ford.



Left to right: Ms Jodie Griffiths-Cook, Dr Justin Barker, Dr Sheridan Kerr, and Ms Hannah Ford



Recommendations

Participants at the 2021 ACT Youth Assembly identified 18 recommendations for the ACT Government to consider.

Five recommendations were identified in the **Inclusive Society Forum**. All recommendations are to be co-designed with young people to ensure their effectiveness. The recommendations are listed below:

Recommendation One: The ACT Government to develop, fund, and implement an awareness campaign that calls out discrimination and provides young people with information on how and where to access support.

Recommendation Two: Young people are aware of school policies that aim to make their schools inclusive, however, they often felt the policies were ineffective and at times tokenistic, as bullying and harassment of young people continues in many school environments.

The ACT Government to review their current policies, programs, and spaces in school settings to ensure that school environments are inclusive to the diverse needs of all young people (young disabled people; young people who identify as part of the LGBTIQ+ community; young people from different cultural and religious backgrounds and young people from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background) in our community to ensure that they can actively participate in the school community.

Recommendation Three: The ACT Government to design, develop and implement a consistent an age-appropriate school-based diversity program that addresses, raises awareness, and explores:

- discrimination in all its forms;
- the difference between racism and discrimination;
- concepts of bias and unconscious bias;
- the impacts of discrimination and racism for individuals, groups and the ACT community more broadly; and
- understanding and accepting the different forms of diversity.

Recommendation Four: Young people expressed creating safe, welcoming, and accessible spaces in a range of settings in the ACT that must meet the diverse needs of young people (young disabled people; young people who identify as part of the LGBTIQ+ community; young people from different cultural and religious background and young people from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background) in our community.

The ACT Government should actively seek input from young people when designing public spaces, to ensure they are welcoming, safe, secure, and connected to the surrounding community and infrastructure including public transport.



Recommendation Five: The ACT Government to further strengthen school settings so they are welcoming, inclusive, safe, and culturally appropriate by:

- building cultural competency in our schools;
- identify an appropriately trained teacher and/or co-ordinator to support the full inclusion of all students and provide ongoing professional development for teachers and school staff;
- create a whole-school approach to inclusion through establishing a school culture that celebrates diversity in all aspects of school life;
- facilitate positive peer relationships and actively teach staff and students how to be more inclusive; and
- school facilities to also provide unisex change rooms and toilets; safe and welcoming spaces; and pray rooms.

Four recommendations were identified in the **Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships Forum**. All recommendations, are to be co-designed alongside young people to ensure that these are positive and interactive which are listed below:

Recommendation One: Ensure that every school year starting from early childhood includes mandatory units of works about inclusive and diverse respectful relationship, consent, and sexual education. This ensures that students are empowered by their increased education on these concepts.

Recommendation Two: All teachers from all sectors are to be given mandatory professional training in delivering inclusive and comprehensive sex and relationship education.

Recommendation Three: Create an interactive and accessible virtual hub that provides reliable and consistent information for parents, students, teachers, and the wider community. It is created and maintained with input from all stakeholders.

Recommendation Four: Develop a community awareness campaign under the banner of the *Consent Capital* to promote sexual and respectful relationship education that involves active participation from community groups.





Five recommendations were identified in the Youth Employment Forum. All recommendations are to be co-designed with young people to ensure their effectiveness. This includes planning for, and providing, sufficient time and resourcing to effectively and meaningfully engage with a diversity of young disabled people and non-disabled people throughout design processes. The recommendations are listed below:

Recommendation One: The ACT Government should criminalise wage theft, imposing individual liability on employers that choose to partake in wage theft and imposing the appropriate fines. Such that they would deter from future defaulting. In the current situation the fines are not large enough and create repeat offenders. Hence criminalising is key.

Recommendation Two: The ACT Government should provide additional funding to the Young Workers Centre to deliver their Rights at Work Schools Program in each ACT High School at least every two years to ensure young people are equally and adequately educated on their employment rights. This includes specific education on the employment of young disabled people.

Recommendation Three: The ACT Government should provide monetary discounts or other incentives for businesses that employ more young people and young disabled people into part and full-time positions. The incentives for employing young disabled people should also include requirements relating to compulsory disability awareness training, and the inclusion of disability rights, obligations, reasonable adjustments and accessibility in orientation or induction. The ACT Human Rights Commission should be empowered to monitor and investigate claims for incentives.

Recommendation Four: Disability education and awareness training be compulsory for all employers and staff and be included in the staff handbook training. This training should be done by disabled people and cover rights of employees with disability, requesting reasonable adjustments, obligations and disclosing disability. This training should also cover disability issues, awareness, accessibility, and the diversity of the disabled experience.

Recommendation Five: The Discrimination Act be amended to include a positive duty to eliminate discrimination. This significant reform would take the onus off young disabled people, and instead places the responsibility on workplaces to take proactive action to improve accessibility and inclusion for workers with disability. This change encourages systemic and preventative change. The ACT Human Rights Commission should be empowered with a range of regulatory tools to monitor, investigate, and enforce the positive duty. The positive duty should apply to public authorities immediately and should apply to private bodies and community organisations after a period of three years.



Four recommendations were identified in the **Environment and Sustainability Forum**, which are listed below.

Recommendation One: The ACT Government to reform school bus routes, timetables and services to encourage and facilitate sustainable transport by:

- reinstating a dedicated school buses in the ACT, servicing all ACT primary schools, high-schools, and colleges;
- revise and implement the ACT School Student Transport Scheme;
- Review and update the Transport Canberra website to be more accessible and included information to find sustainable transport options
- Implement systems to train bus drivers to have awareness of the vulnerability of their passengers and how they can support best them.

Recommendation Two: The ACT Government to require each registered food business in the ACT to enter a Food Waste Minimisation Plan. This should be a three-way agreement between the ACT Government, the business or organisation, and a nominated food charity, detailing how the business or organisation will manage and minimise their food waste.

Recommendation Three: The ACT Government to create a set of guidelines outlining food that is or cannot be donated to charity. This should recommend, based on the condition of the produce, if it can be donated to a charity, and help reduce the amount of produce needed to be rejected by charities.

Recommendation Four: The ACT Government implement composting facilities available for food businesses who wish to manage spoiled food that cannot be donated.





Inclusive Society Forum

Canberra is a diverse region with a strong youth influence.

Young people in our community believe that having a city that is conducive to creating and fostering inclusivity, is important to effective participation across all aspects of your life, so everyone has equal opportunities and feels safe and welcome in our community.

This forum explored safety, discrimination, culture, and identity for young Canberrans. Participants discussed and explored the impacts of social interactions, their experiences, and their understanding of what makes an inclusive community.

This forum was co-facilitated by two Youth Advisory Council Members: Ms Dhani Gilbert, Ms Haneen Yahya Al-Asfi and Ms Jodie Griffiths-Cook, the Children and Young People Commissioner and Public Advocate.

The forum focused on two topics **Discrimination** and **Belonging and feeling safe**.

Discrimination Subforum

The forum explored settings and environments where young people feel excluded, types or perceived reasons for exclusions, and solutions to address the barriers to or solutions to creating and fostering an inclusive community for all young people.

The Discrimination Subforum started with an unconscious bias ice breaker activity. This provided a safe space for young people to start thinking about and uncover their own unconscious bias.

Bias is a prejudice in favour of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another usually in a way that's unfair or unjust. Biases may be held by an individual, group and can have negative or positive consequences. Bias can be both explicit and implicit (also known as conscious and unconscious bias).

Biases, whether conscious or unconscious, are not limited to ethnicity and race. Although racial discrimination is well documented, bias can also include age (reverse ageism), gender, disability, religion, sexual orientation, and many other characteristics are subject to bias. Unconscious bias is a learned assumption, belief, or attitude that exists in our subconscious. Everyone has these biases and can involuntarily affect the way we think and act.



Participants were provided a quote and names of two people on opposite sides of the spectrum and were asked to identify who made which statement. The activity aimed at uncovering unconscious bias. For example, see the quote and image below.

MUHAMMAD(PBUH)

DENZEL WASHINGTON

“A white has no superiority over a black nor a black has any superiority over a white, except by piety and good action ”

**PROPHET MUHAMMAD
(Peace Be Upon Him)**

Some participants were surprised by their responses to the images. The activity generated a positive discussion about unconscious bias with participants discussing how personality, stereotypes, and environment can contribute to our unconscious bias.

The activity led naturally to exploring what discrimination looks like and feels like. To encourage young people to think about discrimination in its different forms Ms Al-Asfi shared an encounter of discrimination that she and her community experienced. Many people in our community enjoy a dip in the pool, whether swimming for recreation or sport, but for some Canberrans swimming is not accessible. A barrier for Muslim women to participate in swimming is finding a facility that is culturally appropriate to their needs (women’s only space). For Ms Al-Asfi local swimming pools don’t meet her needs, leaving her feeling excluded.

The young people were from different schools across the ACT (primary to high school and public to private schools) with different backgrounds and experiences who shared ways to foster an inclusive community and explore ways to strengthen and improve current strategies.

Young people identified a range of settings where they believed discrimination occurs such as school settings; workplaces; health/medical settings; within friendship groups; shopping centres; in the media; in public places and through social media platforms. Young people shared that their experiences of discrimination predominantly occurred at school; on social media and in public places such as shopping centres.



Through the group discussion, young people identified several types of discrimination they experience which included sexuality; gender identity; disability; accessibility; acceptance of diversity, and ageism which are discussed in more detail below.

Participants discussed diversity and what makes each of us unique including gender; cultural background; life experiences and beliefs; disability and sexual orientation and how this shapes the view we have of our community. Diversity is also about recognising, respecting, and valuing differences. Young people who contributed to the discussion identified significant inconsistency of policies and programs across different schools that discuss and raise awareness of accepting diversity. Young people felt a positive experience about acceptance in their school community was often related to a staff member rather than the culture within the school.

Gendered issues for young people: sexuality and gender identity

Young people discussed how clothing choices can determine how adults and sometimes other young people interacted or didn't interact with them. Young women discussed experiencing unwelcomed sexual remarks and gestures because of that what they were wearing. Young people also discussed feeling uncomfortable, humiliated, ignored, and their peers not knowing what to do or how to respond to unwanted sexual remarks or gestures.

Young people discussed feeling unsupported in some settings as they were coming to terms with their gender and sexual identity, which can be a very difficult process with support. Participants who contributed to the discussion identified inconsistency of policies and programs across different schools to support young LGBTQI+ people. Young people felt a positive experience of being accepted was often related to an individual teacher rather than the culture within the school.

Young disable people

Participants with a disability who contributed to the discussion identified that the divide between them and their peers who did not have a disability is significant and continues to grow. Young people suggested training for both staff and students could improve understanding of the different types of disabilities and how unconscious biases influence interactions and further suggested training be mandatory and part of teachers ongoing professional development.

One participant shared, *"I'd rather go to someone who has a disability because I would feel more confident, they would understand, and be aware of the issue and would not be brushed off"*. Many young people don't know what to do when they see discriminatory behaviour. Supporting young people with the skills and knowledge how to safely challenge this behaviour is the first step to changing the culture.

Students with a disability shared they felt that ACT's education system is not inclusive. Despite individualised learning programs being used in schools the diversity of disabilities



among students is not being catered for, as is the experience of several young people who attended the Assembly.

Not all learning environments are conducive to positive learning. Young people shared that neurodiversity does not necessarily equal an intellectual disability. One young person shared, *“if teachers are taught how to create an environment and teach lessons in a way my autistic brain understands I wouldn’t feel excluded”*.

Another young person shared their experience receiving sex education with young people with an intellectual disability rather than their peers. Teaching in this way assumes that a neurodiverse person or a person with a cognitive disability cannot understand the information and needs it to be simplified.

Young LGBTIQ+ people

Inclusive language acknowledges and respects the diversity of our bodies, genders, and relationships. Young LGBTIQ+ people raised a lack of awareness of the impact of using incorrect pronouns. Pronouns are usually gendered – she, her, he, him, this assumes the gender of another person, often based on their name and/or their appearance. Some young people will avoid service/program/setting because they know the experience will be disrespectful and not meet their needs. This can also be true for other young disabled people; young people from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background; and/or a young people from different cultural and religious backgrounds.

Not finding services or programs that meet your needs can leave you feeling excluded, insignificant, and disempowered and can negatively impact your self-esteem and mental health.



Inclusive Society Forum facilitator: Ms Haneen Al-Asfi



Accessibility for young people

Participants discussed that accessibility crosses over gender, age, disabilities, cultural backgrounds, and sexuality identity. This is referred to as intersectionality which is the cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalised individuals or groups.

Young people identified that there is significant inconsistency of accessible policies and programs across different schools to support the needs of young people in our community. For example, some schools provide gender-neutral bathrooms for students, however, for some students the disability bathroom was the only option to access the bathroom while at school. Leaving students feeling their basic right to access a bathroom safely was not being met.

Being able to access a safe space was important to maintaining health and wellbeing in a school setting. Young disabled and young LGBTIQ+ people shared the inconsistency of safe spaces across school settings and there were schools that did this better than others. Young people believed this should be fundamental to fostering an inclusive environment for all students.

In educational settings, young people suggested more efforts were required to support their mental health, sexuality, gender identity, addressing discrimination, establishing safe spaces, and allowing young people to feel safe at school. Safe people and places could be easily identified by using posters, badges, and/or lanyards.

Young people who feel they can be open about themselves whether that is about their cultural or religious background; disability; sexuality or gender identity they are more likely to have higher self-esteem, feel free to be themselves and be more confident to participate in activities with the broader community.

Young disabled participants shared that learning environments need to be conducive to positive learning outcomes, that do not detract or impinge on other students. Creating environments that encourage student participation and engagement would also benefit teachers and learning assistants to provide the support each person needs in the way they need it. A young person shared their positive experience in being supported through the Big Picture program and suggested more schools could learn and apply this in their school.

As previously discussed, swimming pools are not accessible for all young people in our community, the example given earlier relates to providing women-only swimming spaces. For other young people swimming in a public pool is not always possible, for example, a swimming pool may comply with safety regulations but may still not be accessible for all young disabled people. For example, not all swimming pools have disability pool access hoist, or ramps into the pool, restricting access to people with mobility issues to the pool.



Ageism for young people

Young people shared their experiences of adults including older people in a position of power brushing them off and not acknowledging their experiences of racism or discrimination as a significant issue. Participants also felt their rights were often ignored or overlooked by older people because of their age.

Young people spoke about their experiences with the incorrect use of pronouns, lack of understanding of neurodiversity, and lack of willingness to change or educate themselves, leaving young people feeling disempowered and unsupported and their experiences are not valued.

Young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

Young people from different cultural and religious backgrounds like other groups of young people are a highly diverse group. The issues and challenges they face may differ depending on their cultural group; the length of time they have lived in Australia; their pathways to settling in Australia when they make Canberra their home, and the level of community and family support they receive all contribute to a feeling of belonging. Young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds shared their experiences of language barriers; feeling torn between cultures; intergenerational conflict; racism and discrimination; and bullying from their peers.

Despite one in three Canberrans identifying as a person from a culturally and linguistically diverse background, young people shared inconsistency across different schools about accepting and embracing cultural diversity. Young people acknowledge some schools do this well, but overall acceptance was often linked to an individual rather than a school culture.

Participants agreed the ACT Government acknowledges several key observance days such as Harmony Day; NAIDOC Week; International Women's Day; International Mother Day Language; Ramadan; International Day for Person with a Disabilities and the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Discrimination against people with an Intersex variation and Transphobia. While acknowledging observance days is important young people believed that without true culture change this is just tokenistic. Participants expressed that schools must shift away from the notion of culture or difference as a celebration or event. Instead, schools should move to a view of culture as an experience, knowledge, beliefs, and values that affect the lives of everyone in the school community daily.

Belonging and Feeling Safe Subforum

A sense of belonging is important to everyone, including young people it is associated with several positive outcomes. It is crucial to happiness, good mental and physical health. It gives us a sense of purpose and meaning. The core aspects are feeling part of the community, being valued, respected, accepted, and feeling safe.



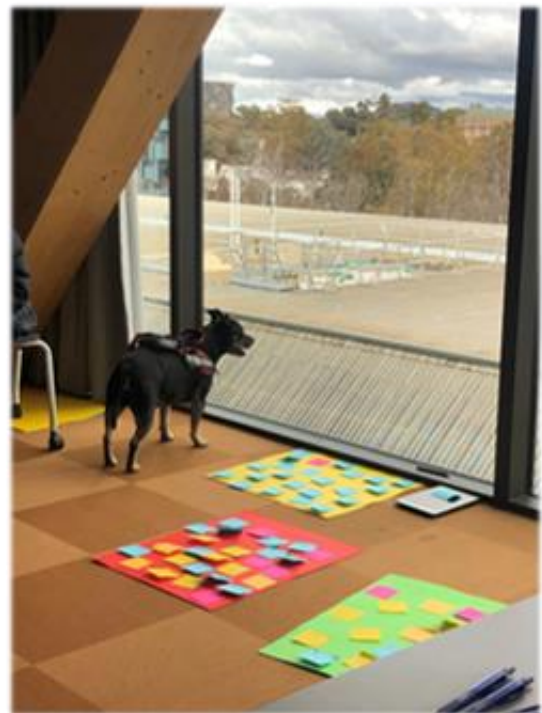
Forum participants identified the following attributes that contributed to feeling a sense of belonging:

- positive emotions (closeness to others and a sense of usefulness)
- positive relationships with peers and family, and other adults such as teachers and/or community leaders;
- active participation in education, own community, sport, social groups, and other social and recreational activities;
- harmonisation, aligning with situations or people with the same values and/or core beliefs; and
- inclusion for all.

The forum discussion highlighted the importance of being recognised, accepted, and not having your identity purely defined as a homogeneous group – young people, but young people with diverse identities, life experiences, beliefs, and needs.



Left to Right: Ms Dhani Gilbert and Ms Haneen Al-Asfi



Max - Therapy Support Dog



Community

Feeling part of the community and feeling safe is essential to well-being and happiness.

Young people are not a homogeneous group, but a group of people with diverse identities, life experiences, and needs.

Young people exist in many different communities whether it's their family, school community, religious community, social groups, sporting, and identify across many diversities.

We all need to feel like we belong, like we're in the place we're meant to be in, with people we're meant to be with. For some young people in our community belongingness is elusive. Forum participants discussed barriers and challenges to belonging and feeling safe.

Young people believe creating environments where everyone is accepted is fundamental to fostering inclusive communities and spaces, a space where diversity is embraced and respected also improves a sense of belonging.

The participants highlighted that these communities range from their school community, cultural, religious, social, and sporting groups, their families, and the LGBTIQ+ community.

Forum participants felt young people were actively engaged in their communities but felt that there was a lack of acceptance of young people within some parts of the ACT community. These barriers can limit young people accessing their communities.

To be valued as an equal member of society is essential to feeling connected, the participants stated that the following things or actions strengthen their sense of belonging and connection to their community:

- acceptance of who you are and your identity;
- being valued as an equal and as a person with expertise in your own life;
- having a voice and choice on decisions that affect you directly;
- correct use of pro-nouns and respectful language;
- safe and accessible spaces: for disabled people; gender-neutral spaces; culturally appropriate spaces; safe spaces free from violence and harassment; and spaces designed with young people in mind.

The barriers for young people to accessing their communities to the fullest and feeling connected include:

- Ageism: participants felt that due to their age they lacked rights, respect from older people, and their ideas and thoughts were often perceived as valueless and frivolous.
- Education: schools are unsafe due to bullying and violence towards young people who are, or are perceived as, different from established societal norms.



- Racism and discrimination for young people particularly for young disabled people, young people from different cultural and religious backgrounds and young people who identify as part of the LGBTIQ+ community
- Unsafe public spaces: young people feel unsafe, or fear being attacked in certain places in our community particularly if there is poor lighting or is not a youth-friendly environment.
- Clothing: judgment for your choice of clothing, makeup, and/or jewellery.

One young person shared, “I should be able to wear the clothes I feel good in without judgment”.

Young people want to be able to participate and contribute to our community and be accepted, valued, and respected for who they are, their views and opinions.

Schools

A sense of school belonging has been associated with core aspects of feeling part of the school community and feeling safe.

Forum participants mentioned relationships with teachers and peers, often in the context of feeling safe to be themselves, suggesting that feeling part of the school and feeling safe are intertwined. Barriers and supports to participation in school life and the relationship with students’ feelings of belonging were:

- bullying and violence against those who appear to be different;
- lack of inclusive safe spaces for young people with disabilities and young people who identify as LGBTIQ+;
- been separated from your peers and treated differently because of your disability
- gender-neutral bathrooms and spaces;
- lack of culturally appropriate safe spaces;
- lack of understanding about the correct use of pro-nouns;
- respectful language;
- safe and accessible spaces for disabled people;
- inclusive environments; and
- staff who are accepting and non-judgemental.

One young person shared, “I don’t feel part of my school community because of my disability”.

Young people want to be able to learn in an environment that accepts their uniqueness and supports them to reach their potential. Welcoming environments and positive relationships between students and teachers provide a conducive space for learning for all students.



Ageism for young people

As previously stated, young people shared their experiences of adults including older people in positions of power brushing them off, ignoring and/or not acknowledging their experiences of racism or discrimination as a significant issue.

Participants felt that due to their age they lacked rights, or their rights were ignored, sharing that older people perceived their ideas and thoughts as insignificant.

Valuing everyone's ideas and opinions regardless of age, gender, culture, religion and sexual preference demonstrates that inclusion is important.

Feeling safe

Feeling like you belong means feeling like you are with other people who accept you for who you are. It can be difficult to feel safe to be yourself or express an opinion when you are around people who don't share your values; views; sexual identity or disability. Forum participants shared these differences meant being excluded from their peers.

Being excluded can make you feel unsafe, sad or scared, or many other emotions and can impact your mental health. Achieving a sense of social belonging is fundamental to improving our mental health and wellbeing.

Spaces, environments, and settings can contribute to whether we feel safe or unsafe. A place and/ or environment where you can feel comfortable, connected and part of the larger community, where you are not exposed to discrimination, criticism, harassment, or any other emotional or physical harm is a place where young people feel safe.

Young people use public spaces just as much as anyone else, if not more. And yet, too often public spaces are simply devoid of activity or amenities and are not appealing for young people.

Youth spaces when developed are often isolated from community settings such as town centres or other purpose-built spaces like youth/community centres. These locations can often feel unsafe and disconnected from the community, lack direct public transport access, lighting, and/or security. Most spaces designed for young people also heavily focus on skate parks and/or basketball courts with little else to offer. In addition to this, young people don't often feel welcome in public spaces such as malls, cafes, and community centres as they feel that they are viewed as loitering, or not welcomed and/or accepted in the space.

Safe spaces can provide a break from judgment, unsolicited opinions, and having to explain yourself. It also allows people to feel supported and respected. This is particularly important for young disabled people, young people who identified from a different cultural background, and young people who identify as members of the LGBTQI+ community. Feeling safe in your community is essential to positive wellbeing and happiness.



A safe space can mean different things for different young people. Forum participants identified the following areas that make them feel safe:

- Feeling physically safe, free of intimidation, bullying, and harassment.
- Culturally safe: an environment which is spiritually, socially, and emotionally safe, as well as physically safe for people; free from intimidation, bullying and harassment, or denial of one's identity, of who they are and what they need.
- LGBTIQ+ friendly and specialised services: a safe space that is a welcoming, supportive, and safe environment for LGBTIQ+ students/young people.
- Disability-friendly and accessible: an environment where young disabled people feel connected and part of their community, are treated as equal, and can access the space without restriction and equipment/support to access the space.
- Free of judgment where your identity is valued.
- Respected and valued-by adults in educational, community, and government settings.
- Non-judgemental services: for young people who are fearful of accessing mainstream support services, a safe space is somewhere they can access information and support without fear of being judged or having to face the consequences of disclosure.
- Youth Spaces developed with youth in mind, that are valued, connected to the community and town centres, have direct public transport access, and have good lighting, and/or security surveillance.
- Having a voice and been heard without criticism: young people want to have their voices heard on issues that matter to them without being criticised or dismissed because of their age. Not having a voice on issues that impact them makes them feel unsafe and powerless.
- Public transport: safe accessible public transport, well light and monitored interchanges, and security mechanisms such as CCTV. Young people felt that school buses for school students only also provided a safer transport option for young people.

One young person shared, *'A safe space is where I can be comfortable in my own skin'*.

Another participant shared *"I don't feel safe as a young person who is queer"*.

Conclusion

Through group discussions young people identified a range of solutions to address discrimination, belonging, and feeling safe which are below.

Young people believe increased understanding is required for teachers, students, and the broader ACT community on what discrimination is and the effects it can have on an individual, their family, and our community. Young people felt this is an important step to create a culture change that fosters a truly inclusive community, rather than one that is tokenistic.



Young people like other Canberrans want to belong and support the development of an awareness campaign that calls out discrimination.

Young people shared that forums like the Assembly provide the opportunity for them to be heard in a space where their opinions are respected and valued. It also provides the opportunity for young people from across Canberra to form connections with other like-minded young people. Participants also shared that they felt school settings stifle this type of open dialogue.

Belonging is fundamental to improving mental health and wellbeing, young people want to be accepted and valued for their uniqueness. Valuing young people's opinions, experiences and expertise mean they are part of the solution and need to be included in developing programs and policies that affect them.

Forum participants identified that young disabled people are more likely to be excluded from their community than peers because of their perceived versus real disability. Young people shared that they felt school settings cater well for neurotypical, heterosexual young white people but felt support LGBTQI+ communities, cisgender and people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities was not consistent across school settings.





Recommendations

Young people recommended all recommendations are to be co-designed with young people to ensure their effectiveness. This includes planning for, and providing, sufficient time and resourcing to engage with a diversity of young people that is effective and meaningful is included throughout the process.

Five recommendations were identified in the **Inclusive Society Forum**. All recommendations are to be co-designed with young people to ensure their effectiveness. The recommendations are listed below:

Recommendation One: The ACT Government to develop, fund, and implement an awareness campaign that calls out discrimination and provides young people with information on how and where to access support.

Recommendation Two: Young people are aware of school policies that aim to make their schools inclusive, however, they often felt the policies were ineffective and at times tokenistic, as bullying and harassment of young people continues in many school environments.

The ACT Government to review their current policies, programs and spaces in school settings to ensure that school environments are inclusive to the diverse needs of all young people (young disabled people; young people who identify as part of the LGBTIQ+ community; young people from different cultural and religious backgrounds and young people from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background) in our community to ensure that they can actively participate in the school community.

Recommendation Three: The ACT Government to design, develop and implement a consistent an age-appropriate school-based diversity program that addresses, raises awareness, and explores:

- discrimination in all its forms;
- the difference between racism and discrimination;
- concepts of bias and unconscious bias;
- the impacts of discrimination and racism for individuals, groups and the ACT community more broadly; and
- understanding and accepting the different forms of diversity.

Recommendation Four: Young people expressed creating safe, welcoming, and accessible spaces in a range of settings in the ACT that must meet the diverse needs of young people (young disabled people; young people who identify as part of the LGBTIQ+ community; young people from different cultural and religious background and young people from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background) in our community.



The ACT Government should actively seek input from young people when designing public spaces, to ensure they are welcoming, safe, secure, and connected to the surrounding community and infrastructure including public transport.

Recommendation Five: The ACT Government to further strengthen school settings so they are welcoming, inclusive, safe and culturally appropriate by:

- building cultural competency in our schools;
- identify an appropriately trained teacher and/or co-ordinator to support the full inclusion of all students and provide ongoing professional development for teachers and school staff;
- create a whole-school approach to inclusion through establishing a school culture that celebrates diversity in all aspects of school life;
- facilitate positive peer relationships and actively teach staff and students how to be more inclusive; and
- school facilities to also provide unisex change rooms and toilets; safe and welcoming spaces; and pray rooms.



Inclusive Society recommendation feedback session.



Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships Forum

The Rights, Resilience and Respectful Relationships forum (the Forum) focused on Comprehensive Relationships and Sexuality Education (CRSE) (see definition below) about home, education institutions, media, and relationships. The forum was a great success and resulted in the creation of four recommendations to the ACT Government by young people for young people.

This Forum was co-facilitated by three Youth Advisory Council Members: Ms Bronte Froome, Ms Lily Hannen, and Ms Joey Brodgen. Significant assistance was provided by Dr Sheridan Kerr from Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT (SHFPACT).

As young people, we recognised that rights, resilience, and respectful relationships is an important topic that affects all young people and the entire population across the ACT and beyond. We find this topic to be important as consent is not a conversation that can happen once and that respectful relationships are an ongoing conversation that must happen from birth. If we leave these types of necessary conversations and education until after young people have begun building sexual and intimate relationships, it is simply too late.

Understanding the role that young people play in the future of education is fundamental, especially when it is regarding their own safety and rights. It is invaluable to listen to young people, speak about issues that adversely affect young people now and as they journey into adulthood and navigate through their life.

Under the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the *Convention of the Rights of the Child*, education, acceptance, and the right to life are basic rights for every child and person. These articles are clearly interrelated to the need for young people to receive accurate and inclusive CRSE, in the home, school, media, and through other relationships. This is not just about the sex talk, but it is about creating a culture of respect, teaching young people about body boundaries, and having open and informative conversations about sex. Creating these types of conversations with young people will create a precedent that will carry into the workplace in later life, and for generations into the future.

The Forum

Over the course of the Forum, there were three main exercises to allow for rigorous discussion between the young people using guiding questions and thought-provoking activities. These activities built on the development of our recommendations. We believe that our recommendations reflect what young people across the ACT and surrounds need to receive the best CRSE. Overall, the Forum exceeded our expectations, and we were lucky to work with such intelligent and aware young people.





Y-Chart Activity

The Y-Chart activity gave the opportunity for the young people to consider words that would best define consent, healthy and unhealthy relationship with describing how they look, feel, and sound. All the young people were given the opportunity to contribute to each of the charts to ensure all possible thoughts were heard and where necessary, discussed.

The purpose of this activity was to begin surface-level conversations about how young people define these key concepts, which would later contribute to discussions regarding how these concepts can better be taught and talked about.

This provided considerable insight into the way that educators, parents, and carers understand consent and relationships, compared to the understanding that young people have. The definitions provided by the young people differ from the usual standard definition as the young people have different experiences and interactions with each other, the media, and themselves which creates a different understanding. Some of the key takeaways were:

- Young people do not only associate healthy, unhealthy relationships and consent as direct contact but also invisible actions, such as respect, inclusivity, equal power balance and being made to feel comfortable.
- Consent is not only limited to a conversation, but it is also a feeling.
- A healthy relationship does not compromise the individual's own sense of self-worth and does not compromise on one's own personal boundaries and values.
- Unhealthily relationships involve an imbalance of power as the root for behaviours.

The participants defined and created their own (powerful) definitions of the concepts that included the following characteristics:

TOPIC	LOOKS LIKE:	SOUNDS LIKE:	FEELS LIKE:
Consent	proper boundaries equal power dynamic safe listening to 'no' legal	empathetic open continuous check-ins enthusiastic respectful	comfortable equal trust in control supported
Healthy Relationships	caring balanced positive shared values compassionate	positive inclusive honest being heard constructive criticism	safe unforced happy bringing out your best accepting
Unhealthy relationships	toxic unequal manipulative stereotyped expectations	controlling gaslighting dismissive violent blaming	power imbalance trapped unsafe inauthentic scary



Timeline Activity

The timeline activity gave participants the opportunity to explore their own experiences or lack thereof with consent and healthy relationships. In the activity, there were a series of numbers from 1-25 symbolising the ages of the young people. There were then asked a series of questions relating to their understanding of consent and relationships and stood at the age where they first learned this information, and whether it was taught at home, school, media or through other relationships. The purpose of this activity was to have the young people place sticky notes on the ages where they learned about sexual education through a series of specific questions, and ideally, this would show where young people are learning this information, whether it is helpful and at what age. Where there was no post-it notes would highlight where there is a gap in CRSE, which led on to the final discussions to hopefully result in recommendations.

The timeline activity resulted in great discussion from the young people across different ages in expressing where they had learned their information and identifying whether it was helpful or unhelpful. To the facilitators' surprise, a large number of young people learned about sexual and non-sexual consent and healthy relationships at a young age (less than 10-year-old) and there was limited education happening at the expected ages of 11 to 12 and 15 to 16, especially when it came to receiving this education in school. The majority of the young people were first exposed to and continued learning about relationships in the home. With more of the structured education still happening at school, it was made clear that young people felt most comfortable speaking to their siblings, carers, parents, and other friends and family as opposed to educators.

Some of the key takeaways from the timeline activity were:

- Although young people received the most education at home, this was mostly unhelpful.
- Age 5 to 10 is the most common age range young people wish that they had first learned about consent.
- School-based sexual education learning occurred after the age of 8.
- The media has had a much smaller impact on young people than previously expected.
- The experience of CRSE in the home differs across ages, and waves between helpful and unhelpful.

Group Discussions

Stemming directly from the timeline activity, the young people were then broken into smaller groups to discuss in-depth some of the issues and solutions, specifically targeting the gaps which were identified from the timeline activity. The young people were broken into groups for home, school, media, and relationships and spent a considerable amount of time in discussions, guided by thought-provoking questions. The purpose of this activity was to produce some specific recommendations to be discussed in the whole group.



Relationships

The relationships subgroup was interested in how young people could support one another, by ensuring that they had access to accurate and timely information. They felt this could be achieved by:

- Effective education in schools that linked (and built upon) topics including bullying prevention, social and emotional learning, and healthy relationships to ensure students not only built their knowledge but also their skills (for example, managing relationship break-ups).
- Effective support services that allow anonymous questions, drop-in counselling at a time that suits young people, and sharing forums that are safe for young people to share their experiences.
- Community support for all young people that models and fosters healthy relationships for all in workplaces and in the wider community.

This group was passionate about all people (particularly including the LGBTQI+ community) are able, and safe, to celebrate their sexual self-expression in Canberra.

Media

The media group discussion began by talking about the problems the media presents in relation to CRSE. The facilitator volunteered to scribe to capture the group's ideas and not halt the flow of the discussion and thought process. The facilitator predicted that the group would discuss how they learned a lot about consent, sexual health, and relationship education from the media and how much misinformation exists online. While this conversation did occur, some surprising main discussion points were:

- The large role that media plays in the understanding of consent and relationships from a young age.
- The subliminal and harmful messages provided by the media are available to children of all ages.
 - The role of the media potentially filtering this information could play a significant role and as a result, limit misinformation.
- The need for relevant and increased quality campaigns run by the government.
- An online space to learn about consent, relationships, and sexual education and provide support services where necessary.



Home

The group discussing CRSE in the home divided the discussion into two separate groups, which were identified from the timeline activity. The timeline activity reflected that prior to the age of 8, most young people are receiving their information in the home, while after the age of 8, this information is provided more in schools and through peer conversations. Some of the key takeaways from this discussion were:

- The need for parental/carers information to be accessible and applicable to a range of ages, such as:
 - an accessible online portal to provide information for young people and parents/carers; and
 - information nights at government and non-government schools to educate parents and carers.
- Destigmatise sexual health conversations by:
 - offering incentive-based programs such as trivia nights, activities to make young people feel empowered; and
 - working with young people about the ways they would like to learn after the age of 8.
- Creating a safe space for learning whether that be within community centres, schools, or at home.

School

The group discussing schools had a strong focus on diversity and inclusion in CRSE, particularly those from LGBTIQ+ and other minority groups. The group found that around the table there was inconsistent education of diversity groups, leaving some young people feeling completely uneducated. Some of the key discussion points were:

- The intersectionality between disability and CRSE and the need for education to be inclusive of all young people.
 - Young people found that prior CRSE was “heteronormative, cis-gendered and able-bodied focused” (direct quote from a participant at the Youth Assembly)
- Often when discussing CRSE in specific focus to LGBTIQ+, asexuality, intersex and gender diversity were often missed.
- Ensuring that there are interactive, direct activities in CRSE to allow for people with different learning needs to be able to positively participate and create a comfortable environment to ask questions.
- Creating a program to ensure that teachers are well-educated across CRSE within all diversity groups in the context of sexual health.
 - A suggestion is to receive mandatory training before commencement of teaching, and then a refresher to occur regularly (at a minimum annually).



Recommendations

It was made clear through the group discussions how interconnected CRSE is, and how each place of learning is fundamental for where young people receive information. If work were to be done in all these areas, it would ensure that young people were correctly informed across the board. As a result of the interconnectedness, some of the small groups had overlapped in their recommendations. After the whole-group discussion, a series of four recommendations were established.

Recommendations are all co-designed alongside young people to ensure that these are positive and interactive. The recommendations are:

Recommendation One: Ensure that every school year starting from early childhood includes mandatory units of works about inclusive and diverse respectful relationships, consent, and sexual education. This ensures that students are empowered by their increased education on these concepts.

Recommendation Two: All teachers from all sectors (public, private, independent, and specialist) are to be given mandatory professional training in delivering inclusive and comprehensive sex and relationship education.

Recommendation Three: Create an interactive and accessible virtual hub that provides reliable and consistent information for parents, students, teachers, and the wider community. It is created and maintained with input from all stakeholders.

Recommendation Four: Developing a community awareness campaign under the banner of the Consent Capital to promote sexual and respectful relationship education that involves active participation from community groups.

As facilitators of the Rights, Resilience and Respectful Relationship Forum, as Youth Advisory Council Members, and as young people, we hope that the reader understands how important it is that young people are well educated when it comes to their and other people's rights, body autonomy and overall well-being.



Left to right: Ms Joey Brogden, Dr Sheridan Kerr, Ms Bronte Froome and Ms Lily Hannen



NOTE: Throughout this document, the definition of Comprehensive Relationships and Sexuality Education (CRSE) from Family Planning Alliance Australia has been used. CRSE is defined as learning that:

- begins at birth and continues throughout life, concerning the physical, emotional, mental, and social aspects of sexuality and relationships
- is developmentally appropriate
- empowers all children and young people to develop a positive body image and manage important transitions such as puberty
- contributes to children and young people's ability to make informed decisions concerning relationships, reproductive and sexual health, and wellbeing
- influences attitudes and values like respect, equality, and diversity
- requires a positive and respectful approach that recognises the possibility of pleasurable and safe sexual experience, based on a foundation of mutual consent and free of coercion and violence.

Reference: Family Planning Alliance Australia. (2016) Relationships and Sexuality Education in Schools Position Statement. Retrieved on 11/07/21 from https://www.familyplanningallianceaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/FPAA-Schools-Education-Position-Statement-001_v2c.pdf



Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships Forum recommendation feedback session.



Youth Employment Forum

Introduction

Youth is a phase in life that is characterised by many changes and transitions. The transition from education to work, dependence to independence, from living with parents or family to living with friends, solo or with a partner. Finding employment that offers security and provides the means to sustain independent living forms the foundation upon which many of these transitions are built. The idea of 'youth' and 'young adulthood' is often seen as a preparation phase for employment. Employment impacts mental health, social lives, where we live, and every other aspect of our lives. **Insecure and unstable employment is a growing issue in Canberra.** According to the Young Workers Centre 2020 Report, 75% of youth interviewed indicated that they were insecurely employed.

Young people predominantly work in more precarious jobs and industries. Many young people also must juggle work and study - impacting both and often affecting young people's mental health and social lives. Young people also experience higher rates of **exploitation, poor work conditions, bullying, and sexual harassment** in employment - sometimes lacking either the knowledges of their rights or feeling powerless to do anything about their treatment. Forty seven percent (47%) of workers 18 years and under reported they had their wages stolen in the last 12 months.

Without employment, it is difficult to become independent and this impacts virtually all aspects of young people's lives. Furthermore, getting and maintaining secure employment is harder for some young people. Canberra has the lowest youth **unemployment** rates in Australia. However, there are groups of people who struggle to find employment - which can put them into a cycle of disadvantage.

This forum was co-facilitation by three Youth Advisory Council Members: Ms Matilda Webb, Ms Shaylah McClymont, and Ms Krishna Shukla. Significant assistance was provided by Dr Justin Barker from ACT Youth Coalition and Ms Grace Flanagan from Unions ACT.

The employment forum focused on three key topics, employment for young people with a disability, employment education in schools, and supporting industries to employ young people.

Employment for disabled young people

In Australia, disabled people are nearly twice as likely to be unemployed as people without a disability, and women with a disability are 10% less likely to be employed than men with a disability. Many young disabled people do not enter the workforce at all over the first seven post-school years and are much more likely to experience long-term unemployment than those without a disability.



A 2015 report by the Australian Human Rights Commission found numerous systemic barriers to employment for disabled people including lack of practical assistance for employers to support the employment of disabled people; negative employer and community attitudes; poor transition to work initiatives for school leavers; negative outcomes from disability employment services which fail to respond to individual needs or deliver long term job retention. Many of these barriers are compounded by gender and race.

In this group, we looked at how we can reduce disability discrimination in workplaces and better support young disabled people to gain and retain employment.

Employment education in schools

Employment is a complex challenge that involves several different legislations and can be a daunting experience for young people. Young people are at the stage of life where they are getting their first jobs and education on employment is crucial to ensuring young people are well-informed employees. Education can inform young people on what standard wages to expect what to do when they are being exploited, what standards their workplace should adhere to, and what to do when their workplace doesn't meet the standards. Currently, there is minimal education on employment rights in schools. This education is not part of the curriculum, and not standardised across schools meaning that some young people have no access to employment education. Well-informed young people can better support themselves to understand what they should and shouldn't expect from their employer.

Supporting industries to employ young people

"I am underpaid at one of my workplaces, but they will fire me if I complain" - quote from the Young Workers Report 2020. Industries that primarily employ young people and often have multiple locations or chains are notorious for exploiting youth and taking advantage of the fact that many young people don't know all their rights. They also exploit young international students who will accept 'cash in hand' jobs without knowing better. However, in many cases, small businesses may occasionally choose to underpay staff when business isn't doing good. None the less this indicates the following:

- that small business must be supported to take on young people and pay them the correct wages;
- that all businesses must be informed and penalised in a way that they wouldn't repeat wage theft; and
- young people need to be given the tools to learn their rights, for example 41% of workers under 18 didn't always get pay-slips.

The young people in the employment forum were split into groups based on the topics that were discussed. Participants did a deep dive into their area of youth employment and identified the key issues, developing ideas of solutions to the identified issues. Groups then presented back to the larger group to allow participants to contribute across all the key topics. Participants then developed the key findings and recommendations to be presented.



Key findings

The importance of employment and the impact employment status has on all other parts of life were made evident through all the discussions in the employment discussions.

Currently in the ACT addressing discrimination, or requesting reasonable adjustments is the responsibility of the impacted person with a disability. Additionally, discrimination is only addressed after it has occurred, and discrimination complaint resolutions only address individual circumstances, rather than impacting wider systemic reform.

Young people lack education on the benefits and importance of Unions. Young people are unaware of what unions do and are not provided information on how a union could be useful to support them against an exploitative employer. Currently, there is also a disconnect between the disability community and Unions. Increasing the connection between these two communities and educating disabled people on the benefits of joining a Union could help move the onus from the disabled individual dealing with issues in the workplace to their Union rep, who has greater resources, ability, and support.

Young people lack accessible information on workers' rights and how to find it. There is no centralised information source that is easily accessible and can provide young people from all backgrounds with information like what is their minimum wage, what conditions they should be working under, and what treatment they should be receiving as well as information on what to do if their workplace does not meet these standards.

Young people in the ACT lack education and awareness of disability issues and the diversity of the disability community. This is worrisome as anyone can become disabled at any time but contributes to ableism and inaccessibility within the community.

The casual workforce is predominantly made up of young people however, this industry remains inaccessible for many people with a disability. Employers are unwilling to hire people who disclose their disabilities. The lack of flexibility and disposability of casual workers also makes it hard for young disabled people to retain casual employment. Young disabled people who are unable to gain access to employment until later in life experience negative consequences on their super, experience, ability to find work, and independence.





Recommendations

It was made clear through the group discussions how employment forms the foundation of many parts of young people's wellbeing and future. If work were to be done in all these areas, it would ensure that young people were correctly informed on their rights in the workplace. As a result of the interconnectedness, some of the small groups overlapped in their recommendations. After the whole-group discussion, a series of four recommendations were established.

Applicable to all recommendations, we request that they are all effectively co-designed with young people to ensure their effectiveness. This includes planning for, and providing, sufficient time and resourcing to engage with a diversity of young people effectively and meaningfully with a disability and non-disabled people throughout design processes. These recommendations are:

Recommendation One: The ACT Government should criminalise wage theft, imposing individual liability on employers that choose to partake in wage theft and imposing the appropriate fines. Such that they would deter from future defaulting. In the current situation, the fines are not large enough and create repeat offenders. Hence criminalising is key.

Recommendation Two: The ACT Government should provide additional funding to the Young Workers Centre to deliver their Rights at Work Schools Program in each ACT High School at least every two years to ensure young people are equally and adequately educated on their employment rights. This includes specific education on the employment of young disabled people.

Recommendation Three: The ACT Government should provide monetary discounts or other incentives for businesses that employ more young people and young disabled people into part-time and full-time positions. The incentives for employing young disabled people should also include requirements relating to compulsory disability awareness training, and the inclusion of disability rights, obligations, reasonable adjustments, and accessibility in orientation or induction. The ACT Human Rights Commission should be empowered to monitor and investigate claims for incentives.

Recommendation Four: Disability education and awareness training be compulsory for all employers and staff and be included in the staff handbook training. This training should be done by disabled people and cover the rights of employees with disabilities, requesting reasonable adjustments, obligations, and disclosing a disability. This training should also cover disability issues, awareness, accessibility, and the diversity of the disabled experience.



Recommendation Five: Amend the *Discrimination Act* to include a positive duty to eliminate discrimination. This significant reform would remove the onus from young disabled people, and instead places the responsibility on workplaces to take proactive action to improve accessibility and inclusion for workers with disabilities. This change encourages systemic and preventative change. The ACT Human Rights Commission should be empowered with a range of regulatory tools to monitor, investigate, and enforce the positive duty. The positive duty should apply to public authorities immediately and should apply to private bodies and community organisations after a period of three years.

Reference:

- Young Workers Centre 2020 Report <https://youngworkerscbr.org.au>
- 2015 Report by the Australian Human Rights Commission <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/age-discrimination/projects/willing-work-national-inquiry-employment-discrimination>



Youth Employment Forum recommendation feedback session.



Environment and Sustainability Forum

The ACT Youth Advisory Council has collectively addressed the Environment and Sustainability as a continuing and ongoing area of importance for young people in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). Young Canberran's are also increasingly aware of the role they all have in maintaining and protecting the natural environment around us, especially when faced with an imminent global climate crisis. The 2020 Mission Australia Youth Survey Report (Mission Australia, 2020) found that 34.3% of young people in the ACT identified the environment as the issue most important to them. This was 15% points higher than the national average.

Some young people have taken matters into their own hands and have already begun mobilizing their peers on social media and in other online interactions and forums, to discuss, debate, and advocate for better environmental protection. It is evident that this issue is becoming increasingly concerning to young people of the ACT and that action must be taken immediately to address these issues. With single-use items on the rise and the mental health of young people deteriorating, it is more important than ever that the voices and views of young people are heard, acknowledged, and actioned.

On 25 June 2021, 27 young people from across the Canberra region put forward three key recommendations on how to make Canberra a more environmentally sustainable city.

The group consisted of three subforums to discuss the following topics in more detail:

- Sustainable Transport Subforum
- Food Waste Subforum
- Sustainable schools and workplace Subforum

Through continuous conversations with young people in the ACT community, and researching local and current issues, these topics were identified as environmental issues that directly affected ACT youth.

The Forum was Co-Facilitated by Ms Hannah Ford of SEE-Change (SEE-Change, 2021) and ACT Youth Advisory Council (Community Services, 2021) members Ms Jazmyn Michie, Mr Nicholas Villiers, and Ms Charli Spratford.



Sustainable Transport Subforum

Introduction

The Sustainable Transport subgroup worked to outline the main issues surrounding the use of sustainable transport, barriers that prevent young people from utilizing existing programs, services, infrastructure, and solutions to solve the issues identified. The group consisted of ten young people, all of whom were students from public and private schools in the ACT. The group shared their personal experiences of using various modes of transport and discussed the shortfalls of these systems.

Discussion

Throughout the Forum, three central themes emerged that would encourage more young people to engage with sustainable transport options:

- Increased safety of sustainable transport options;
- More infrastructure supporting sustainable transport options; and
- Greater accessibility to sustainable transport options for young people.

In this subforum, low or no emission transport options such as walking, cycling, public transport, and electric vehicles, were prioritised over personal, fossil fuel-based vehicles (Figure 1). Discussions around sustainable transport had many commonalities with active transport options addressed in the ACT Governments *Building an Integrated Transport Network* (Transport Canberra, 2021), released in May 2015. Active travel as defined in this report refers to any human-powered method of mobility, such as walking, cycling, or any other human-powered transportation.

This series of photos, taken in Canberra, shows the same number of people that can fit in one bus, riding bicycles, walking or travelling by car. Courtesy Cycling Promotion Fund, 2013.



Cycling Promotion Fund Canberra, 2013 (Bicycles Network Australia, 2021)



Increase the safety of sustainable transport options for young people.

Safety largely influences how students choose to travel and is one of the major barriers preventing young people from engaging with active or sustainable transport options. Safety issues identified by subforum members included dangerous bike paths, having to navigate unreliable, time-consuming, or complex travel routes, and feeling unable to travel places alone or at night.

Forum members indicated the removal of dedicated school buses in April 2019 created several safety concerns for young people in the ACT. This included the removal of dedicated bus services to 51 schools across the ACT. Young people are having to catch multiple buses via several locations on the way to their school. This increases the likelihood of young people missing buses, getting lost, being exposed to heavily populated areas, and potentially being late for school. Many students as young as primary school age are forced to use buses with complex routes, often alone, amongst groups of strangers, often more than twice their age. This provides little incentive for parents to encourage their children to learn about and use public transport. Forum members raised concerns of 'stranger danger', sexual assault, predatory behaviour, and a lack of respect from other public transport users.

The group was unanimous when talking about times they had been disrespected by older people, overlooked, and unheard. One member who had been trying to get home from school was dismissed by an adult passenger when asking to press the stop button. Discouraged, they had to wait until they reached the next stop. A similar story was told by another student who could not physically leave the bus because the aisle was too crowded, and nobody offered any support. This student missed their stop and had to walk the distance of several stops back to their home.

Another safety concern raised were instances of buses reaching full capacity, and the bus driving past stops, meaning people would have to wait or attempt to walk to their destination, potentially alone, long distances, or late in the evening. The time students spend on public transport was seen to be significantly greater when compared to driving. This provides little incentive for students to catch busses and creates significant disadvantages for students who do catch public transport as the long travel times and complex routes make the trip time-consuming, unproductive, and inconvenient for many young people in the ACT.

Increase the accessibility of sustainable transport options for young people.

Accessibility to sustainable transport options is seen as a high priority for young people. Participants supported the ACT Governments efforts to ensure all ACT buses and light rail vehicles are accessible for people with physical disabilities, wheelchairs, prams, and walkers to ensure sustainable transport options are accessible to all people. The young people mentioned the Transport Canberra website (Transport Canberra, 2021) is not easy to navigate, making it difficult to find the information they are looking for, including accessible



transport. Young people want to see the ACT Government explore ways to improve this website in aspects including accessibility, usability, and navigability. Young people suggested accessibility could also include greater education about how to safely engage with public and active transport.

Increase the infrastructure for young people to access sustainable transport options.

The young people acknowledged the ACT Government has introduced several initiatives to lower harmful emissions and use sustainable transport options such as electric cars. Making electric vehicles more attainable for young people was also discussed. Electric vehicles are currently viewed as a luxury item rather than a viable sustainable option for young people. Young people would like to see the ACT Government investigate further incentives and subsidies for hybrid vehicles, electric vehicles, and electric bicycles, as alternative options to petrol vehicles. This would bring these options closer to the affordable price range of most young people. Limited access to charging stations was seen as a barrier, vulnerability, and risk for those looking to invest in electric vehicles. The young people supported the ACT Government's efforts to introduce electric buses into their fleet and want to see 100% electric buses across the ACT, so all residents of the ACT, including young people especially, can access sustainable transport options. Subforum participants also supported the use of T2 transit lanes around Canberra to encourage more Canberrans to carpool, therefore reducing emissions and the number of cars on the road.





Sustainable Transport Subforum recommendations

The members of the Sustainable Transport Subforum recommended the ACT Government work to encourage and enable young people of the ACT to access and use sustainable transport options by increasing the safety, accessibility, and infrastructure of sustainable transport options for young people.

Recommendation: The ACT Government reform the school bus routes, timetables and services to encourage and facilitate sustainable transport by:

- Reinstating dedicated school buses in the ACT, servicing all ACT primary schools, high schools, and colleges. This new system would aim to protect and provide independence to Canberra students, promote and encourage sustainable transport options for young people in the ACT and maintain consistent daily schedules for young people.
- Revise and implement the *ACT School Student Transport Scheme*. It was noted that the *ACT School Student Transport Scheme* was introduced on 3 September 2001, only to be removed 21 December 2001 (ACTBus, 2021). The scheme provided subsidized and free public transport for students traveling to and from school (primary, high school and college). A similar scheme of the same name is currently active in NSW (Transport for NSW, 2016).
- Review and update the Transport Canberra website to be more accessible. The *Provision of Dedicated School Bus Services Policy* which “applies to all requests for new dedicated school services or amendments to existing dedicated school services” (Transport Canberra, 2021) is not currently available/easy to locate on the Transport Canberra website. It is unclear to users what direct school routes are available for students if any.
- Update the Transport Canberra website to include information to find sustainable transport options to suit their location, schedule, and other needs more easily. The young people also raised that many school busses listed on the Transport Canberra website, only provide transport from dense city centres directly to their school. For example, Campbell High School's bus route begins at the city interchange and terminates at the school. This means people as young as 12 are having to navigate their transportation in heavily populated areas, away from their neighbourhoods. More direct suburban school routes should also be considered so young people who live outside of city centres are not disproportionately disadvantaged.
- Implement systems to train bus drivers to have awareness of the vulnerability of their passengers and how they can support best them.



Conclusion

By providing young people access to convenient, safe, and reliable sustainable transport options, the ACT government can provide young people with opportunities to actively contribute to ensuring the longevity of the environment and the future they will inherit.

Food Waste Subforum

Introduction

Seven young people joined the Food Waste subforum to develop a recommendation on how food waste can be managed better within the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). The young people in the group were all aware of current initiatives and ways individuals can eliminate or minimize food waste. The young people also believe most young people, and in fact households across the ACT, have or do make significant contributions and efforts to reduce food waste already. They were aware that food waste is one of the most significant contributors to greenhouse gas emissions in the ACT, and food waste can happen right throughout the production, transport, sale, and consumption of produce.

Discussion

Having agreed that reducing food waste requires many stakeholders of the community to make contributions, the young people identified businesses and organisations who sell and distribute food and produce as the most likely to be able to make further significant contributions to reduce food waste in the ACT.

The young people made several innovative and creative solutions to eliminate food waste. These included investing in research to prevent the shelf life of produce and to produce packaging to minimise damage in the supply chain and to display products to minimise degradation in the store.

The young people also recommended the ACT Government should implement and adopt a *Sustainable Food Business Strategy*. This strategy would aim to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, significantly reduce food waste, and provide socio-economic outcomes. This strategy should involve ACT Government working in partnership with businesses and food-rescue organisations such as Oz Harvest and Second Bite to reduce their food waste, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and provide food and meals to vulnerable communities.

The young people recommended the ACT Government minimise food wasted through overbuying and large serving sizes. The young people thought the ACT Government should mandate food businesses and organizations to display graphical representations of their serving sizes available before customers place their order. This would allow customers to have realistic expectations of the size of their food before and eliminate food waste. They also thought the Government should support fresh produce to be sold individually and mandate that where fresh produce is sold in a bag, group, or bunch, it should also be



available to be sold individually or in smaller quantities. This will eliminate shoppers having to buy more than they need and hence eliminate food wasted by overbuying.

Finally, the young people suggested the ACT Government should produce a set of guidelines outlining the best ways to transport various product types to avoid them being damaged during transport. This would allow businesses to reduce food waste and potentially decrease revenue lost through food spoilt during transport.

Food Waste Subforums recommendations

After careful consideration of the scope, complexity, cost, scale of benefits and ease of implementation of the recommendations made, the youth endorsed the recommendation for the ACT Government to adopt a *Sustainable Food Business Strategy*. The details of this recommendation are as below.

Recommendation: The ACT Government to require each registered food business in the ACT to enter a Food Waste Minimisation Plan. This should be a three-way agreement between the ACT Government, the business or organisation, and a nominated food charity, detailing how the business or organisation will manage and minimise their food waste.

Recommendation: The ACT Government to create a set of guidelines outlining food that is or cannot be donated to charity. This should recommend, based on the condition of the produce, if it can be donated to a charity, and help reduce the amount of produce needed to be rejected by charities.

Recommendation: The ACT Government implement composting facilities available for food businesses who wish to manage spoiled food that cannot be donated.

Conclusion

The young people who attended the food waste subforum were acutely aware of the need to reduce or eliminate food waste in the ACT but are mostly already actively engaging in measures to contribute to this shared goal. The young people feel alone in their efforts and share the view more can and must be done by both governments, businesses, and community organisations. The young people believe that whilst the positive environmental impacts are obvious, eliminating food waste in the ACT could also provide positive social outcomes by helping to support some of our most vulnerable community members, save consumers money by reducing overbuying, and increase collaboration in reducing emissions across government, business, and consumers. The young people have recommended effective methods for eliminating food waste in the production, transport, sale, and consumption of produce and food products.



Environment and Sustainability Forum recommendation feedback session.



Glossary of Terms

- **Comprehensive Relationships and Sexuality Education (CRSE)** from Family Planning Alliance Australia has been used. CRSE is defined as learning that:
 - begins at birth and continues throughout life, concerning the physical, emotional, mental, and social aspects of sexuality and relationships
 - is developmentally appropriate
 - empowers all children and young people to develop a positive body image and manage important transitions such as puberty
 - contributes to children and young people's ability to make informed decisions concerning relationships, reproductive and sexual health, and wellbeing
 - influences attitudes and values like respect, equality, and diversity
 - requires a positive and respectful approach that recognises the possibility of pleasurable and safe sexual experience, based on a foundation of mutual consent and free of coercion and violence.

[https://www.familyplanningallianceaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/FPAASchoolsEducation Position-Statement_001_v2c.pdf](https://www.familyplanningallianceaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/FPAASchoolsEducationPositionStatement_001_v2c.pdf)
- **Racism** is the belief that race is a fundamental determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race.
<https://hrc.act.gov.au/discrimination/race-discrimination/>
- **Discrimination** is the act of making unjustified distinctions between people based on the groups, classes, or other categories to which they belong or are perceived to belong. In the ACT it is against the law for someone to discriminate against you because of a characteristic that you have, or that someone thinks you have, in an area of public life such as employment, education, provision of goods and services and accommodation. It is against the law for someone to discriminate against a person because of:
 - age
 - disability
 - employment status
 - gender identity
 - race – including colour, ethnic or national origin
 - religious conviction – which includes having no religious conviction
 - sex
 - sex characteristics
 - sexuality

A full list is available on the ACT Human Rights Commission's website at <https://hrc.act.gov.au/discrimination/>
- **Bias** is a prejudice in favour of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another usually in a way that's unfair or unjust. Bias can be both explicit and unconscious bias (also known as implicit bias).
- **Neurodiversity** is an umbrella term covering several neurodevelopmental conditions. These include ADHD; Autism; Dyslexia; Dyspraxia; Dyscalculia; and Dysgraphia.



Neurodiversity is the range of differences in an individual's brain function and behavioural traits. Rather than thinking there is something wrong or difficult when someone isn't like their peers, neurodiversity embraces the differences in both brain function and behavioural traits as a part of the diversity.

<https://neurodiversityassociation.com/>

- **LGBTIQ+:** *In the Capital of Equality Strategy 2019-2023*, LGBTIQ+ is an umbrella term respectfully used to refer to the diversity of individuals that are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and/or queer. It is also intended to capture diverse sexualities and gender identities, including (but not limited to) people who are agender, non-binary, gender fluid, asexual and pansexual, as well as individuals who prefer to use specialised personal terms to describe their own sex, gender, or sexuality.
- **Disabled person:** there is some disagreement within the disability community about the two terms 'person with a disability' and 'disabled person'. The Council has chosen to use 'disabled person', because they feel it is empowering and that 'person with a disability' implies the disability can (or should) be separated from the person.

An article about the two terms:

<https://www.aruma.com.au/about-us/blog/disabled-vs-disability-which-is-right/>





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