



Policy Platform: Multicultural Young People Youth Coalition of the ACT

The Youth Coalition defines multicultural young people (aged 12 – 25) as including:

- Young people who are culturally and linguistically diverse;
- Young people who are newly arrived; and,
- Young people of a refugee background.*

It was recently estimated that 32,700 people of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds live in Canberra.¹ Almost 14% of young people in the ACT were born overseas, and over 6,500 young people speak languages other than English at home.² Over the past decade, there has been a marked increase in the proportion of people aged under 30 years arriving through Australia's Humanitarian Program,³ with young people accounting for 38.3% of the ACT's total humanitarian entrants between 2002 and 2007.⁴ In light of this, the Youth Coalition identifies multicultural young people as a key group that government and community resources and services should be directed to.

At a 2010 Planning Day held with members of the ACT Multicultural Youth Affairs Network, stakeholders identified education, mental health, and housing / homelessness as key issues experienced by multicultural young people in the ACT. These correspond with the key issues for multicultural young people at a national level, identified by the National Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network, which also included employment and racism / discrimination as key issues.

Education

In light of the recent national and ACT legislation changes around education attainment, which requires young people to complete Year 10 and then remain in full time education, training or employment until they complete Year 12 or turn 17, education is a significant issue for multicultural young people, particularly those who are newly arrived. Young people who are newly arrived or from a refugee background may have experienced limited formal schooling, or gaps in their education. Services that work with multicultural young people have highlighted the need to provide additional resources to English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. The Youth Coalition supports the development and implementation of mechanisms that support multicultural young people to meaningfully engage in education and employment opportunities.

The Youth Coalition also supports the expansion of the Dickson College Refugee Bridging Pilot Program, which supports young people aged 16 years and over who are newly arrived and of a refugee background, to complete Year 10 and 12. The Program reports that young people travel from all regions of the ACT to attend this

* Please note that the Youth Coalition does not include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young People in this definition. See also the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young People Policy Platform.

program. The Program does not receive any funding from the ACT Government. Services report that young people who are under the age of 16, and who are not eligible to participate in the Program, often experience a range of challenges in maintaining attendance at school. It was clearly identified that the ACT Government needs to improve transitional supports and education pathways for multicultural young people in the ACT.

Mental Health

Multicultural young people may be at increased risk, compared with the general population of young people, of experiencing mental health issues, due to additional risk factors such as racism and discrimination, social isolation, or pre-settlement trauma or torture. However, multicultural young people experience additional barriers to accessing appropriate mental health treatment and support, such as language barriers, stigma, and limited capacity of clinicians to work with diverse communities.

The Youth Coalition supports the work of the National Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network, which identified a need to develop a transcultural approach to mental health that recognises the significance of cultural and linguistic factors in understanding mental health and addresses specific risk factors for individuals and groups.⁵

Housing and Homelessness

Service providers in the ACT have reported an increase in numbers of referrals of multicultural young people to housing and homelessness support services. They particularly noted an increase in the number of young mothers and pregnant young women who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness due to conflict with their partners and families. Homelessness is also increasingly affecting young women due to intergenerational conflict, family breakdown and domestic violence.

Service System

Youth services and multicultural young people have identified the need for better linkages and transition points between 'specialist' multicultural services, and 'mainstream' youth services. It was reported that young people often experience a reluctance to exit specialist services (such as settlement services) due to the established relationship they have with those services, and a perception that mainstream services do not have the capacity to effectively respond to their needs. In addition, youth services noted the need to provide additional training to mainstream youth services, to build their capacity to work with multicultural young people, but also multicultural services, to build their capacity to work with young people.

Services also reported that newly arrived young people often experience barriers to accessing primary health services, due to language barriers, stigma and capacity of clinicians to work with diverse backgrounds. This is a significant issue for multicultural young people, who may experience health issues that have not been addressed prior to their settlement.

Since 2008, the Youth Coalition has supported the Multicultural Youth Affairs Network (MYAN), which is comprised of over 70 members from government and community agencies, and seeks to improve supports for multicultural young people in the ACT. During the 2010/11 financial year, the MYAN received a small amount of one-off funding from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship to progress the

MYAN. The Youth Coalition strongly believes that the ACT Government should provide recurring funding for this important initiative.

Commitments

1. Advocating for the sustainability of the ACT Multicultural Youth Affairs Network, in order to continue to progress multicultural youth affairs in the ACT.
2. Advocating for the ACT Government to provide funding to expand education bridging programs for newly arrived young people and young people with a refugee background, including to young people under the age of 16.
3. Advocating for improved transitional supports and educational pathways for all multicultural young people in the ACT.
4. Advocating for appropriate mental health treatment and support options for multicultural young people.
5. Advocating for appropriate supports for multicultural young people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness, including young mothers and pregnant young women.
6. Advocating for training opportunities to be provided to both 'mainstream' youth services and multicultural services to build their capacity to work with multicultural young people, along with teachers, health professionals and police.
7. Advocating for the active involvement of young people in designing, planning and evaluating youth policy and service delivery frameworks.
8. Advocating for the active and supported participation of young people in their individual care planning and case management.
9. Advocating for improved referral and transition processes between specialist services, particularly settlement services, and 'mainstream' youth services.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2008) Making Culture Count: A Demographic Profile of Multicultural Canberra (Presentation), Australian Government, Canberra.

² ACT Government (2002) Youth in the ACT: A Social and Demographic Profile, Canberra.

³ O'Sullivan, K. Olli, L (2007) Settling In: Exploring Good Settlement for Refugee Young People in Australia, Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues, Melbourne.

⁴ Department of Immigration and Citizenship (2007) Australian Capital Territory Settlement Trends and Needs of New Arrivals 2007, Australian Government, Canberra.

⁵ National Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (August 2010) Mental Health Policy Statement, Victoria