

youth coalition

***Submission to the ACT
Government 2008 /09 Budget***

September 2007

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Acknowledgement

The Youth Coalition of the ACT acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as the traditional owners and continuing custodians of the lands of the ACT and we pay our respects to the Elders, families and ancestors.

We acknowledge that the effect of forced removal of Indigenous children from their families as well as past racist policies and actions continues today.

We acknowledge that the Indigenous people hold distinctive rights as the original people of modern day Australia including the right to a distinct status and culture, self-determination and land.

The Youth Coalition of the ACT celebrates Ngunnawal culture and the invaluable contribution it makes to our community.

'Submission to the ACT Budget 2008/09
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Introduction

The Youth Coalition of the ACT (Youth Coalition) is the peak youth affairs body in the Australian Capital Territory and is responsible for representing the interests of people aged between 12 and 25 years of age and those who work with them. The Youth Coalition works to actively promote the well being and aspirations of young people in the ACT with particular respect to their human rights economic, political, cultural, spiritual, educational and social development.

The Youth Coalition is represented on many ACT advisory structures and provides advice to the ACT Government on a range of issues related to young people and youth services.

The Youth Coalition works collaboratively with a range of other service providers and organisations, a key role being the provision of coordination and analysis of the implications of ACT policy and program decisions for young people and youth services.

As the peak body for the youth sector, the Youth Coalition facilitates the development of strong linkages and promotes collaboration between the community, government and private sectors to achieve better outcomes for young people in the ACT.

The Youth Coalition has a history of experience and broad range of knowledge upon which we have drawn to prepare this submission. The Youth Coalition maintains networks and runs forums for our members, young people and interested organisations and individuals. We host a monthly forum where we discuss current issues, listen to guest speakers, participate in consultative processes (and learn about other opportunities to participate), and share information.

We also hold a bi-annual Policy Forum and Conference and other forums and working parties as issues arise. We aim to inform our members of new developments, funding opportunities, reform processes and other issues through our regular E-Bulletin service, website and other avenues.

The Youth Coalition has also consulted with young people and youth and community services to inform our 2008/09 ACT Government Budget Submission.

Summary of Recommendations

1. Youth Service Program Funding

- **Cost:** Approximately \$1.1m (recurrent)
- **Outcomes:** More holistic service provision, increase support and programs for young people at risk in the ACT, more responsive services, smaller waiting lists, supporting young people's transitions, increase access and equity, increase youth participation, increased health and wellbeing for young people and their families and support services through reorientation.

2. Community Sector Viability

- **Cost:** Variable
- **Outcomes:** The community sector will be better staffed, better trained and reduce turnover, leading to service delivery that is of a higher quality and has greater continuity.

3. Regional Youth Centre Funding

- **Cost:** \$200,000 (recurrent)
- **Outcomes:** Increased ability to meet high demand for service delivery, decreased social isolation, better support for young people living in geographically isolated regions of Canberra.

4. Sector Development

- **Cost:** \$100,000 (recurrent)
- **Outcomes:** Improved knowledge, skills and networking of the community sector and government agencies to work more effectively with young people, improved quality of service delivery for young people.

5. ACTION Buses

- **Cost:** Variable
- **Outcomes:** Minimisation of the impact of bad public transport services on productivity, youth unemployment and social exclusion.

6. Young People Priority in ACT Housing

- **Cost:** Nil
- **Outcomes:** Reduced number of young people in Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), reduced number of young people in transitional housing, reduction of the number of homeless young people in the ACT, reduction in the number of young people in housing stress.

7. Public Housing Capital Injection

- **Cost:** \$0 in 2008/09, \$10m per year (for the following 3 years)
- **Outcomes:** Shorter waiting lists, greater turnover of people on the lists, better support for those on low wages in Canberra, less use of high cost SAAP services.

8. Gugan Gulwan Aboriginal Youth Corporation

- **Cost:** \$75,000 (recurrent)
- **Outcomes:** Increased capacity to support young people through drop-in, case management, health promotion programs, early intervention and prevention programs, increased ability to respond to requests for support from other youth services – including government services and increased ability to respond to referrals from other services – including government services.

9. Indigenous Alternative Education

- **Cost:** \$35,000 (recurrent)
- **Outcomes:** Improved literacy and numeracy for Indigenous young people, increased school attendance; improved attendance levels by engaging parents and the community; provision of flexibility to meet Indigenous community cultural and other needs; utilisation of skills of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers to improve attendance levels; greater focus on ensuring culturally inclusive approaches to education planning and delivery; and increased health and well-being of Indigenous young people.

10. Indigenous Family Support Worker

- **Cost:** \$102,060 (recurrent)
- **Outcomes:** Improved support provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families who are involved with the Care and Protection system; improved government and non-government collaborations; and improved system coordination.

11. Indigenous Support Groups

- **Cost:** \$30,000 (recurrent)
- **Outcomes:** Increased capacity to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to deal with issues such as education, family issues, nutrition, hygiene and anger management. Provide support to expand their peer support networks, improve support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young parents, increase the capacity to collaborate with other youth services – including government services, and increase the capacity to respond to referrals from other services – including government services.

12. Adolescent Inpatient Facility

- **Cost:** Unknown
- **Outcomes:** More appropriate acute mental health care for young people experiencing mental illness, better health outcomes for young people.

13. Multicultural Youth Service

- **Cost:** \$150,000 (recurrent)
- **Outcomes:** Maintain current service provision for young people from multicultural backgrounds, increase support for other services working with multicultural young people.

14. **Car Registration**
 - **Cost:** Unknown
 - **Outcomes:** Increased car registrations and fewer fines/charges/court cases/detention periods.

15. **Learning to Drive Vouchers**
 - **Cost:** \$ 90,000 per year (ongoing)
 - **Outcomes:** Driving lessons for 300 young people who are at risk of being unsafe to reduce risk of accidents, car damage, property damage and personal injury – including hospital admissions and long term medical care.

16. **Bit Bent**
 - **Cost:** \$40,000 (recurrent)
 - **Outcomes:** Creation of a sustainable service, broaden the scope of the service to additional regions in Canberra, reduced isolation and stigma for GLBTI young people and improved access to information.

17. **Youth Support Workers in Schools PD**
 - **Cost:** \$19,000 per year (recurrent)
 - **Outcomes:** Youth Support Workers who are well trained and more proficient in their work, better support provided for young people in government high schools.

18. **Youth Law Centre (ACT)**
 - **Cost:** \$60,000-\$90,000 (recurrent).
 - **Outcomes:** Individual legal support for additional young people, community information and education for young people.

19. **Social and Demographic Profile**
 - **Cost:** Unknown
 - **Outcomes:** Better understanding of young people in the ACT, better targeted services and increased ability to plan for the future.

Youth Services Program Funding

- **Cost:** Approximately \$1.1m (recurrent)
- **Outcomes:** More holistic service provision, increase support and programs for young people at risk in the ACT, more responsive services, smaller waiting lists, supporting young people's transitions, increase access and equity, increase youth participation, increased health and wellbeing for young people and their families and support services through reorientation.

The Youth Services Program should be increased by 25% to resource it to respond to new and emerging needs and to assist in reorientating in response to the YSP evaluation.

YSP services have been experiencing demand that significantly outstrips their capacity to provide services and have been experiencing this over a prolonged period of time.

The number of young people accessing YSP services has increased significantly since the programs original funding and this is reflected in the reporting submitted by YSP services every six months. There are also significant gaps in service provision that are also constantly highlighted by services.

These areas of unmet need will be examined during the YSP Evaluation that is currently taking place. It is clear that from this evaluation there will be a process of reorientation of some services to meet some of the current unmet demand however this will not solve the problem of a limited capacity within the YSP services to actively respond to emerging needs and issues.

Any changes of focus must be met with additional funding, not within existing funding. To reorientate services without any replacement services will be highly detrimental to the young people that are currently supported through these programs. We therefore strongly urge the ACT Government to recognise the increased demand and unmet need and address this issue with additional funding by increasing the YSP funding by 25%, approximately \$1.1 million.

Community Sector Viability

- **Cost:** Variable
- **Outcomes:** The community sector will be better staffed, better trained and reduce turnover, leading to service delivery that is of a higher quality and has greater continuity.

The ACT Government, as a matter of urgency, must budget for an increase in community sector wages.

The ACT Community Sector is currently facing severe staff recruitment and retention problems as a result of much lower wages than paid to employees of the ACT Public Service.

The sector has applied for money under the Community Support and Infrastructure Grants to model the cost of wage increases for community sector employees in the ACT and this project will have results in early 2008. In anticipation we explore the ACT Government to set aside additional recurrent budget funding to begin the process of increasing community sector wages.

The wage disparity between community and government means that the community sector is unable to attract staff who may be most qualified for particular positions as the remuneration they can offer is well below that which one would receive working in government.

While the indexation for the community sector in previous budgets went some way to addressing this wage crisis by pegging them with a new model of CPI and WPI combined - this in no way makes up for the existing low wages nor for the increase in the ACT Public Service wages that has been far outstripping the community sector.

The Community Sector Taskforce's report found that those working in the community sector do not have incremental advances to the extent that are provided by the ACT Public Service and as such, positions with similar duties and responsibilities can vary by up to \$20,000. For example:

A Health Professional Level 2 and SACS Level 5 may begin doing the same work and receiving a similar base rate, the SACS worker can only advance by just over \$3,100 while the equivalent government position can increase by almost \$16,400. Further, the SACS award does not even provide for levels that exist within the ACT Public Service as the highest level of the SACS Award (CSW Level 8) has a pay equivalent of an ASO5.

Wage disparity also has flow on effects within the community sector with 41% of organisations reporting difficulty in attracting appropriate staff due to poor remuneration. Community sector organisations also have difficulty in retaining staff with a staff turnover rate of 30.7% - double the national average for community sector organisations Australia wide and three times that of all organisations in Australia.

To increase the capacity of the ACT community sector to deliver programs and services, it is vital that wages have some parity with the ACT Public Service.

Regional Youth Centre Funding

- Cost: \$200,000 (recurrent)
- Outcomes: Increased ability to meet high demand for service delivery, decreased social isolation, better support for young people living in geographically isolated regions of Canberra.

The ACT Government must respond to population growth and adjust the funding for the two youth centres located on the fringes of Canberra— Lanyon and Gungahlin – which are now under resourced given the population growth of young people in these regions.

Lanyon and Gungahlin Youth Centres play an important role in providing services for young people in these regions due to the lack of other services and facilities. While young people accessing youth centres in town centres such as Tuggeranong and Belconnen have a shopping centre and entertainment facilities. In Gungahlin and Lanyon, these youth centres are the only facilities that most young people can access in these areas.

While these two regions have limited infrastructure and facilities, there has been a increases in population in these areas and the numbers of young people have increased significantly.

The population of young people 15-24 years is shown in the table below.^{1 2}

	Lanyon/South Tuggeranong	Gungahlin
2000	4250	2800
2005 (estimated)	5050	3600
2006 (Actual)	5752	4210

These figures represent a 26% increase in Lanyon and a 33% increase in Gungahlin from 2000 to 2006. This population growth is linked to an increasing demand for services by these two youth centres, which are under resourced to respond to this demand given their limited funding.

Lanyon and Gungahlin both receive significantly less funding than other youth centres – which receive between \$320,000 and \$445,000 - even though their target group is increasing significantly and are relied upon more and expected to provide a broader range of services given the geographic isolation of the areas they work in.

An additional \$100,000 for each of these services would increase their capacity to respond to the unique issues these services face given the geographically isolated areas in which they work.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006) Population by Age and Sex, Australia Data Series 3235.0
² ACT Government (2002) Young People in the ACT: A Social and Demographic Profile p15

Sector Development

- **Cost:** \$100,000 (recurrent)
- **Outcomes:** Improved knowledge, skills and networking of the community sector and government agencies to work more effectively with young people, improved quality of service delivery for young people.

The Youth Coalition is seeking recurrent funding of \$100,000 for our Sector Development Program, to fund a full-time Sector Development Officer and to provide subsidised training and resources for community workers.

The Sector Development Officer is responsible for responding to the broad range of issues presently facing the sector that are cross-portfolio. The Youth Coalition receives a limited amount of sector development funding from the Office of Children Youth and Family Support (OCYFS) but tries to respond to numerous training requests from non-government agencies. There have also been increasing requests from government agencies including:

- ACT Housing, Gateway Services
- Department of Education, School Counsellors and Youth Support Workers in Schools
- ACT Health, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, The Canberra Hospital,
- Territory and Municipal Services
- Chief Minister's Department
- Justice and Community Safety, DPP

This additional funding would provide the capacity for the Youth Coalition's Sector Development Program to:

- Raise awareness and understanding across non-government and government regarding issues facing young people and strategies to address them.
- Assist in the implementation of the Youth Services Program (YSP) and the findings of the YSP evaluation by supporting services to reorientate their delivery.
- Development of resources, based on consultations with young people and services;
- Provide professional development and training opportunities;
- Provide networking opportunities for workers across all policy and service delivery areas.

The current sector development activities run by the Youth Coalition that involve both community sector and government workers include a training and professional development calendar, monthly forums, individual support, outsourced training by professionals and recognised experts on mental health and alcohol and drugs, the development of directories and sector tools, promotion and implementation of a youth workers code of ethics, in-house training and a regular one day bus tour of a variety of youth and community services.

The majority of the Youth Coalition's sector development initiatives current have long waiting lists – including over 50 community sector and 40 government workers for the monthly bus tour. In order for the Youth Coalition to continue to provide high quality and responsive sector development opportunities to both the community sector and to the government sector, additional funding is essential.

ACTION Buses

- Cost: Variable
- Outcomes: Minimisation of the impact of bad public transport services on productivity, youth unemployment and social exclusion.

ACTION should be given a significant increase in funding to increase school routes, more regular services during off peak periods and night time services.

Young people generally fit into the low-income bracket and have an inflexible reliance on bus services. While young people have a number of concerns about ACTION services in the ACT, frequency of bus services is the primary factor that, if improved, would increase young people's usage of ACTION services in the ACT. The Youth Coalition accepts that an increase of frequency may not be possible across the spectrum of ACTION bus services and thus provides a categorical breakdown of concerns and recommended improvements.

Educational Services

Given the regularity of school timetables and their correspondence with day-time peak services, services getting to educational institutions are given an average rating by young. However this only applies to day-time bus services to and from educational institutions and a person who is staying late at university, or playing sport after school is in a significantly more disadvantaged position than a person who leaves school during the peak traffic period. ACTION should explore a modification of its afternoon peak and school bus timetables to cater for these young people.

Barriers to Youth Employment

Many young people who work on weekends and in the evenings comment that bus services in these periods are inadequate. Further, young people indicate that their ability to undertake gainful employment is limited by public transport services. Thus, in some cases, young people indicated they chose not to accept or apply for a job purely because they would have no ability to travel to and from work. Australian research on employment indicates that some employers discriminate against young people who have to catch public transport to work because of the fear that they will be unreliable workers. Considering the ACT's young population, public transport acting as a barrier to employment will have indirect effects on our productivity, youth unemployment and social exclusion. ACTION should address problems of reliability and frequency of services on weekends and in the evenings.

Night- Time Services

When travelling by night, young people categorically and generally indicated that frequency, reliability, speed, safety and routes are worse than in the day. Further, young people have strong concerns with safety when travelling by night, both on buses and at Belconnen and Woden interchanges. Young people indicated that the safety concerns were compounded by low frequency at night-times to discourage young people from using bus services at night-time. The Youth Coalition congratulates ACTION for beginning to install CCTV cameras in buses but recommends that ACTION address safety concerns at interchanges.

Weekend Services

Many young people are concerned that the lack of services on the weekend adversely affects the amount of social, and employment based activities they undertake. ACTION bus services on the weekend must be improved to prevent social exclusion and increase the capacity of young people to work.

Young People Priority in Housing ACT

•Cost: Nil

•Outcomes: Reduced number of young people in Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), reduced number of young people in transitional housing, reduction of the number of homeless young people in the ACT, reduction in the number of young people in housing stress.

The category of 'Young Person' should be added to the Housing ACT list of factors that determine eligibility to the priority housing list in recognition of the additional barriers they face in accessing the private rental market in Canberra.

Young people face two significant barriers when attempting to access housing in the ACT. The first barrier is that faced by many members of the Canberra community – cost. It is universally understood and accepted that young people have some of the lowest incomes in the ACT community. This results from structural factors such as youth wages, training wages, mixing study and work, below poverty line Centrelink benefits and unemployment rate above 12%.

However, young people face an additional barrier to most people who attempt to access the private rental market – discrimination. Private housing providers avoid renting to young people and actively discriminate against them because young people are seen as 'bad' tenants and there is such an overwhelming demand for housing, providers can afford to choose whichever tenant they want and this in most cases isn't young people.

Some young people become trapped in the SAAP system with no exit points as they cannot afford the private rental market and face discrimination but cannot get into public housing. This leaves them occupying much needed spaces and receiving a service they do not necessarily need that is many times more expensive than their allocation into a public housing property.

The eligibility criteria for Housing ACT makes it difficult for young people to get housing in a timely manner as many young people find the process onerous – particularly in demonstrating their need. Many have barriers that preclude them from getting private rental but these are unable to be demonstrated to the extent needed to make them eligible for priority access to public housing.

The very low numbers of young people in public housing – particularly those aged 16-20 years – is a clear indicator of the surprisingly small role that Housing ACT currently plays in supporting young people into affordable and secure housing. We strongly urge the ACT Government to include being aged under 25 as a criteria on the priority waiting list in recognition of the difficulty this group has in accessing the private rental market and the low levels of young people currently being housed by Housing ACT.

Public Housing Capital Injection

- **Cost:** \$0 in 2008/09, \$10m per year (for the following 3 years)
- **Outcomes:** Shorter waiting lists, greater turnover of people on the lists, better support for those on low wages in Canberra, less use of high cost SAAP services.

The ACT Government should continue to provide capital injections into Housing ACT in this budget to increase the supply of public housing.

The ACT Government has made significant changes to public housing in the ACT in an attempt to increase the provision of housing to those most in need. However, at the heart of the issues is that there are not enough properties in Housing ACT. While changing waiting lists makes a difference to how the service is provided, it does not change the capacity of the service itself.

The current undersupply of public housing is largely the fault of the Commonwealth Government who have ripped millions of dollars out of the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement leaving it with 32% less in real terms than in 1996. The ACT Government has showed leadership in overmatching the current agreement with the election promise of \$30m over three years. We strongly urge the ACT Government to plan for this to continue into the future.

The ACT has a long and proud history of supporting public housing and has one of the highest stocks of public housing in Australia. This is particularly important in the ACT where average wages are much higher than the national average and house prices are also high. In the current situation the lack of housing affordability particularly affects those who have low-income employment and therefore are likely to be in housing stress due to the comparatively low level of income they receive.

Maintaining public housing is vital and plays an important part in providing a continuity of service to young people in the ACT. For those in Supported Accommodation Assistance Programs (SAAP), public housing is a key exit point and with long waiting lists, SAAP services provide a very high cost service to young people who are not necessarily in need of it simply because young people who can maintain their own tenancies are unable to secure a property.

Increasing the supply of public housing is therefore both necessary given the demand and is in the long term best interest of the ACT Government and those living in the ACT.

Gugan Gulwan Aboriginal Youth Corporation

- **Cost:** \$75,000 (recurrent)
- **Outcomes:** Increased capacity to support young people through drop-in, case management, health promotion programs, early intervention and prevention programs, increased ability to respond to requests for support from other youth services – including government services and increased ability to respond to referrals from other services – including government services.

The ACT Government must provide on-going core funding to Gugan Gulwan Aboriginal Youth Corporation to enable it to meet the demand it has from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the ACT.

Gugan Gulwan has been operating successfully for several years as the only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth Centre in the ACT. The centre has developed a range of effective programs for working with Indigenous young people across the ACT and this has highlighted the importance of Indigenous youth centres in providing culturally appropriate and effective programs for Indigenous young people.

The youth centre, however, has only one drop in space for Indigenous young people and this is in Erindale that makes it inaccessible for many Indigenous young people who live on the Northside. While Gugan Gulwan has developed high quality outreach programs for Indigenous young people in the north, there needs to be a physical space within the north that can be used by Indigenous young people to have their own space similar to the drop in space in the south.

Services such as this are vital for Indigenous young people who continue to face significant disadvantage within the ACT. Indigenous young people continue to be over represented in many indicators of risk including representing 45% of those remanded in Quamby Youth Detention Centre,³ at the age of 17 they are 20% less likely to be in school and nine times more likely to live in out of home care.⁴

Additional funding could be used by Gugan Gulwan to meet the current gaps they experience which include increased capacity at their Erindale centre and provide young Indigenous people in the north with a safe space to speak with youth workers and other professionals and to implement early intervention and prevention programs designed to reduce the instances of risk factors in Indigenous young people in the ACT.

This initiative would increase the amount of support provided to Indigenous young people and assist in reducing the significant disadvantage experienced by Indigenous young people in the ACT.

³ ACT Government (2005) *ACT Criminal Justice Statistical Profile March 2005 Quarter* p23

⁴ ACT Government (2004) *A Social and Cultural Profile of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Canberra* p23, p19

Indigenous Alternative Education

- **Cost:** \$35,000 (recurrent)
- **Outcomes:** improved literacy and numeracy for Indigenous young people, increased school attendance; improved attendance levels by engaging parents and the community; provision of flexibility to meet Indigenous community cultural and other needs; utilisation of skills of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers to improve attendance levels; greater focus on ensuring culturally inclusive approaches to education planning and delivery; and increased health and well-being of Indigenous young people.

The ACT Government should provide \$35,000 in recurrent funding to Gugan Gulwan Aboriginal Youth Corporation to continue their Indigenous Alternative Education Program.

This program is currently funded through the Community Inclusion Fund and this funding will cease by early 2008. The program has funded a teacher position and education activities for Indigenous young people for over 3 years. The young people participating in this program were experiencing significant difficulties attending mainstream school. These difficulties included family issues, poverty, violence, alcohol and other drug issues, and homelessness.

Continued funding will enable a teacher and education activities to continue to be provided to Indigenous young people. It is well known that Indigenous young people have poorer educational outcomes than non-Indigenous young people. It is vital that this program continues in order to support these young people to remain engaged in learning.

The ACT Government has repeatedly stated its commitment to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to achieve their potential. Successful programs, such as this, are vital in supporting the Government to achieve its goals.

The ACT Government acknowledged that achieving an acceptable literacy and numeracy standard for Indigenous children and young people would require extra effort and resources⁵. The provision of funding for this Indigenous Alternative Education program will assist in improving levels of literacy and numeracy amongst this group.

It is vital that this commitment is made to remove the educational disadvantages that Indigenous students face, so that they can be more involved in, and benefit more from the opportunities Canberra has to offer.

⁵ *National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2000 – 2004)*

Indigenous Family Support Worker

- **Cost:** \$102,060 (recurrent)
- **Outcomes:** Improved support provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families who are involved with the Care and Protection system; improved government and non-government collaborations; and improved system coordination.

Child abuse and neglect associated with Indigenous communities cannot be understood, nor addressed, unless it is viewed from a broad perspective, which includes both historical and present day issues. Measures centred around community based responses which empower Indigenous Australians are needed, in order to protect Indigenous children from serious levels of abuse which they are presently experiencing⁶.

The ACT Government should provide \$102,060 in recurrent funding to fund the Family Support Worker Project. The Project is a partnership between Gugan Gulwan Aboriginal Youth Corporation, Winnunga Nimmilyjah and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Unit in the Office of Children, Youth and Family Support. It is currently being funded as a pilot program and the funding will cease in February 2008.

The aim of the Family Support Worker Project is to maximize coordination across services, and improve responsiveness in Care and Protection matters whilst ensuring duplication and overlap is minimised. The Project provides culturally appropriate support services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families who are at risk of, or who have had, a child removed from their care.

There have been considerable outcomes from the Project, many of which are congruent with the recommendations of the Vardon Report (a review of the ACT child protection system in 2004). Some of these outcomes include increased government and non-government collaborations, and improved outcomes for children, young people and families affected by Care and Protection matters.

It is well documented that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, who are generally disadvantaged on many scales, are particularly over-represented in the care and protection systems. ACT Indigenous children are significantly over-represented in the child protection system⁷. Funding this program will enable the Care and Protection system in the ACT to better respond to Indigenous Families.

⁶ SNAICC (Spring 2003) *Child Abuse Prevention Issues no. 19*

⁷ Vardon, C. (2004) *Territory As Parent*

Indigenous Support Groups

- **Cost:** \$30,000 (recurrent)
- **Outcomes:** Increased capacity to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to deal with issues such as education, family issues, nutrition, hygiene and anger management. Provide support to expand their peer support networks, improve support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young parents, increase the capacity to collaborate with other youth services – including government services, and increase the capacity to respond to referrals from other services – including government services.

The ACT Government should provide \$30,000 in recurrent funding to Gugan Gulwan Aboriginal Youth Corporation to run their Young Men's Mentor Group, Young Women's Mentor Group and Young Mum's Group.

Gugan Gulwan Aboriginal Youth Corporation has been operating successfully for several years as the only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth Centre in the ACT. The centre has developed high quality and effective programs for working with Indigenous young people across the ACT. This has highlighted the importance of Indigenous youth services in providing culturally appropriate and effective programs for Indigenous young people.

Gugan Gulwan is currently trying to run a Young Men's Mentor Group, a Young Women's Mentor Group and a Young Mum's Group. To date, each of these groups have been relying on in-kind support from external agencies. As this support is not sustainable, each of these groups is at serious risk of having to be abandoned. If funding is not received approximately 60 Indigenous young people will no longer be able to access the innovative support groups they have been benefiting from.

Programs such as these groups are vital for Indigenous young people who continue to face significant disadvantage within the ACT. Indigenous young people continue to be over-represented in many indicators of risk. This includes representing 45% of those remanded in Quamby Youth Detention Centre, being 20% less likely to be in school at the age of 17, and 9 times more likely to live in out of home care⁹.

Each of these programs assist young Indigenous people to access a safe space to speak with youth workers and other professionals. Through these programs, youth workers and other professionals have the opportunity to implement early intervention and prevention strategies designed to reduce the instances of risk factors in Indigenous young people in the ACT. Continued funding would ensure that the support being provided to Indigenous young people is able to continue and will assist in reducing the significant disadvantage experienced by many Indigenous young people in the ACT.

⁹ ACT Government (2005) *ACT Criminal Justice Statistical Profile March 2005 Quarter p23*

Adolescent Inpatient Facility

- **Cost:** Unknown
- **Outcomes:** More appropriate acute mental health care for young people experiencing mental illness, better health outcomes for young people.

We urge the ACT Government to commit funds for the construction and operation of an adolescent inpatient facility to provide safe and appropriate mental health care to young people in the ACT.

While the ACT Government has funded a feasibility study, no funding has yet been allocated to the development and construction of this much needed facility. The youth and mental health sectors last year welcomed a step-up step-down facility but in order to establish an appropriate continuum of care, an adolescent inpatient facility is required.

Young people currently accessing the Psychiatric Services Unit are treated in an environment that is not age-appropriate and can be at time, unsafe. This is not an acceptable situation.

The Government has taken a strong and commendable position on the establishment of a youth justice centre that is based on best practice, rehabilitation and human rights. We strongly urge the government to apply this same reasoning to the establishment of an adolescent inpatient facility as the young people accessing this facility are also a highly at risk group that need and deserve high quality health care.

Multicultural Youth Services

- **Cost:** \$150,000 (recurrent)
- **Outcomes:** Maintain current service provision for young people from multicultural backgrounds, increase support for other services working with multicultural young people.

The ACT Government should maintain funding equivalent to that currently provided by the Community Inclusion Board (\$80,000) and provide additional funding (\$70,000) to increase the organisation's capacity to support other services working with multicultural young people and work more extensively with multicultural young people and unsafe/illegal driving.

Multicultural Youth Services (MYS) has developed into a specialised organisation with a high degree of organisational knowledge and skill in working with young people from multicultural backgrounds – particularly with newly arrived refugees. The service won an ACT Early Intervention Award in 2006 and supports more than 35 young refugees and migrants each day. The service has built up a high level of trust within the young multicultural population and has built up expertise that is recognised in the service sector.

The closure of this service will result in a significant gap in service provision and the loss of a very significant support to those from multicultural backgrounds and those who have escaped violence and trauma and come to Australia to seek refuge.

Maintaining the current funding of \$80,000 will enable the service to continue to provide essential support such as case management, drop in space, brokerage and resettlement assistance.

The additional funding of \$70,000 will assist the service to provide support to other mainstream services working with multicultural young people and increased support to respond to current issues.

An example of current issues is the rise in unsafe and illegal driving by young refugees. As many refugees move to Australia without driving skills and without parents who have the capacity to teach their children to drive, many face barriers to learning to drive. They also are unlikely to be fully aware of the road rules and expectations of levels of safety. This is compounded by their employment which is most likely to be at non-peak travel periods and in areas poorly serviced by public transport such as Mitchell and Hume. As such, there are highly levels of poor driver safety and of driving without a licence.

The funding would enable MYS to run programs aimed at increasing the knowledge and safety of young refugees who are driving in the ACT and reduce instances of serious accidents and illegal activity.

Car Registration

- Cost: Unknown
- Outcomes: Increased car registrations, fewer fines/charges/court cases/detention periods.

The ACT Government should introduce a scheme of subsidised car registration for those who hold a Health Care Card or Low Incomes Card. This would reduce the financial burden of car registration and encourage people to register their vehicles in the ACT.

The total cost of car registration in the ACT is higher than any other state or territory in Australia for an average car for private use. While this cost includes third party insurance, the cost of registration is highly prohibitive – particularly to those living on a low wage.

For those living on very low wages or solely on Centrelink support, they are unlikely to be able to afford the cost of registration for their vehicles. We know that this is particularly the case for young people who are studying, on training wages or on youth wages. For some of these young people, they are living on a marginal income and the cost of registering a car for between \$600 and \$700 is a huge financial burden that many young people in this position are unable to afford.

For those who do pay their registration, they are likely to experience financial hardship while others will be inclined to drive unregistered vehicles which leads to contact with the justice system and a spiralling affect of fines for those unable to pay in the first instance.

While some suggest that they should simply rely on public transport, due to their low incomes, many of these people have been pushed to the fringes of Canberra and live in areas poorly serviced by public transport and are reliant on a car for work or education.

Introducing a scheme of subsidised car registration would make a significant difference to some of Canberra's most marginalised people and would reduce the likelihood of contact with the justice system and with police.

Learning to Drive Vouchers

- Cost: \$ 90,000 per year (ongoing)
- Outcomes: Driving lessons for 300 young people who are at risk of being unsafe to reduce risk of accidents, car damage, property damage and personal injury – including hospital admissions and long term medical care.

We encourage the ACT Government to develop a program that provides free driving lessons for young people who are at risk of becoming unsafe drivers through an absence of supervised driving opportunities. This would reduce young drivers' accidents and injuries on ACT roads.

Young drivers are four times more likely to have an accident than experienced drivers and the deaths of young people on the road are a high profile media issue. Young people's ability to drive safely is ultimately a reflection of their experience on the road and in supervised learning. While many young people have a family car to practice in and parents to assist them, there are some young people who do not.

A group of young people face difficulty in obtaining supervised assistance for a number of reasons that may include not having a family car, no parent who can drive and a lack of money to afford driving lessons. These young people – who often live on the geographic margins of the ACT – have no choice but to drive, as the bus service is not an adequate form of transport to school and work.

Young people who do not have the opportunity to learn to drive with a family member or friend and who cannot afford driving lessons will, in some instances, drive regardless. When young people drive unlicensed and without practice, their instances of accidents are much higher. By providing a program involving 10 free lessons to young people who would not otherwise have learnt to drive, will significantly decrease their chance of being involved in an accident.

This program could be administered by providing vouchers to organisations currently running Road Ready courses.

Bit Bent

- **Cost:** \$40,000 (recurrent)
- **Outcomes:** Creation of a sustainable service, broaden the scope of the service to additional regions in Canberra, reduced isolation and stigma for GLBTI young people and improved access to information.

The ACT Government should provide funding to the Bit Bent Program in order to ensure the program is sustainable given the unique and important nature of the service.

The Bit Bent Program has been running successfully for almost 5 years based on the contribution of volunteers and is at risk of closing down if it cannot get the funding it requires to support the young people who access the service. Up to 11% of young people are not unequivocally heterosexual⁹, this equates to up to 7694 young people in the ACT¹⁰. Currently, there is no funded service specifically for young people who are Gay, Lesbian, Bi-Sexual, Transgender or Intersex (GLBTI).

Up to 70 GLBTI young people, or almost 1% of the GLBTI youth population in the ACT, are currently accessing the Bit Bent Program. The program receives in-kind support from a range of agencies but is unable to meet the growing demand and the increasing complexity of issues of the young people who are accessing the program.

The Bit Bent Program support GLBTI young people to become connected within their community, develop peer and service system supports, and provides regular educational and recreational activities.

The service needs funding in order to continue to be sustainable. The funding would reimburse facilitators for their time, pay for venue costs and other program costs – including food and recreational activities. Additional funding would also support the program to expand to regions beyond Belconnen and Woden. It is vital this program is funded as it provides one of the only services to GLBTI young people in the ACT, the loss of this service would be highly detrimental to the young people currently accessing the service and for all GLBTI young people in Canberra.

⁹ Hillier, L., Matthews, L. & Dempsey, D. (1997) A low priority in a hierarchy of needs: A profile of the sexual health needs of homeless young people in Australia. National Centre in HIV Social Research, La Trobe University, Carlton.

¹⁰ Based on 2005 Australian Bureau of Statistics there were 69,946 people aged 12 – 25 years residing in the ACT.

Youth Support Workers in Schools PD

- **Cost:** \$19,000 per year (recurrent)
- **Outcomes:** Youth Support Workers who are well trained and more proficient in their work; better support provided for young people in government high schools.

Youth Support Workers in Schools need additional funding to participate in professional development and networking opportunities that are on par with other school and government staff.

Youth Support Workers in Schools play an important role within all the high schools in the ACT supporting young people and building collaborative practice across schools and the community. Their role in schools is relatively new but they have never been formally allocated a training and professional development budget.

These workers have now been incorporated within schools but not all have been given resources for professional development. This severely disadvantages these workers as they are required to work with students across a vast range of areas that are complex and dynamic. Issues such as mental health, alcohol and drugs homelessness, behaviour management, group work and social skills involve constantly updated research and best practice.

Youth Support Workers in Schools must be able to engage in networking, training and professional development in order to remain up to date with developments in the field and to perform their job with a high degree of proficiency. We suggest that the 19 workers should be allocated a budget of at least \$1,000 each.

We strongly urge the ACT Government to provide Youth Support Workers in Schools with a training and professional development budget that reflects their need to be appropriately trained and skilled in their work.

Youth Law Centre (ACT)

- **Cost:** \$60,000-\$80,000 (recurrent).
- **Outcomes:** Individual legal support for additional young people, community information and education for young people.

We encourage the ACT Government to provide funding to build capacity in the Youth Law Centre (ACT).

Young people in the ACT have a complex range of legal issues that affect their lives. In particular, young people are affected by legal issues in areas such as employment, insurance, contracts and debt, traffic issues, rental and housing issues, Centrelink benefits, family issues and criminal matters. Young people need access to legal advice to avoid exploitation and unfair and illegal treatment.

It is recognised that young people often do not know where to seek help and may require more assistance in dealing with legal matters than older members of the community – particularly those without the capacity to draw on family or extended social group supports.

A legal service for young people currently exists in the shape of the Youth Law Centre (ACT) and is a partnership between Legal Aid, Clayton Utz, the ANU and the Youth Coalition of the ACT. However, the service does not receive any ACT Government funding. This means that it does not have the capacity to do outreach and engage with young people in youth services and young people in schools. This limits their ability to do community legal education.

While there are currently a number of Community Legal Centres in Canberra none are able to provide assistance to young people across all these areas of law and none are able to develop young people specific legal education and have the capacity to deliver it.

Providing extra funding to the Youth Law Centre would enable the service to engage in outreach and education. This would not duplicate the Legal Aid community education position as this position must educate the whole community about legal issues and cannot specialise and focus on young people and meet the existing need.

Additional funding would enable the service to make young people aware of its existence and demand for the service would match the need for the service. Many young people who require legal assistance do not identify that their issue is a legal issue for example insurance matters or employment issues. Face to face contact and relationship building is therefore very important and funding the service to employ someone to do outreach work would achieve this. It would also allow the service to provide legal advice outside a fixed location.

This funding would also allow for the service to run education on youth legal issues in schools and to young people in community organisation programs. Such a proposal would allow someone to cover a larger area and reach many young people every year.

Social and Demographic Profile

- Cost: Unknown
- Outcomes: Better understanding of young people in the ACT, better targeted services and increased ability to plan for the future.

The ACT Government should invest in the development of a second Social and Demographic Profile of Young People in the ACT.

In 2002, the ACT Government produced a document entitled *Youth in the ACT: A Social and Demographic Profile* that compiled a range of statistical information on young people. The document provided both government and the non-government agencies with indicators of social and demographic trends for young people.

The production of this document enabled the ACT Government to document the experiences of young people in the Territory and to bring to light the contribution of young people in the ACT, the needs of young people and in Territory and emerging trends for the future.

The document, however, was produced using data from the 1996 Census which is now outdated. For example, there is no mention of African nations in the country of origin for newly arrived young people in the ACT as these were negligible in 1996 but not are a very significant part of the demographic profile.

Therefore, we suggest that a new profile be developed updating the statistics used in this document with, for example, the 2006 Census Data to ensure that the ACT Government and community sector is able to use the best possible data when making decisions about service provision to young people in the ACT.