

The Youth Coalition recognises that in the vast majority of cases families are best placed and most appropriate to ensure the care and protection of young people. As such, there is a need for increased resources to be put into early intervention and prevention initiatives that aim to support families. In situations where young people do come into contact with the care and protection system, there needs to be additional support for transitioning and exiting while the continued over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people needs to be immediately addressed.

Increased support to families is one of the most significant ways in which the care and protection of young people is best secured. Research indicates the effectiveness of early intervention and prevention in reducing both the costs of young people becoming involved the government's care and protection system and, more importantly, the health, wellbeing and happiness of young people. As a result, more resources must be invested in both short and long term support for families. As a community we have a responsibility to provide both support and protection to children and young people and investment in families is one of the more effective ways of achieving this.

While the focus for the care and protection of young people should be through early intervention and prevention, the need for the care and protection system at a government level is necessary. In situations where young people are involved in the care and protection system, the focus should be on the wellbeing and best interests of the young people concerned, as highlighted by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the principles in the ACT's *Children and Young People's ACT 1991*.

In order for the wellbeing of young people to be given the highest priority, the Youth Coalition believes that there is a need for the Charter of Rights for Young People in Care to be fully implemented across the ACT. The care and protection system must ensure that young people are treated with dignity, offered all possible supports and that they are meaningfully involved in decision that affect their lives. We believe that this is most effectively achieved through the, on going monitoring role of the Office of the Public Advocate and the independence of the Commissioner for Children and Young People.

In recognising the diversity of young people involved in the care and protection system, the Youth Coalition believes that while some young people may be highly independent and able to transition easily out of the system, this is not the case for others. In the current system, young people must be transitioned out of the system once they reach the age of 18, sometimes without adequate supports in place for their independent living. This could be one of the contributing factors to the high rates of homelessness, unemployment and contact with the justice system and lower health indicators experience by young people who have been in care.

The Youth Coalition believes that young people need to be offered transitional supports from the care and protection system until the age of 21 in order for them to make more successful transitions into other arrangements and that this would also reduce the likelihood of their marginalisation after leaving the care and protection system. This must also be accompanied by increased transitional supports and exit planning that adequately supports young people exiting from the care and protection system.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are over represented in the care and protection system yet the care and protection system has been found to systematically neglect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.¹ This over representation indicates a lack of provision of family support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. The lack of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander foster carers and workers in the care and protection system are also of concern and need to be addressed in order for young people to be afforded the highest possible level of care.

The Youth Coalition is committed to:

- ◆ Advocating for a substantial increase in the resources provided for early intervention and prevention programs for families.
- ◆ Advocating for the Charter of Rights for Young People in Care to be fully implemented and for this to be adequately resourced for those working with young people in care and for young people in care.
- ◆ Advocating for increased collaboration between government and non-government stakeholders in the care and protection system.
- ◆ Advocating for the issue of Indigenous over representation in care to be addressed both locally and nationally as a priority issue.
- ◆ Advocating for increased exit planning and transitional support for young people in care, building upon existing initiatives such as the Transition to Independent Living Allowance.
- ◆ Advocating for young people up to the age of 21 years to be supported by the care and protection system
- ◆ Advocating for the sustainable funding of community based, youth led initiatives that are focused on young people's meaningful participation.

¹ Gwenn Murray (2004) *The Territory's Children Ensuring Safety and Quality Care for Children and Young People: Report on the Audit and Case Review*. p.vi