

The Youth Coalition believes that young people make and have dynamic cultures that are distinct and separate from the broader ACT culture while also making other significant contributions to culture in the ACT. Young people's own experiences are incorporated in the cultural fabric of the territory through young people's public art works, music and other cultural expressions. Young people's participation in sporting activities is central to their wellbeing with many health benefits arising from engaging in sport. Yet young people's participation in many cultural, sporting and recreational activities is predicated on their ability to access affordable and quality facilities and programs.

Young people have the right under Article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CROC) to rest, leisure, recreation and the participation in cultural life and the arts. Public expressions of culture through art, dance, music and theatre play an important role in sharing young people's experiences between each other and the wider community. Young people's individual cultures are influential in their development of self-identities and individual and collective youth cultures are important in cultural awareness raising. These cultures can be both self-generating and sustaining as well as supported by other groups within young people's communities such as the youth sector and schools.

The benefits for young people's wellbeing as a result of being involved in physical recreational activities are clearly demonstrated. Physical recreation can reduce obesity, high blood pressure and Type 2 diabetes as well as protecting against some forms of cancer and strengthening the musculoskeletal system and improving mental wellbeing through reducing feelings of stress, anxiety and depression.¹ Therefore, the ability for young people to take part in physical recreation is a key determinant of their wellbeing. The Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing recommends that for young people to attain benefits from exercise, they must take part in moderate-intensive physical activity for a duration of at least 60 minutes on at least five days of the week.²

Young people in the ACT aged 18-25 years have higher levels of engagement in sport than every other older age bracket with around 80% of young people engaged in sporting activities.³ This is also significantly higher than the national average rate of participation of only 74%.⁴ The Youth Coalition also recognises that young people engage in sport which is not formerly organised such as street sports that have been dramatically increasing in popularity. Almost 25% of these young people are involved in swimming as their main form of physical recreation, which is again much higher than both other age groups in the ACT and the Australian average for young people.⁵ This is likely to be the result of the high quality and well distributed swimming pools around Canberra. However, this highlights the need for swimming facilities to be well maintained and supported by the ACT Government and for pools to continue to be accessible to young people.

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2006) *Australia's Health 2006* p162

² Ibid

³ ACT Government (2002), *Youth in the ACT: A Social and Demographic Profile*, p115

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid p116

The ability for young people to access sporting, recreational and arts facilities is central to their ability to participate and interact with these programs. Public transport is vital for many young people to access these services, yet young people face barriers to attending evening events when public transport runs infrequently, particularly at night and on the weekends. Venues and programs must be affordable for young people. They must also be able to offer young people interesting and engaging programs and be supportive of programs initiated by young people – particularly projects that may not be mainstream and may reflect diverse cultures. This is particularly the case for young people who engage in art through graffiti and stencilling who lack legal sites to exhibit their artwork.

The Youth Coalition is committed to:

- ◆ Advocating for the provision of facilities that are accessible for young people.
- ◆ Advocating for the provision of affordable facilities for use by young people.
- ◆ Advocating for the provision of high quality facilities and programs for young people.
- ◆ Advocating for the funding of cultural programs that give young people the ability to develop and express their own cultures and sub-cultures.
- ◆ Advocating for further supports for female engagement in a diverse range of sports and recreational activities.
- ◆ Advocating for the continued maintenance of cultural and sporting facilities to ensure they are kept to a high standard.
- ◆ Identifying alternative systems for supporting young people engaged in non-mainstream activities that may be difficult for government to target due to their non-traditional structures.
- ◆ Supporting graffiti and stencilling as public art and furthering opportunities for young people to engage in legal graffiti and stencilling work.
- ◆ Supporting positive images of young people, youth culture and young people engaged in recreational activities and combating negative stereotypes.