

The Youth Coalition recognises that young people are citizens and as such, participate in society. Their participation occurs in a variety of ways and may, at times, go unnoticed by those who are not directly involved. However, young people's participation in decisions that affect them and the life of their community is valuable and has a range of positive outcomes for young people and those who engage with them.

The range of ways that young people participate is broad, covering areas such as formal and informal volunteering, informal political action, activities with political implication, awareness raising, altruistic acts and general social participation.¹ The Youth Coalition does not believe that any single measure of participation can define citizenship for young people and that some, in attempts to demonstrate apathy in young people, can overlook the range of ways that young people participate. Statements on apathy often fail to acknowledge the role that young people play in their families and as citizens in their wider communities. The Youth Coalition recognises the high participation rate of young people in the ACT in volunteering with 36.4% of young people volunteering in the ACT compared with the national average of 26.8%.²

Young people's participation has been shown to have a range of positive outcomes for young people and those who work with them. It gives young people ownership over decisions about their lives, increases self confidence and skills, aids them in preparing for their own independent decision making and builds connections between young people and the community. For those who work with young people, it improves the effectiveness of projects and enhances the performance of boards and committees through drawing on the wealth of knowledge and expertise of young people's participation.³

Youth participation is difficult to achieve and requires a commitment from organisations to financially support the process and to build a culture where young people are able to contribute in valuable and meaningful ways. Without adequate support and commitment to the implementation of youth participation policies, organisations are at risk of engaging young people in tokenistic ways.

The Youth Coalition believes that participation should be meaningful and that young people's participation can only be meaningful when young people are adequately informed and supported in their involvement, their contributions are valued and they believe the work they are doing has a purpose.

¹ Noel Smith et al (2005), 'Young People as Real Citizens: Towards an Inclusionary Understanding of Citizenship' *Journal of Youth Studies* 8(4) p438

² ACT Government (2002), *Youth in the ACT: A Social and Demographic Profile* p112

³ David Burfoot (2003), 'Children and Young People's participation; Arguing for a better future' *Youth Studies Australia* 22(3) p45

The Youth Coalition is committed to:

- ◆ Advocating for young people to have equitable access to participate in their communities.
- ◆ Advocating for students to be meaningfully involved in Student Representative Councils and for these councils to work together across the ACT.
- ◆ Involving young people in the Youth Coalition in ways which value and support the contributions they make to the Youth Coalition.
- ◆ Promoting participation strategies that engage young people in supportive and meaningful ways.
- ◆ Recognising that young people participate in a myriad of ways.
- ◆ Recognising that young people have valuable contributions to make to society
- ◆ Recognising that young people's participation has positive outcomes for both young people and those who work with them.
- ◆ Supporting the ACT Government in consulting with young people through the use of diverse and inclusive mechanisms.