



Valuing the Potential

of Canberra's Young People



Canberra**liberals**

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Youth Policy

Valuing the Potential of All Canberra's Young People

Canberra's young people hold the keys to the future of our city and the Canberra Liberals recognise the importance of investing in their development, to give them the best prospects in life and to help the most vulnerable kids feel they have both a valued place and a range of opportunities within the wider community.

Young people cannot be simplistically lumped into one category. The Canberra Liberals recognise the need for ACT Government policy to cater to a wide spectrum of needs.

Our first priority and responsibility is to provide opportunities and tailored support for young Canberrans who face disadvantage, such as indigenous and immigrant youth – particularly refugees and asylum seekers. We are also concerned to work in partnership with community organisations that run positive programs to assist young people who are struggling in the grip of corrosive problems like depression, alcoholism and addiction.

We also recognise that a great many young Canberrans are high achievers and are actively engaged in study, work and sport. Many of these young achievers make an early contribution to volunteer groups and community-based activity. But more can be done to encourage young people, who enjoy a positive outlook in their own life, to get them involved in helping others in the community. A Canberra Liberal Government will also work hard to make our city a more vibrant environment that attracts young people to stay here to begin a career, buy a home and start a family.

Many young people have optimism about their future and a good sense of idealism and justice. Their readiness to care, their energy and their capacity for imagination are among the finest attributes of the human character. A Canberra Liberal Government will work in new ways to forge partnerships with young people that involve them as active contributors in our community.

Safety at Night

The Stanhope Government has not done enough to make young people feel safe when they go to nightspots like Civic, Kingston and Manuka. One of the biggest headaches for young people who socialise in the evening is that they find it hard to get a taxi home. The wait at taxi queues can be prolonged and there have been cases of altercations at cab ranks between commuters who are waiting in line.

Taxi drivers have told us that some drivers are avoiding Friday and Saturday night shifts because of fears over violence, even though it used to be the case that these shifts were popular because of higher pay.

A Canberra Liberal Government will look at a range of solutions to make our nightspots safer, including enhanced lighting, a visible police presence, CCTV cameras and responsible service of alcohol.

One of the most important things we can do is to provide safe and affordable transport options to help young people get home after dark.

The Canberra Liberals have listened to a number of young people, including those on the Youth Advisory Council who have called for an extension of the Nightrider service beyond the summer months. Under the Stanhope Government the Night Rider service only operates over six weeks from December to the new year period, a time when many young people are interstate. This bus service only operates on Fridays and Saturdays, with departures starting from Civic between 1:00 am and 4:45am. The service costs a \$5.00 cash fare and drops passengers within walking distance of their Canberra homes within suburbs listed on the timetable.

An extended Night Rider service would help a number of young people who want to socialise with friends, but are concerned about access to safe, timely and affordable means of departing nightspots after dark. The problem in getting a ride home is also a headache for many of the young people who work in the hospitality industry, in relatively modest paying jobs. They too can find it hard to get home late at night unless they have a car.

The Canberra Liberals will expand the Night Rider bus service to cover more weekends of the year at a cost of approximately \$120,000 per annum. The service will extend to cover Thursday evening through to Saturday evening over most of the summer period. We will also seek sponsorship from other organisations to support further extensions to the service as a road safety initiative.

We will also examine the possibility of an associated loop route in the Night Rider service between nightspots in Civic, Manuka and Kingston.

	2008-09 \$000	2009-10 \$000	2010-11 \$000	2011-12 \$000
Expanded Night Rider services	60	120	124	128
Revenue	18	36	37	38

Social Engagement for Young People Who Need it Most

A significant portion of Stanhope Government activities directed at the youth population is confined to filling a gap after problems have taken hold. The Canberra Liberals recognise that it is important to support programs that give young people a sense of worth and involvement in their community and have a preventative character.

A Canberra Liberal Government will provide funding to our youth centres and youth development programs so they can provide scholarships to improve participation by disadvantaged youths. These scholarships will be directed at target groups of indigenous youth, migrant youths (particularly from refugees and asylum seeker families) and youths from disadvantaged households.

We will provide \$138,000 over the next four years to support scholarships at Canberra's youth centres and in youth development programs, to engage a greater share of our city's disadvantaged young people in expanded and enhanced youth programs. This funding will assist with travel costs, meal costs and will provide recognition for youths who progress through and complete programs and will reward those who graduate into leadership roles in programs at the centres.

	2008-09 \$000	2009-10 \$000	2010-11 \$000	2011-12 \$000
Engagement Scholarships to support disadvantage youths in youth programs.	15	40	41	42

This investment will help raise the profile of the current youth centre network and improve access by young people who would benefit the most from their services.

A Canberra Liberal Government will also ensure that teachers, parents and the community at large are more aware of the opportunities and support available at the ACT's youth centres. We will encourage young people who not currently involved to pay a visit together with their friends, and to have a go at an activity in a local centre.

From Breakdowns to Breakthroughs

Our formative years are both times of exploration and huge uncertainty. It is important to young people to feel that their worth and potential is recognised. Unfortunately despite the best endeavours of many parents and the broader community, some young people can find themselves in situations of despair and doubt. Young people in crisis need sympathetic people they can turn to, who are trained and experienced in dealing in their specific needs.

The ACT community has a very large population of young students studying at our four universities, including international students and students from interstate who are living away from home for the first time. We recognise that the struggle through university is not just a question of academic perseverance, it can also depend on the emotional resilience of students who can face challenges of loneliness, financial struggle and stress. The type of counselling services provided through our universities varies between institutions and it can be difficult for students to access help outside of normal business hours.

Sometimes young people need emotional resources to help them through tough relationship issues, other times they may face financial difficulty or health problems and can be in need of referral to government services. It will be easier for young people to seek help if they have the assurance that there is a confidential service available that is designed for their specific needs and circumstances. There are already valuable phone services available for people in crisis, but more could be done to provide support designed for young people, face-to-face support and after-hours support.

A Canberra Liberal Government will provide an after-hours youth counselling service that includes a helpline and a mobile outreach service. This service will use qualified counsellors and will be available for students at university, as well as to younger teens. The service will be built on a partnership between government and non-government organisations.

A Canberra Liberal Government will provide \$360,000 over the next four years to support this investment in improved support for young people in crisis. We will seek to involve non-government partners who can help organise post-crisis support for young people, by building peer support networks and buddy arrangements. A key focus of this new service will be to offering ongoing support mechanisms in their lives, including through creating new relationships.

	2008-09 \$000	2009-10 \$000	2010-11 \$000	2011-12 \$000
After-hours Youth Counselling Service	20	110	113	117

We will also support a range of initiatives to ensure we can help young people before they feel they have reached a point of crisis in their life.

A Canberra Liberal Government will also review the *Suicide Prevention Strategy 2005-2008*, with particular regard to the recommendations that

were made in early drafts of the report and subsequently watered down.

We will also initiate serious discussions in the Legislative Assembly about the purchase and consumption of alcohol by young people, and work with community groups and business on the problem of binge drinking and addiction.

Early drafts of the suicide prevention strategy released in 2005 included recommendations supporting the expansion of life skills programs for apprentices and trainees. The recommendations also supported the development of a consolidated men's health and well being plan. Neither recommendation made it into the final report. A Canberra Liberal Government will give these recommendations the public airing and serious consideration they deserve.

Underage drinking and binge drinking by young people are problems that should not be ignored. Evidence suggests that the marketing habits of some suppliers encourages irresponsible behaviour. We will review the arrangements for marketing and sale of alcohol, in particular incentives to buy excessive volumes of alcohol.

Support for Teen Parents

Welfare organisations are reporting an increase in young, expectant parents who are at risk. Some are already homeless and both parents tend to drop out of school. There are few accommodation options for young, expecting couples. There is a shortage of assistance to very vulnerable young people, especially young men.

A Canberra Liberal Government will conduct a pilot program which provides assistance to teen parents. The pilot will provide a range of skills and services to assist and encourage young people to continue with education and training. The support program will include efforts to encourage young men to remain involved in the lives of their children and to share some of the parenting work.

The pilot will tap into existing programs and services provided by government agencies, as well as non government organisations like Menslink and service providers like Karinya House. The pilot will seek to address all the needs of young parents, both of whom are often stigmatised.

	2008-09 \$000	2009-10 \$000	2010-11 \$000	2011-12 \$000
Support for Teen Parents - Trial		100	200	

Office of Children and Young People

The Office of Children and Young People has been subject to considerable review and a major injection of funding in the past four years. There has been a significant recruitment drive but there are still ongoing issues with staff shortages and staff turnover.

Recent cases indicate that not all the systems and lines of communications are working as effectively as they can for the benefit of children at risk, their families and the staff and members of the community that provide such important services to our most vulnerable children.

In government the Canberra Liberals will audit of all the recommendations of all the reviews of Children's Services to ensure that they have been fully implemented and are operational.

A Canberra Liberal government will also review all co-operation mechanisms between the Office of Children and Young People, health, education and police to ensure we are operating the most seamless services possible.

We will conduct a review of care and protection complaints mechanisms to ensure that reports of children at risk do not slip through the net.

Taking Youth Seriously

Young Canberrans have a great stake in the future of our city. They are as entitled to be heard by government as any other sector in society.

A Canberra Liberal Government will consult regularly with young people, including peak youth bodies, to seek their views on the way in which mainstream services are meeting the needs of young people and how they can be improved.

We will acknowledge young leaders who have sponsored fresh ideas and visionary ideas for our city. And we will recognise outstanding young people who have contributed in exceptional ways to community-building activities, whether in youth services, culture, sport or in charitable services.

We will also consult with teachers and other professionals who help young people, to listen seriously to their advice and ideas. We will support innovative educational programs that instil values-based and character-building principles into the life of young people and help them to think critically and make ethical choices.

We will work with a range of community groups including the Scouting and Guiding movements, Outward Bound, Menslink and the PCYCs to support and develop programs that help young people build skills and confidence.

We will seek to improve access to facilities and services in the areas of transport, sport and recreation and accommodation. Many young Canberrans leave the city they have grown up in, to start a career interstate. A Canberra Liberal Government will be strongly committed to diversifying the ACT economy, to broaden the range of local career choices available to younger generations of Canberrans. A more diversified Canberra economy will provide a more vibrant social environment, with access to a diverse range of recreational pursuits.