



## YMCA COMMITMENT TO YOUTH

*“Honesty, Caring, Respect and Responsibility”*

The YMCA values the uniqueness and diversity of young people. The YMCA exists to empower and support young people to reach their potential and develop resilience. The YMCA works to connect young people to their communities. The YMCA advocates for young people, and provides platforms for their voices to be heard. We ensure that all our services are accessible to young people.

The YMCA seeks to be known in Australia for its expertise in youth engagement, youth leadership and youth empowerment.

Our commitment to Australia’s youth will be achieved by our Member Associations through:

- **Fostering Youth Empowerment**  
*We proactively seek to encourage and provide opportunities that maximise decisions made by young people, benefit young people with tangible outcomes, providing for access, equity, inclusiveness and diversity. We seek to provide opportunities that involve real challenges and development.*
- **Encouraging Leadership**  
*We recognise that young people are not just ‘the leaders of tomorrow’ – they are also the leaders of today. We provide opportunities for young people to learn about themselves and develop leadership skills for life.*
- **Involving and engaging young people in decision making at all levels.**  
*We are committed to youth participation. We provide opportunities for young people to be involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of programs and services. We are creative in finding ways young people can meaningfully engage in decision making processes. We believe that the best youth programs are run by young people for young people with a sense of project ownership.*
- **Advocating for and with young people.**  
*We develop relationships and partnerships that advance the needs of young people. We use our position of strength as a major national provider of youth services to advocate nationally, regionally and locally.*
- **Recognising and celebrating the achievements of young people**  
*We believe that youth work is about celebrating and building on the existing assets of the young person, in a manner based on positivity, hope and encouragement.*

## BACKGROUND

### History

The YMCA, since its inception in 1844 in London, has been a youth development organisation. It was developed by a 22 year old drapery merchant named George Williams – making us one of the first truly youth-led charities. He gathered together a few friends to form a society that met regularly to support each other and focus on holistic personal development. He knew that all people are made up of a body, a mind and a spirit, and that the fostering of strength in each was of equal importance.

There is much that George Williams would recognise in today's YMCA:

- We are still committed to youth development.
- We are still committed to providing opportunities for all people to grow in body, mind and spirit.
- The Y has retained a structure whereby local people decide what programs and services their local Y offers, based on local need
- We are still committed to the provision of volunteering opportunities.

### The YMCA of Today

Every week, over 300,000 young Australians experience a program or service conducted by an Australian YMCA.

The YMCA offers youth services in every state and territory. Currently 23% of the YMCA's customers, and 42% of our staff, are of youth age.

Less than 1% of the YMCA's revenue is generated through government funding. The YMCA is able to use its size and program diversity to help offset the costs of conducting youth programs. Far from being merely an expender of Government monies, we are able to add a substantial contribution of our own to projects we are involved in.

We are mindful of the following statistics:

Mission Australia in 2012 published national survey results highlighting that Australian youth rank personal relationships with family and friends highly, with emphases on the importance of education and mental health. It was also identified that a large majority of Australian youth feel that they are supported within their community (88.3%). With this being said issues concerning this demographic relate to financial stability (30.8%), population concerns (27.6%) and the effects of drugs and alcohol (21.8%). The future outlook presented by Australian young people is expressed as being positive, with seven out of ten young people reported feeling this way.

The YMCA understands that "Youth" is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community. Youth is a more fluid category than a fixed age-group. The concept of youth is influenced by several variables such as peers, lifestyle, gender and culture.

Age is the easiest way to define Youth however will vary within local, state and federal and international government definitions. Therefore within YMCA movement and when we are carrying out Youth Strategies there will be different definitions of youth depending on the context. Due to YMCA board range and inclusive programming “Youth” means every person between the ages of 12 to 25 years. This grouping includes both adolescents, ages 12-19, and youth, ages 15-25. This broader use of the terms underscores the need for policies and programs to focus less on age and more on recognising the specific developmental needs of people as they transition from childhood to adulthood.

We endorse the guiding principles set out by the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition:

### Young People

- We believe young people have important contributions to make in our community – **now** and in the future. We value their place in Australian life
- We recognise that young people are influenced by their environment, which includes their family, peers, educators, youth workers, health professionals and other members of the community
- We are committed to supporting young people by advocating for their rights.
- We are committed to helping establish an Australian community that respects and values the rights of young people
- We believe in the right of young people to be included and to participate in all aspects of community life, and in the value that their participation brings to the broader community
- We believe in building the capacity of young people, the youth sector and the community to establish powerful and positive approaches to youth engagement.

### Human rights and social justice

- We believe all young people have a right to their human rights being upheld – in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child - and that inequality is not acceptable in our society
- We are committed to Australia removing the inequalities between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young Australians
- We believe that every young person in Australia has a right to access adequate and appropriate programs and services regardless of their geographic location, race, gender, sexuality, physical ability or disability, social, religious or economic circumstances.

### Inclusion and participation

- We are committed to helping establish an Australian community that respects and values the rights of young people
- We believe in the right of young people to be included and to participate in all aspects of community life, and in the value that their participation brings to the broader community
- We believe in building the capacity of young people, the youth sector and the community to establish powerful and positive approaches to youth engagement.

## **Our Scope of Youth programs and services**

### ***Building strengths and assets in all young people***

Youth services require careful and strategic planning to ensure the needs and interests of all young people are catered for.

YMCA Youth Services targets all sections of the youth population. We offer a wide range of strength-based programs and services that cater for the diverse interests of young people and provide assistance in times of need.

Our programs clearly demonstrate the Y's strategic approach to service delivery, some examples are:

- Leadership and Personal Development
- Health and Wellness
- Volunteering and Mentoring opportunities
- Employment Education and Training
- Youth Parliament.

Services to young people should be planned with 'intentional' outcomes in mind, and target all aspects of a young person's development. All YMCA youth services draw on a framework of developmental assets, which form the essential building blocks for healthy human development. These assets are concrete, positive experiences and qualities that underpin the development of young people. Collectively, they can assist the decisions young people make during critical adolescent years and help them become responsible, productive and caring adults.

### **AGREED ACTION**

The YMCA Movement in Australia supports this commitment and will:

- i. Maintain the best standards of practice in youth service delivery:
  - Using an evidence based framework
  - Sharing IP and resources
  - Providing a supportive and welcoming environment for young people
  - YMCA staff and volunteers are appropriately trained and qualified, and are actively involved in youth service networks, peak bodies and partnerships at the local, state and national levels.
- ii. Strive to develop a holistic youth services portfolio, matched to the needs of the young people in its communities.
  - That every young person, wherever they appear on the continuum between "at risk" and "holistically healthy" has the right to have services made available to him/her, and should be able to readily access them.
  - Whilst focusing on the youth development end, the YMCA will ensure resources are directed across the continuum, based on the needs of young people in the community.
  - Each YMCA will be knowledgeable about the needs of young people in its community, and will match program/service provision to those needs.
  - YMCA youth services provide opportunities for the young people of their community to grow in body, mind and spirit.