



YWCA of Canberra

Submission to 2013/14 ACT Government Budget Consultation

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Contact:
Rebecca Vassarotti
Executive Director
YWCA of Canberra

Tel: 02 6175 9900
Fax: 02 6175 9991
E-mail: rebecca.vassarotti@ywca-canberra.org.au

GPO Box 767
Canberra ACT 2601

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The YWCA of Canberra proudly recognises the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including the right to own and control their cultures, and pays respect around these rights. The YWCA of Canberra commits to respecting and actively supporting the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and worldviews.

In recent years the YWCA of Canberra has worked proactively to build respect and opportunities for reconciliation. In October 2009 we launched our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) and in 2011 refreshed and relaunched our RAP.

Our RAP vision is that through progressing reconciliation and healing we will improve the well-being of both the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the wider Australian community. Acknowledging the continuing custodianship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of land and culture, we embrace a grass roots approach involving the whole of the YWCA of Canberra community – clients of our programs, external Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partners, staff, members and Board in our reconciliation journey.

We support initiatives and proposals brought forward in the ACT Budget process that move to address disadvantage, advance reconciliation and support Indigenous peoples' rights and dignity. A particular initiative that has been identified in our RAP is support for the campaign for constitutional recognition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We encourage and support the ACT Government's commitment to this campaign and look forward to opportunities to work in partnership to promote this important recognition.

THE YWCA OF CANBERRA - WHO WE ARE

The YWCA of Canberra is part of a national and international movement.

Strengthened by diversity, the Organisation draws together members to create opportunities for growth, leadership and empowerment of women and girls in order to attain a common vision: peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all people.

The YWCA is one of the world's largest women's organisations. We are represented in 122 countries, and have a global outreach of 25 million.

Across Australia, the YWCA works with approximately 250,000 individuals and families each year in over 270 sites across Australia. YWCA has an annual turnover of \$37 million (over one-third of this money is self-generated) and we provide family-friendly employment for over 700 staff.

The YWCA of Canberra is a flexible and responsive organisation that has been providing services within the Canberra community since its inception in 1929. During 2012 we provided services to over 7500 women, their families and community members across the ACT. The YWCA of Canberra is a feminist organisation with a primary focus on social justice and a passionate commitment to community. Our vision is *women achieving their potential*.

The YWCA of Canberra is a membership organisation, and invites women and men across the ACT to become actively involved in our work. The YWCA of Canberra's Board of Management comprises twelve women elected from and by our membership, at least 30 per cent of who are young women aged 30 or under.

The YWCA of Canberra provides services across the ACT in the areas of Children's Services, Youth and Family Services, Housing and Social Inclusion, Training and Women's Leadership.

OUR VALUES

The YWCA of Canberra believes that everyone who is part of the community has the right to contribute to, and share equally in, the benefits of the community's social, cultural and economic development. The values which guide and inspire our work are:

Equity and fairness – equality of opportunity, rights and access to social, cultural and economic well-being

Diversity – valuing diversity of people and communities and respecting differences in culture, race, religion, sexuality, abilities and lifestyles

Self determination and empowerment – women have the information, skills and resources to participate in community life, exercise choices and control their lives

Women's leadership – especially the development of young women's leadership as a means to creating a better world in which reconciliation, justice, peace, health, human dignity, freedom and care for the environment prevail

Reconciliation with Indigenous Australians – acknowledging the ongoing custodianship by Indigenous Australians of land and culture, and working with Indigenous communities in partnership for the well-being of the whole community

Stewardship – of the resources of the YWCA, our community and our environment.

OUR STRATEGIC GOALS

The YWCA of Canberra works towards the following ends:

- Women influencing, leading and deciding
- Women achieving security and independence through their economic participation
- Women and their families have access to the conditions and resources they need to lead healthy lives: food, shelter, education, income, a sustainable environment, social justice and community cohesion
- Communities that are safe and connected
- Children and young people building the skills and attributes to create a better future
- YWCA of Canberra is a leading, ethical and sustainable organisation.

**100 years to come:
Investing to build a more sustainable and inclusive Canberra for the future**

The YWCA of Canberra is pleased to provide this submission to inform the development of the 2013/14 ACT Government Budget.

Throughout 2013 the ACT community and the ACT Government will be celebrating 100 years of development, growth and change in the ACT. As well as celebrating our history, the centenary provides an opportunity to look forward into the next 100 years of the ACT, and to think about what we need to do now to ensure that the ACT continues to be a vibrant, prosperous and equal community, in which nobody gets left behind.

The *Time to Talk Canberra 2030* visioning process undertaken by the Government in 2010 provided a good first step along this road. This process showed that the community want the Government to lead the process of building a more environmentally, socially and economically sustainable Canberra by 2030.¹ The YWCA of Canberra believes this feedback provides a mandate for Government to drive visionary, innovative and evidenced-based policy making to build a more sustainable and just community in the ACT.

In formulating the 2013/14 Budget, we encourage the Government to continue to work towards this goal and make financial decisions which build on the current strengths of Government, the community and private sectors, as well as address service delivery gaps affecting the most vulnerable people in our community.

The YWCA of Canberra recognises the pressures on the Territory Budget due to the on-going impacts of the global financial crisis and the Government's commitment to return the Budget to surplus in 2015/16. The YWCA of Canberra commends the Government for its commitment to ensure the delivery of core services to a high standard throughout the process of restoring the Territory Budget to surplus.²

Providing sustainable funding for core services is however a prerequisite to high quality and consistent service delivery. As our submission highlights, there are a number of core service areas which require Government resourcing and attention in 2013/14. These are:

1. Sustainable funding for the homelessness sector and innovation in responding to the housing affordability crisis in the ACT
2. Supporting young people to achieve their potential through investment in youth engagement services and flexible learning options for young people at risk of disengaging with education.
3. Supporting child care providers to enable them to provide services for children with disabilities
4. Eliminating all forms of violence against women and creating an anti-violence culture in the ACT

¹ Elton Consulting, 2010, *Time to Talk: Canberra 2030 Outcomes Report*, ACT Government, December, 5.

² ACT Government 2012, *Australian Capital Territory Budget Consultation 2013-14: A budget Overview Prepared for the 2013-14 Budget Consultation Process*, 4.

5. Supporting women's leadership at all levels.

Many of these have been the subject of election promises or form part of the Parliamentary Agreement; however others have unfortunately not been prioritised through these processes. The YWCA of Canberra believes that investment in all of these services and issues is vital to achieving the goal of a more sustainable and equitable Canberra community.

In seeking to introduce more efficient, innovative and productive work practices as a means to achieve high quality service delivery in the current economic environment, the YWCA of Canberra recommends the Government invests in programs and services which respond to need in the community, promote prevention or early intervention, which are grounded in a strong evidence base, and which utilise collaboration and effective partnerships to ensure the best outcomes for their clients through an integrated approach to service delivery.

As the Government is aware, the ACT's image as an affluent society often means the individuals and families in our community that live in poverty are overlooked. The YWCA of Canberra believes that investment in sound and sustainable services which meet the needs of vulnerable people in our community must remain a key priority within the 2013/14 Budget.



Rebecca Vassarotti
Executive Director

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the ACT Government commit to maintaining the current level of funding provided to ACT based homelessness services and prioritise the issue within the 2013/14 ACT Budget.
2. That the Government invest in innovative models that aim to provide a range of responses to homelessness and support homelessness service providers to play an active role in responding to the housing affordability crisis in Canberra beyond their traditional service delivery.
3. That further investigation be undertaken into how the land rent scheme can be utilised to support small not-for-profit organisations, like the YWCA of Canberra, to unlock capital and actively participate in addressing housing affordability in Canberra.
4. The YWCA of Canberra calls on the Government to commit to ensuring ACT women will continue to have access to women-specific homelessness services in Canberra.
5. The YWCA of Canberra also calls on the Government to work with community and commercial housing providers to increase the number of available, affordable and appropriate housing options for older people, particularly older women on low incomes.
6. The YWCA of Canberra recommends that the ACT Government consider opportunities to facilitate cross-sectoral projects which work across Directorates, such as the Lanyon Claim Literacy Project, which have a strong evidence-base and promote collaboration as a means to better support children and young people in our community.
7. That the first instalment of funding for therapeutic services for children and young people be delivered in the 2013/14 budget.
8. That the ACT Government supports the United Voices Big Steps campaign to improve the wages of child care educators.
9. The YWCA of Canberra calls on the ACT Government to provide adequate subsidies to support children with special needs to access mainstream school age care programs.
10. The YWCA of Canberra recommends that the ACT Government invest in the ongoing delivery of respectful relationship education to students in primary and high school as a key strategy to eliminate violence against women in our community.
11. That the ACT Government commits funds to provide diverse leadership opportunities for women in the ACT, particularly young women.

Housing Affordability and Homelessness

Access to safe, secure, appropriate and affordable housing is both a basic human right, and a prerequisite for a person to live a healthy, safe and satisfying life.

Unfortunately, housing affordability and homelessness remain significant issues in the ACT. Statistics indicate that each night approximately 1,360 people are homeless in Canberra. In addition to this, 40 per cent of low to moderate income renters and a further 40 per cent of low income mortgage holders are estimated to be in housing stress; placing these people at real risk of homelessness.³

Women and girls face particular gendered vulnerabilities including greater exposure to violence, poverty and inequality, which increase their risk of homelessness.⁴ Older women on low incomes but who don't qualify for public housing are particularly recognised as an emerging risk group for homelessness. Female headed single parent households are more likely to experience poverty and housing stress, as are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. The need to escape domestic violence is a cause of homelessness that predominantly affects women, and remains the key cause for women experiencing homelessness.

Addressing housing affordability and homelessness in a way that recognises and meets the needs of women and their families is key to ensuring Canberra is a community where "all people reach their potential, make a contribution and share the benefits of an inclusive community" as envisaged in the Canberra Social Plan 2011.

For this reason, the YWCA of Canberra recommends that funding for initiatives and services that address housing affordability and homelessness remain a key priority for the ACT Government in 2013/14. ACT Government investment must be directed towards both support services responding to the needs of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, and initiatives which work to break the cycle of homelessness and address the housing affordability crisis in the longer term.

Vibrant and Responsive Homelessness Services

In the immediate term, the YWCA of Canberra is particularly concerned about the impending reduction of funding for homelessness services in the ACT as a result of decreased Commonwealth funding under the National Affordable Housing Agreement. The ACT Government has indicated there will be a reduction in available funding of \$3.7 million in 2013/14 and \$5.9 million in 2014/15 onwards. If the ACT Government does not invest additional funds, this will see a reduction of funding of more than a quarter of the current base – in a system that is already acknowledged not to be meeting the significant demand. This will have a devastating impact on some of the most vulnerable people in our community and will see a significant increase in primary homelessness with fewer services available to address both the crisis and underlying issues for people facing homelessness.

High-quality and responsive homelessness services are an integral element of addressing housing affordability issues in our community.

³ ACT Shelter, 2012, *Towards a Fairer Housing System in the ACT. Priorities for Change 2012-2014*, ACT Shelter Inc. Canberra.

⁴ Homelessness Australia 2011, *Homelessness and Women*, factsheet, Homelessness Australia, last viewed 23 February 2013

<<http://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/UserFiles/File/Fact%20sheets/Fact%20Sheets%202011-12/Homelessness%20%20Women%202011-12%288%29.pdf>>

We recognise the Government is undertaking consultation about changes to the sector and a new costing model. The recommendations paper put forward by the Joint Pathways Sub-Committee promotes a service system that is able to provide person centred, timely and flexible responses to address the needs and experiences of individuals at different stages and with different needs. The challenge of introducing a new service system will be in ensuring that services continue to respond to the evidence base and are provided in an integrated and seamless manner. The impact of introducing a new service system at a time where there has been the foreshadowing of a significant funding reduction must be acknowledged and minimised. To minimise the impact of this, it is important that the reform and procurement processes are transparent, well managed, and timely, and that changes and developments continue to be communicated to the sector as they occur.

Ensuring high-quality service provision that meets the principles articulated in the Joint Pathways Sub-Committee paper and appropriate professional standards cannot be compromised. This is particularly important given the vulnerability of clients accessing homelessness services. There needs to be acknowledgement that achieving this requires fair and equitable funding. Given existing services are already unable to meet demand within the community, the YWCA of Canberra is extremely concerned about the impact to the ACT community if existing services are reduced.

Recommendation 1: The YWCA of Canberra calls on the ACT Government to commit to maintaining the current level of funding provided to ACT based homelessness services and prioritise the issue within the 2013/14 ACT Budget.

Preventing homelessness before it occurs

The YWCA of Canberra also recommends that the ACT Government invests in prevention and early intervention measures in responding to the issues of housing affordability and homelessness.

As a provider of homelessness services, we are increasingly concerned about the reduction of exit points for families accessing our transitional accommodation services. As a result of this, we are working with Community Housing Canberra, to develop our own affordable housing program. In 2013, we will have seven affordable housing tenancies including two one bedroom units in Bruce, and a group house for five women in Spence, Lady Heydon House.

The YWCA of Canberra recognises the potential in this area for more innovative collaborative practice which draws upon the expertise and investment of the community sector, private business and government to respond to the issue of housing affordability and homelessness in our community.

We have welcomed the ACT Government's commitment to this issue and particularly appreciate support such as the Franklin Charity House initiative that will facilitate significant donations to organisations doing work in this area, including the YWCA of Canberra. We hope the ACT Government continues to support innovative and integrated responses to housing affordability in our community.

Recommendation 2: We encourage the Government to invest in innovative models that aim to provide a range of responses to homelessness and support homelessness service providers to play an active role in responding to the housing affordability crisis in Canberra beyond their traditional service delivery.

One particular area warranting further investigation is how the land rent scheme can be utilised to support small not-for-profit organisations, like the YWCA of Canberra, to unlock capital to support innovative and targeted housing affordability programs in Canberra, like

Lady Heydon House. The YWCA of Canberra sees the land rent scheme as a possible tool in continuing to grow our work in this area, but we believe further work has to be done to make this program more accessible for not-for-profit organisations.

Recommendation 3: That further investigation be undertaken into how the land rent scheme can be utilised to support small not-for-profit organisations, like the YWCA of Canberra to unlock capital and actively participate in addressing housing affordability in Canberra.

Responding to the specific needs of women and families experiencing homelessness

Domestic violence and sexual assault remain key causes for women experiencing homelessness and accessing homelessness and housing support services. Some homelessness services provide expert specialist support for women and their children fleeing violence including counselling, women's only accommodation and court support. To ensure the sector is adequately responding to the needs of women and their children, it is critical that these services remain an active and vibrant part of the ACT homelessness sector.

The provision of safe spaces for women within generalist homelessness services also remains vital to ensuring women at risk of and experiencing homelessness are safe and supported. This is particularly pertinent given the closure of the only specific homelessness service for young women in 2012.

The YWCA of Canberra recognises the ACT Government's efforts to respond to this through the establishment of an advisory group in relation to young women and homelessness. Whilst this is an important step, the YWCA of Canberra encourages the ACT Government to take further action to ensure the needs of women, particularly young women, are met within the homelessness sector by ensuring that women-specific services remain an accessible and vibrant part of the service sector.

Recommendation 4: The YWCA of Canberra calls on the Government to commit to ensuring ACT women will continue to have access to women-specific homelessness services in Canberra.

There is significant evidence that older women are also emerging as a particular risk group for housing poverty and insecurity. The YWCA of Canberra has recognised and responded to this through the establishment of Lady Heydon House, in Spence, which will provide high quality, safe, appropriate and affordable housing for low waged women over 50, in a five bedroom group house.

Recommendation 5: The YWCA of Canberra also calls on the Government to work with community and commercial housing providers to increase the number of available, affordable and appropriate housing options for older people, particularly older women on low incomes.

Supporting young people to achieve their potential

The YWCA of Canberra commends the ACT Government for its commitments to provide increased funds to support children and young people in our community as part of its 2012 election promises and the Parliamentary Agreement.

In particular, the YWCA of Canberra is pleased to note the promise of increased investment in youth engagement services and youth centres across the ACT region. As per the Parliamentary Agreement, this is expected to be \$1.2 million per annum for the next four years.

As a provider of youth engagement services in the Tuggeranong region, this investment will enable the YWCA of Canberra to achieve better outcomes for young people in our region in a number of ways:

- Regularising the hours youth centres are open so young people know when they can access programs and support
- Expand outreach work in schools and colleges
- Enable the provision and expansion of targeted programs for students who are beginning to disengage with education
- Provide scope to investigate opportunities for cross-sectoral work with Indigenous young offenders and reengagement with education, training or employment.

Commitment of these funds in the 2013/14 ACT Budget and going forward will enable the YWCA of Canberra to continue to develop innovative programs which support young people to achieve their potential.

The YWCA of Canberra believes a commitment to collaboration and integrated service delivery is one way to produce better outcomes for young people and may provide efficiencies in the way these services are delivered. An integrated approach to service delivery which draws together the education and community sectors and the Government, also allows the ACT Government to draw resources from across different Directorates, such as Education and Training and Community Services Directorates. This can lead to efficiencies and promote innovation and collaboration both within Government and between Government and other sectors.

For example, the YWCA of Canberra's Lanyon Claim Literacy Project has been developed through a collaborative partnership with the YWCA of Canberra (Mura Lanyon Youth Centre), Lanyon High School and U-Can Read, University of Canberra. The project led to extremely positive outcomes for students and the school, as students' literacy skills and confidence improved. At the end of the pilot, students who had never read one book, had read four books, and parents reported that some students were now reading at home for pleasure. This also had flow on effects for students in other subjects. Funding for this program was provided by both the Education Directorate and the Community Services Directorate.

Recommendation 6: The YWCA of Canberra recommends that the ACT Government consider opportunities to facilitate cross-sectoral projects which work across Directorates, such as the Lanyon Claim Literacy Project, which have a strong evidence-base and promote collaboration as a means to better support children and young people in our community.

The YWCA of Canberra also congratulates the Government's commitment to increase funding for therapeutic services for children and young people.

In the delivery of our therapeutic support service for young people and their families in the ACT, and through our participation on the Re-engaging Youth Network Board and the Child, Youth and Families Support Program, it has become increasingly clear that a significant gap exists between the availability of therapeutic support services for children and young people in the ACT, and community demand for these services.

The YWCA of Canberra Circles of Support program provides outreach counselling for children and young people aged 8 -15 years. The program currently operates at Lanyon, Phillip and Watson, and is due to be established in West Belconnen in 2013. The program has been operational since late 2012 and is already fully subscribed.

The additional \$1.2 million dollars for therapeutic services committed by the ACT Government during the 2012 election will assist the YWCA of Canberra and other therapeutic support service providers in the ACT, to address the service provision gap which has been identified in this area. Given the current demand for these services, it is also important that the first instalment of this funding is delivered in 2013/14 Budget as per the original commitment.

<p>Recommendation 7: that the first instalment of funding for therapeutic services be delivered in the 2013/14 budget.</p>

Eliminating Violence Against Women

The impact of violence against women in our community is recognised by ACT Government in *Our Responsibility, the ACT Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children Strategy 2011-2017*. The YWCA of Canberra recognises the Government's on-going work to fulfil the aims and objectives of the Strategy, and we congratulate the Government for its work in this area in 2012.

In recognising this success, we must also highlight that there is significant work ahead as we implement the Strategy and work to eliminate violence against women and build an anti-violence culture in our community. The YWCA of Canberra is committed to supporting this work through our involvement in the ACT Governance Group, the National Plan Implementation Panel and our on-going work in the community.

In the context of the ACT Budget, the YWCA of Canberra emphasises that there is a need to appropriately resource implementation of the ACT Strategy. In particular, resourcing for violence prevention work must remain a key focus of Government funding in this area in the short, medium and long term.

Best practice approaches to ending violence against women emphasise the importance of prevention and early intervention. Violence prevention seeks to prevent violence before it occurs by addressing the root causes of violence against women. Research indicates that investing in effective violence prevention can result in long-term savings for communities and governments, and produce better social outcomes across a range of areas.

To this end, the YWCA of Canberra commends the announcement of the Audrey Fagan Violence Prevention Grants Program which will provide \$45,000 per year to ACT community groups which demonstrate a commitment to furthering the objectives of the Strategy.⁵

Whilst this is an important commitment, the YWCA of Canberra encourages the ACT Government to continue to invest in a range of violence prevention activities, in particular those which target children and young people.

A key format for primary prevention is the provision of respectful relationships education to children and young people. These programs support young people to develop safe and respectful relationships through skills development and attitudinal and behavioral change. Support for respectful relationships initiatives and education is listed as a key strategy under Primary Objective 1 of the ACT Strategy and under the National Plan. The value of these programs is also highlighted by their inclusion as a key focus of the new draft Australian Curriculum Health and Physical Education component recently released for consultation.

The ACT Government can assist schools in meeting the requirements of the new curriculum in this area by providing support for schools to partner with organisations with expertise in violence prevention to deliver programs and/or build the capacity of schools to work in this area more effectively and confidently.

The YWCA of Canberra has long-standing expertise in the area of primary prevention of violence against women, and in particularly in working with children and young people. In 2012 we developed a new respectful relationships program, *Respect, Communicate, Choose* for children in upper primary school years, with support from the ACT Office for Women. This

⁵ Katy Gallagher 2012, Supporting Canberra women to fulfil their potential, media release, ACT Labour Party Canberra, last viewed 23 February <<http://www.katygallagher.net/?p=2731>>

program is one of only a few respectful relationships programs designed for children of this age group, and was developed in consultation with teachers, school counselors and other services which support children affected by violence against women. The program builds on our existing prevention work, *Relationship Things*, which targets young people ages 14-18.

In 2012/13 *Respect, Communicate, Choose* will be delivered to between 300 and 500 students across six ACT primary schools with support from the Australian Government through its Respectful Relationships Funding Round Three. Feedback and outcomes from this program have been positive. After participating in the program in term 4, 2012:

- 84% of students demonstrated very gender equitable attitudes
- 91% of students were able to identify what respect looks like in a relationship
- 86% of students indicated they always or mostly knew who to go to for support
- 82% of students felt they always or mostly felt confident to take action when they saw disrespectful attitudes or actions

This program complements work being undertaken by the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre (CRCC) in ACT high schools through the *Sexual Assault Prevention Program in Secondary Schools*. Both of these programs are designed to be consistent with best practice standards for respectful relationship education programs, and aim to challenge attitudes which condone violence and gender inequality, as well as promote positive behavior change.

The effectiveness of these programs will be most measurable where implementation is on-going, and organisations are able to work with schools to create an enabling environment which promotes positive behaviours and supports students to challenge attitudes that condone violence and oppression.

The YWCA of Canberra is working with CRCC to determine ways in which we can work together to increase the impact of these programs for students and school communities. For example, from 2013 both organisations will be working with Namadgi School to deliver their programs in primary school and high school. We hope that exposing students to both programs over time will increase the impact and help ensure students build the skills and attitudes to maintain safe, equal and respectful relationships.

Fostering partnerships between expert service providers (such as the YWCA of Canberra and CRCC), schools and the education directorate to facilitate the delivery of these programs and build capacity within schools to respond to these issues will lead to efficiencies in this area over time.

Funding for both of these programs will come to an end in 2013/14. There is a real risk that innovative and best practice built through these programs may be lost if secure ongoing funding sources can not be secured.

<p>Recommendation 8: The YWCA of Canberra recommends that the ACT Government invest in the on-going delivery of respectful relationship education to students in primary and high school as a key strategy to eliminate violence against women in our community.</p>

Inclusive child care services

The YWCA of Canberra applauds the substantial election commitments made in relation to childcare in the ACT. As a leading provider of high quality community child care, the YWCA of Canberra is acutely aware of the growing need for child care services in our community.

The commitments for additional support for training and development for staff in the ACT child care sector is also an important investment to help providers and workers to attain the levels of qualification required under the new National Quality Standards.

The YWCA of Canberra commends the inclusion of funding for sector development in the 2012 election commitments and encourages the ACT Government to deliver on these commitments as part of the 2013/14 Budget.

The YWCA of Canberra supports United Voices Big Steps campaign to the Federal Government for a cash injection directly into the wages of Child Care Workers. The sector will face challenges in retention of qualified Child Care Educators if the current rates of pay do not significantly increase.

Recommendation 9: We call on the ACT government to support the United Voices Big Steps campaign to improve the wages of child care educators.

In considering investments in this area, the YWCA of Canberra also calls on the ACT Government to ensure the inclusivity and accessibility of child care services in our community.

As part of our school age care program, the YWCA of Canberra takes the responsibility of providing accessible services very seriously. We are proud to say that the majority of our school age care programs support children with special needs, ranging from autism, Asperger to physical and mental incapacity. Difficulties accessing appropriately trained staff, and the lack of appropriate programs for older children with special needs, remain significant issues affecting the delivery of these services.

The care of special needs children requires a 1-1 staff ratio and we access financial support from the National Inclusion Support Subsidy Provider, KU Children's Services, to enable us to deliver this service for Canberran families. However, there is a significant gap between the actual cost of this care and the subsidy provided, which means that services who take on care of children and young people with special needs are making a significant financial contribution which is not recognised by governments at either a local or federal level.

In order to provide this service to children and young people with special needs and their families, child care providers must employ staff with special skills and training. The ability to recruit employees with the relevant skills and experience is difficult with the current workforce. As the demand for these specialised services increases, as we have witnessed within our own service in recent years, this is becoming more of an issue.

As such, support for existing staff to access specialist training is a significant need within our service as well as across the sector.

The experience of young adults who require supervised care after school is an issue that is growing in significance and importance. We have a number of young people (including children as old as 15) who are currently accessing programs designed for much younger children in primary school settings because there is nowhere else for them to go. These settings are inappropriate for the children themselves, create unfair expectations on staff

(expecting to provide services to primary school aged children) and create a range of challenges in the management of all children within programs. The provision of appropriate out of school age care for these older children is an issue that requires urgent action.

Recommendation 10: The YWCA of Canberra calls on the ACT Government to provide adequate subsidies to support children with special needs to access mainstream school age care programs.

Promoting and supporting women's leadership

The purpose of the YWCA of Canberra is to build a better community for all through the leadership of women and girls. We are recognised as leaders in promoting, developing and fostering the growth of women leaders in our community through a range of programs, services and events targeting women and girls from a range of backgrounds and in different contexts.

The YWCA of Canberra recognises the work done by the ACT Government to date to promote women's leadership in the ACT. We commend the recent announcement of scholarships for women to participate in Australian Company Directors training programs. This will provide some women in the ACT with an important opportunity to develop individual skills and experience.

We note however the importance of investing in programs which meet the needs of women in a range of contexts, and which seek not only to develop individual skills, but also promote gender equality and encourage civic engagement. The YWCA of Canberra encourages the ACT Government not to limit investment in women's leadership to one program, but instead to look at opportunities to invest in a diverse range of programs for women which both develop their leadership skills as well as which address the impacts of gender inequality and seek to produce champions for women's leadership.

The YWCA of Canberra also encourages the ACT Government to invest in leadership opportunities specifically for young women and girls. The YWCA of Canberra is a leader in women's leadership programs for young women. In 2013 we will be delivering three flagship programs for women ages 18 and under:

- **Every Girl** - a new program being delivered by YWCAs across Australia that will develop positive self esteem and resilience among girls aged 10-14 years old. It will provide girls with the tools to realise their full potential, build upon their strengths and participate fully in their community, achieved through an underlying core objective of developing citizenship.
- **Y Aspire** – an early intervention leadership program aimed to support young women in high school who are at risk of disengaging with education. The program aims to build skills and confidence that will assist them in their journey through high school and beyond.
- **Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Leadership Workshops** – developed and delivered by a group of young Aboriginal women with the support of the YWCA of Canberra, the focus of the program will be to build the confidence of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in our community, and provide them with information and advice which will assist them in their transition from secondary school into tertiary education, employment or other opportunities.

These programs draw on best practice and seek to both address key challenges facing young women in their leadership journey including self-esteem and sexism, and support them to achieve their potential by providing access to new skills and opportunities. These programs provide an example of the kinds of opportunities that should be made available to young women in our community to assist them to achieve their potential.

Recommendation 11: That the ACT Government commit funds to provide diverse leadership opportunities for women in the ACT, particularly young women.