

## Comments to the Better Suburbs Play Spaces Forum

The Youth Coalition of the ACT is the peak body for young people aged 12-25 in the ACT. We urge the Better Suburbs Play Spaces Forum to consult directly with young people in relation to play spaces and public space across Canberra.

### Young people do not feel welcome in public spaces

In the ACT, young people frequently report feeling unwelcome and criticised for being in public spaces. While access to public space is usually open to all ages, young people often feel discouraged from using these spaces, with their presence perceived by others as 'loitering' or 'a nuisance'. The 2016 *Rate Canberra Survey* of over 2000 young Canberrans found that only 35% of young people aged 12-17 years felt valued by the Canberra community. Creating tailored recreational spaces, and ensuring that all public spaces are welcoming to young people, may support this group to feel more valued in the community, provide places where they feel they belong, and where they can go in key periods such as weekends and school holidays.

*'A group of toddlers play, a group of adults catch up, but it seems only teenagers loiter.'*[1]

### There are too few and inadequate play spaces for young people

While there are a number of appropriate and free/affordable indoor and outdoor recreational spaces for young children and adults in the ACT, there are few options for young people transitioning into independence but shy of adulthood. There has been little investment into providing public recreational spaces for young people that are affordable and accessible without adult supervision. Traditional venues of gathering, such as skate parks, do not meet young people's evolving needs and only cater to the interests of a small number of young people. Creating new activities and expanding the features of current recreational spaces may better meet the needs of young people with a diverse range of interests, and allow them to spend time with friends without being moved on. Such features may include, but are not limited to, better/extended hours of lighting, WiFi in recreational venues, natural features, exercise equipment, and should extend across sports, arts and music.

*'...there's not many places for youth to go and be safe and happy with others'  
- 17 years, Female, Weston/Molonglo [2]*

### Safe and enjoyable spaces are important for young people's development

Access to safe and enjoyable recreational places is important to the social, emotional and physical development of young people. Without appropriate recreational spaces, young people may be at risk of missing out on physical activity and social interactions that support their health and development. It is incumbent upon governments to provide young people with resources and opportunities to optimise their physical and social development, and to incentivise positive community behaviours. In order to develop appropriate and accessible spaces for young people that meet their diverse needs and interests, it is essential that young people are consulted about the types of recreational spaces they would like to use in Canberra, and are also involved in design and planning processes.

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1. Carter, C (2018), 'Why we need to say 'yes' to loitering', HerCanberra, 23 July, accessed 27 July 2018, <<https://hercanberra.com.au/cpcity/why-we-need-to-say-yes-to-loitering/>>

2. Youth Coalition of the ACT (2016), Rate Canberra Report 2016, Canberra