



Youth Work: It's More Than Pizza  
Project Report

August 2015

[www.youthcoalition.net](http://www.youthcoalition.net)

Supported by



The Youth Coalition of the ACT acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as the traditional owners and continuing custodians of the lands of the ACT and we pay our respects to the Elders, families and ancestors.

We acknowledge that the effect of forced removal of Indigenous children from their families as well as past racist policies and actions continues today.

We acknowledge that the Indigenous people hold distinctive rights as the original people of modern day Australia including the right to a distinct status and culture, self-determination and land. The Youth Coalition of the ACT celebrates Indigenous cultures and the invaluable contribution they make to our community.

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August 2015

Prepared by Youth Coalition staff member Hannah Watts

The Youth Coalition would like to thank the youth services that participated in this project, as well as the young people from Canberra Youth Residential Service, Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation, Ted Noffs Foundation, and Y.ENGAGE who participated in the initial consultations. We would also like to acknowledge Clare Wolski who volunteered her time and professional knowledge as a dietitian throughout the duration of this project.

The Youth Coalition receives funding for peak activity (policy development, sector development, advocacy & representation) from the ACT Government Community Services Directorate. An additional grant was received from the ACT Government under the ACT Health Promotion Grants Program to run the 'Youth Work: It's More Than Pizza' project.

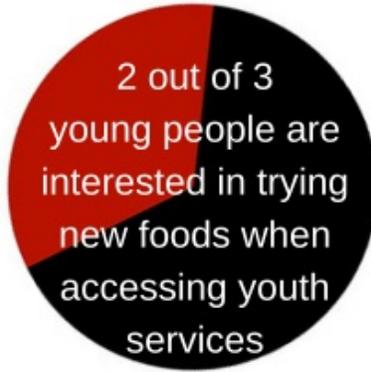
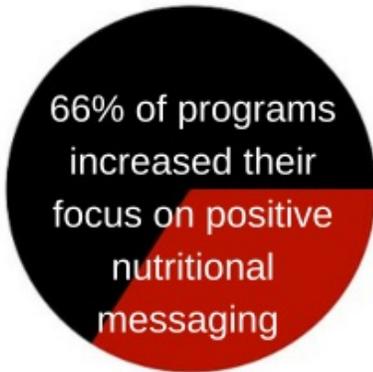
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# Youth Work: It's More Than Pizza



## Project

### Aims:

- Influence the youth sector to provide healthy, affordable food & positive nutritional messaging to young people accessing their services
- Increased focus on workplace health & wellbeing across the youth sector

**16** Youth Programs

**132** Youth Workers

**25** Young People



# Introduction

## About the Youth Coalition of the ACT

The Youth Coalition is the peak youth affairs body in the ACT. The Youth Coalition is a membership-based organisation responsible for representing and promoting the interests and wellbeing of young people aged 12 to 25 years and those who work with them.

The Youth Coalition provides a number of sector development activities to workers and services in the youth and community sectors that focus on information provision, training, networking, resource development, collaborations and partnerships. These activities aim to support workers and services to build their capacity and improve their practice in working with young people in the ACT.

## About this report

This report provides an overview of the activities of the 'Youth Work: It's More Than Pizza' project which was run by the Youth Coalition between August 2014 and May 2015. Funding for the 'Youth Work: It's More Than Pizza' project was provided by the ACT Government, under the ACT Health Promotion Grants Program.

# Background

The 'Youth Work: It's More Than Pizza' project aimed to influence the youth sector to provide healthy, affordable food and positive nutritional messaging to young people accessing their services. The Youth Coalition considers workers in youth programs as people well placed to support young people's health, because of their position as role models in young people's lives.

There is evidence that young people are not adequately educated about health and nutrition. The 2011 ACT Healthy Young People Feasibility Study listed the considerably lower than recommended levels of physical activity and vegetable consumption as one of the primary health issues affecting young people in the ACT.<sup>1</sup> Young people experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage are particularly at risk for poorer health,<sup>2</sup> and in the Youth Coalition's 2012 Rate Canberra survey of young people in the ACT, young people aged 18 – 25 frequently identified their concern about having money for expenses like phone bills and food. Young people also listed access to health services as a top concern.<sup>3</sup>

By embedding positive nutritional messaging in the practice of the youth sector, we expected to see an increase in the proportion of young people and their families who are maintaining

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<sup>1</sup> ACT Health (2011) ACT Young People Feasibility Study Final Report, prepared by LeeJenn Health Consultants for the ACT Government, Canberra ACT

<sup>2</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2011) Young Australians: Their Health and Wellbeing 2011, Australian Government, Canberra

<sup>3</sup> Youth Coalition of the ACT (2012) Rate Canberra 2012: Findings from the Survey of Young People aged 12-25 in the ACT, Canberra.

healthier lifestyles through increased understanding of nutrition, and who are practicing healthier eating.

Through an increased focus on positive nutritional messaging, over the long term we expect to see a change in the workplace practices of our member organisations, with an increased focus on workplace health and wellbeing. This dual focus on workers and young people accessing services ensures that the nutritional messaging being circulated by the youth sector is complemented by positive role modelling by youth workers and organisations.

The name of the project is a humorous reference to the stereotypical practice of services providing pizza to young people because it is relatively cheap, with no preparation time, and is guaranteed to be eaten as soon as it's served. Of course the way that youth services view food and nutrition is more nuanced than this. Workers responded well to the project title, and it facilitated conversations that cut straight to the point about the importance of workers being proactive role models for the young people they support.

## **Project Description**

### **'Project Partner' model**

The Youth Coalition invited member programs and organisations to sign on as 'partners' in the 'Youth Work: It's More Than Pizza' project. Sixteen youth programs and services initially signed on, and received information throughout the project. By partnering with us, they committed to improving their knowledge and practice in the area of youth health and nutrition. Partners agreed to participate in project activities, where they were able to, with the aim of providing healthier options and positive nutritional messaging to their staff teams and the young people who engage in their services.

The programs who partnered with us were: CALM Aftercare, Canberra Youth Residential Service, Community Outreach and Out-client Program, CYCLOPS Young Carers Program, headspaceCanberra, Lanyon Youth and Community Centre, Multicultural Youth Service, Our Place Residential Service, PALM Program, STEPS Residential Service, Take Hold Program, The Junction Youth Health Service, Y.Engage, Youth Education Program, Youth Engagement Team, and Youth & Wellbeing Outreach Service. In addition, Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Program allowed us to meet with a group of young people in their programs for one of the consultations.

The 'Project Partner' model meant that programs and services had an investment in the project, through making a commitment to changing their practice around healthy eating and nutritional messaging. All of the programs provide food to young people on a regular basis - daily, weekly, or monthly, and made an initial commitment to increasing their knowledge, trying new resources, and ensuring they had healthy options available at all times.

## **Project activities**

The 'Youth Work: It's More Than Pizza' project was based around a series of activities:

- Holding consultations with young people to gain a clearer understanding of healthier food options that are appealing to young people.
- Conducting surveys with the project partners.
- Providing resources on the nutritional needs of young people to the youth sector.
- Providing online recipes and cookbooks that the youth sector can utilise in their programs to provide food to young people that promotes health and wellbeing, or pass on to young people accessing their services that they could take home and try themselves.
- Role modelling affordable, healthy food options at Youth Coalition events such as monthly forums and meetings. Project partners were encouraged to have their staff attend a Youth Coalition event over the project period, and sample the food that was provided.
- Focussing one of the Youth Coalition's Monthly Forums on 'Healthy Eating for Young People'.
- Running a 'Celebrity Cook-off' at the National Youth Week Expo in Garema Place, and encouraging the youth sector who had stall as the expo to provide healthy food options to those attending the Expo.
- Running a 'recipe review' activity where project partners could provide a recipe that they use in their service. The recipe was then reviewed by a dietitian, who made suggestions on how the recipe could be altered to be a healthier option, and the reviewed recipes were shared with all project partners.

Each of the project activities ran on an 'opt-in' basis, ensuring there was no pressure for staff and programs to participate in every activity or to try every recipe or resource. This meant that the project did not take up significant amounts of time or take staffing resources away from the services delivered to young people. By regularly engaging with programs through invitations to participate in activities, sharing resources, and asking them about the food they were providing in their activities, we were able to see an increased focus on making healthier choices in the programs who engaged with the project activities, and on discussing healthy alternatives with young people.

### ***Consultations with Young People***

In November 2014, the Youth Coalition held consultations with 25 young people aged 15 – 22, from two residential youth programs and two centre-based youth services. The groups were asked questions relating to their general knowledge of and attitude towards healthy eating, and the experiences that young people have had in services and programs related to food. They were also provided with a variety of healthy snacks to try, which they then provided a 'rating' for (out of 5), and asked if they would like to have that food again. Feedback from these consultations was shared at a Monthly Forum, and passed on to the project partners. It is now available on the 'Youth Work: It's More Than Pizza' resource page at [members.youthcoalition.net/healthyfood](http://members.youthcoalition.net/healthyfood)

## *Surveying Project Partners*

Two baseline surveys were conducted at the beginning of the 'Youth Work: It's More Than Pizza' project. One survey was completed on behalf of the program that had signed up to the project, and was used to determine:

- What food is being provided to young people when they engage with the youth sector,
- Who has responsibility for planning meals/food provision for young people,
- What the key determining factors in choosing the food served were, and
- Whether cost, time, taste, knowledge or other factors form a barrier to providing healthy food in their program.

A second survey was completed by individual workers, to determine:

- How confident workers are in making healthy food choices for themselves, for staff meetings and other functions, and for the people they work with,
- Whether workers had completed training in meal planning, healthy eating, or understanding the nutritional needs of young people,
- Where workers currently get their information, knowledge, and ideas about healthy eating from, and
- What type of training workers would like to receive in this area.

Similar surveys were conducted at the end of the project, to determine whether the practices of individual workers and of programs had changed, which project activities staff members had engaged with, and whether they had improved their knowledge and access to relevant resources about healthy foods and nutrition for young people.

At the outset of the project, we had anticipated that some of the key reasons why services often do not provide healthy foods to young people were:

- That workers did not necessarily have the knowledge or training to ensure that healthy options were provided,
- That programs and organisations did not have the budget to purchase healthy foods, and
- That young people often do not want to eat healthy alternatives.

Through our surveys with workers, we found that more workers than we expected had received some kind of training around meal planning and healthy eating. However, the majority of this training had not included information specifically about understanding the nutritional needs of young people.

Almost all programs identified that both financial and staffing resources are key factors in decision making around the food they offer. While staff are aware that preparing healthy meals and snacks can be more cost-effective than buying unhealthy options, most program staff do not have the time to prepare meals before young people arrive at their program, and many do not have the facilities to cook with young people, or cooking is not a part of their program. This means that if staff want to provide food to young people, it needs to be quick to prepare and require minimal resources. A lack of low/no prep healthy options that are low cost and provide a

variety of meals means that quick, easy, low cost, unhealthy options are often chosen, even when programs would prefer to provide good, nutritious food. Without adequate operational budgets to provide more staff hours, and access to cooking facilities, many youth programs will continue to struggle with providing the good food that they and the majority of young people would actually prefer.

Through the consultations held with young people, we discovered that many did want to have access to healthy food options while engaging with youth services. However, without adequate operational budgets to provide more staff hours, and access to cooking facilities, many youth programs continue to struggle with providing the good food that they and the majority of young people would actually prefer.

### *Providing Resources*

A webpage was set up that project partners could access, which provided resources on the nutritional needs of young people, recipes and cookbooks that youth services and young people can access online for free, and local services that provide information and programs related to healthy eating. This webpage is now available for anyone to access at [members.youthcoalition.net/healthyfood](http://members.youthcoalition.net/healthyfood)

### *Role Modelling Affordable, Healthy Food Options*

The Youth Coalition consistently modelled healthy food choices at events that were held throughout the project, including regular monthly forums, at special events such as the National Youth Week Expo, and during all youth consultations and activities run during the project period. This not only provided us with the opportunity to demonstrate good practice in this area, but also to initiate discussions with other programs, organisations, workers, and young people who were not involved directly in the project.

### *Youth Coalition Monthly Forum focussed on Healthy Eating for Young People*

The November 2014 Monthly Forum was focussed on Healthy Eating for Young People. Rebecca Cuzzillo and Hannah Watts from the Youth Coalition presented feedback from the series of consultations with young people that were held earlier that month. Michael Moore, CEO of the Public Health Association of Australia, presented information on the Social Determinants of Health, and the role of youth services in promoting and modelling healthy practices for young people. Clare Wolski, the dietitian who advised the 'Youth Work: It's More Than Pizza' project, provided information on nutrition for young people, as well as practical tips for services and workers on engaging young people in healthy eating practices. The initial project surveys that were completed by staff and programs involved in the project informed some of the information that Clare presented.

### *National Youth Week Expo & Celebrity Cook Off*

Each year, the Youth Coalition runs an expo in Garema Place as the launch of National Youth Week in the ACT. A variety of youth programs, community service organisations, and government programs run stalls at the expo, providing information about the services they offer to young people and the community. Many stalls provide food as a way of engaging with young

people attending the expo as well as the general public who are in the area. This year, stallholders were encouraged to provide healthy food as part of their stalls, to engage in discussions with young people about the food they were offering, and to promote positive nutritional messaging.

A key event at the Expo was a Celebrity Cook Off, a competition between Mick Gentleman MLA (Minister for Children and Young People), Diane Joseph (Director-General of the Education and Training Directorate) and Emma Robertson (Director of the Youth Coalition of the ACT). Each person was given a \$40 budget, and 30 minutes to prepare food for a large group of young people. A panel of four young volunteers at the expo judged the competitors on the creativity of their idea, the appeal of their food to young people, ease of preparation, nutritional value, and taste. This fun activity drew a large crowd of spectators, who were able to watch the food preparation and cooking process, taste the food made by the competitors, and hear messages about healthy food options and the 'Youth Work: It's More Than Pizza' project.

### *Recipe Review*

Project partners were invited to submit a (not so healthy) recipe for a snack or meal that they would use in their service, which was reviewed by the project dietitian, Clare Wolski. The recipe could be something that is regularly enjoyed by the young people accessing services, or something new that the young people suggested they would like to try.

Clare reviewed the recipes and suggested options to increase the nutritional quality of the meal, providing an opportunity to turn a 'sometimes' meal into a regular favourite. All project partners received a copy of the 'new and improved' recipes so they could try the new recipes out with the groups of young people they worked with. These recipes are available on the 'Youth Work: It's More Than Pizza' resource page at [members.youthcoalition.net/healthyfood](http://members.youthcoalition.net/healthyfood)

## **Feedback from project partners**

At the end of the 'Youth Work: It's More Than Pizza' project, our partners were invited to provide feedback on the project activities, as well as the impact the project had on their workplace practices. Comments included:

"This project fit well within the team's goals and priorities and reinforced the need to offer healthy options to young people and staff...we now regularly ensure we are offering fresh, healthy snacking options (like whole, fresh fruit) to young people...When holding staff meetings the food on offer to staff includes healthy options (like fresh vegetables and dip)...It is expected staff plan healthy food options for youth engagement activities in the school holiday program. It became a requirement to consider the nutritional value of what food will be offered at our activities, and management will seek justification for any alterations to plans that did not seem to consider the nutritional content of the food involved."

"We now do more food planning with young people, and menu plans are really fleshed out looking at what ingredients we need, and how healthy a meal is."

“Workers are making more of an effort to provide healthy food or healthier options...for school holiday activities, there is a focus on providing food options including wholemeal grains and breads, low fat dairy and better quality meats (which are subsequently lower in fat and salt). There has been more of a focus on purchasing better quality and less refined products and focussing more on food preparation.”

“The biggest change arising from ‘Youth Work: It’s More Than Pizza; for our program has been a greater awareness of healthy eating in the sector as a whole. This has enabled running joint events and providing food at these events to be more consistent e.g. all healthy options as opposed to having lollies and pre-purchased pizzas alongside veggie sticks and dip. It’s also been good to create an awareness of healthy eating and highlight the issue.”

## **Recommendations for future projects**

Additional feedback from project partners and Youth Coalition staff has formed a number of recommendations for future projects.

### **Recommendation 1: More opportunities for individual staff members to engage with the project.**

Future projects like this should involve more direct contact with staff in each of the programs. This could include project staff attending team meetings with each program, or running an ‘in-house’ training session for each program. This would ensure that programs could receive ideas and information tailored to their needs, and would allow more individual staff members to engage with the project.

### **Recommendation 2: Further development of resources**

Development of a hard copy resource pack that could be kept on-site and used by staff teams and young people, as well as a simplified ‘take home’ resource that young people could be provided with.

### **Recommendation 3: Further & ongoing training for youth workers**

A majority of workers who participated in the project have not participated in training and professional development in the areas of meal planning and understanding the nutritional needs of young people. Several programs expressed an interest in participating further in projects that would provide more training for workers in the area of health and nutrition for young people accessing youth services, or an extension of the ‘Youth Work: It’s More Than Pizza’ Project.