



MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday 16th October 2024

The Y Canberra Region stands with young people this ACT election, proactively meeting to address some of the biggest issues they face.

The Y Canberra Region is keeping its eye firmly on their goal of building a better world with and for young people, today meeting with Independents for Canberra candidate, Thomas Emerson, to discuss the issues facing the young people of the ACT, and to develop ways to better tackle these issues.

“Canberra is a young, forward-thinking City, the median age is just over 35 years, making it the youngest capital city outside of Darwin. Canberra is a city of children, Gen Alphas, Gen Z, and Millennials,” said The Y Canberra Region CEO, Kirsty Dixon.

“As we approach the ACT election, the many issues the younger generation of the ACT face each and every day are of serious concern. We are worried for Canberra children and young people, and our city’s future generations,” Ms Dixon continued.

Ms Dixon, together with fellow The Y Canberra Region staff, today met with Thomas Emerson, reinforcing that the Y’s young people and Youth Representative Group (YRG) are supportive of Independents and the power of the cross-bench to introduce fresh new ideas, and better policies.

“Our YRG members really relate to Thomas Emerson, a fellow millennial, he is an energetic and smart young leader and younger parent, he is also prepared to listen, be courageous, and introduce new policies and ideas,” said Ms Dixon.

Tom is striving for “real action, not just talk”, and this includes the introduction of innovative legislation like the Future Generations Act. The *Future Generations Act* is world-class public policy and a practical way to introduce accountability into a ‘forever government’. The UN ‘Summit of the Future’ adopted the Declaration of Future Generations just last month and called it a ‘paradigm shift’.

Ms Dixon said The Y Canberra Region met today to discuss some very big issues Canberra’s future generations face, and that being proactive and banding together is likely to see better outcomes than leaving things to chance, especially as voters aged between 18 to 40 years now make up a significant percentage of the voting cohort, yet Canberra’s major party leaders and cabinet ministers are mostly Generation Xers, or older.

The statistics are quite concerning for ACT youth:

- The ACT has the highest average weekly earnings in Australia, yet 9,000 children are living below the poverty rate (ACTCOSS, Cost of Living Report 2024).
- The ACT has the poorest performing Australian Early Developmental Census results, outside of the Northern Territory, with over half of Canberra children not developmentally on-track, and up to a third of children in some Canberra Suburbs developmentally vulnerable in at least one development domain (AEDC, 2021).
- The Anglicare Rental Affordability Snapshot 2024, found that NO rental properties in the ACT were affordable for a single young adult on youth allowance.
- The National Mental Health Commission (2021) reports Seven out of 10 of the most common presentations to paediatricians are for mental health and they are falling through the cracks.
- The 2020 inquiry into the ACT Mental Health Act by the Human Rights Commission, stated that despite being the most over-represented cohort experiencing mental health challenges, children and young people are regularly under-represented, or completely excluded from policy discussions.

The Y Canberra Region is working hard to address the needs of young people, with today's meeting aligning with the goals set out in The Y's Strategy 2030, with the aim to empower, connect and support young people in their care, their staff and communities.

The Y Canberra Region's Senior Manager of Youth Voice, Sam Duffy-Yates, who oversees the Youth Representative Group (YRG) said,

"The ACT is overall a young demographic, and I don't know a single young person who isn't affected by the cost of living, housing, mental health, or sustainability stress."

Ms Dixon also expressed concern with young people having watched governments over the past 20 years make decisions, or worse still, avoid bold ones, about housing, the climate, preventative mental health, youth justice, education, and taxation that has actually worked against them and their futures.

"Young people don't want to listen to older Generation X leaders and cabinet ministers, labelling themselves 'progressive', when they see no progress, a safe home, good mental health, or a secure planet for themselves. Young people aren't progressing, many are going backwards," Ms Dixon continued.

Research states that young people are no-longer voting along party political lines, and are more likely to be motivated by cause-related issues and bold policy ideas that take their future seriously.

"What places like Wales and Scotland are doing, it is groundbreaking, these progressive leaders care about the young people's wellbeing and the planet, and not only are they listening to young people, they are embedding children's interests in legislation. We think every grandparent and parent would want that for Canberra's children and grandchildren," Ms Dixon said.

Canberra is the only territory or state in Australia that does not have a community-based, rather than government-directed, Y Youth Parliament and Youth Voice Ambassador program. The Y hopes to seek support to establish an independent, community-directed Y Youth Parliament to ensure young people and children citizen voices are always heard by the Legislative Assembly.

"It is exciting to see that there are young people, like Tom, who have a genuine drive to put the voices of young people at the forefront, and explore policies and initiate change on issues that young people care about," Ms Dixon concluded.

For more information on the Y Canberra Region, visit www.ymcacanberra.org.au

MEDIA CONTACT:

For more information, images or to arrange an interview contact Sam Duffy-Yates, for The Y Canberra Region, on 0419 821 225 or sam.duffy-yates@ymca.org.au

MEDIA BACKGROUNDER

ABOUT THE Y CANBERRA REGION

- Established in 1941, The Y Canberra Region, formerly YMCA Canberra Region, has grown side-by-side with the nation's capital.
- Today, the Y Canberra Region's vision and mission is to build a better world, with and for young people.
- The Y Canberra Region provides support and services to over 20,000 children and young people per year, including their parents, carers, teachers, and supporters.
- The Y Canberra Region delivers services across Canberra and its surrounds in community health, recreation and fitness, before and after school care, early learning education and care, accommodation services, and youth voice programs.
- The Y Canberra Region are a significant local employer providing employment to over 400 staff and volunteers.
- Almost 50% of The Y Canberra Region's workforce is under 30 years-old.
- For more information on The Y Canberra Region, visit www.ymcacanberra.org.au, call (02) 6242 4040 or follow us on social media @YMCACanberra