

## **Respectful Relationships, Sexuality and Consent Education Roundtable Event Communiqué**

The Respectful Relationships, Sexuality and Consent Education Roundtable event held in July 2021, drew together a wide range of interested stakeholders across school sectors, universities and the community. The purpose of the event was to explore current education and research in understanding what is happening in our Canberra community and identify opportunities to strengthen Relationships and Sexuality Education.

The Roundtable was attended by the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Yvette Berry MLA and the Director-General of the Education Directorate, Katy Haire and was co-hosted by the Education Directorate and the University of Canberra. It was also attended by a broad range of experts and stakeholders including school leaders and teachers from Public, Catholic and Independent schools, Youth Advisory Council members, the Teacher Quality Institute, ACT Policing, pre-service teachers, academics from the University of Canberra and the Australian Catholic University, parent representatives and community groups.

Increased media and community focus on the prevalence of sexual assault and harassment has highlighted the need for a community-wide approach to strengthening Relationships and Sexuality Education across all school sectors and through pre-service teacher education. A message young people across the country are giving us, is we need to improve the understanding of consent education in school communities.

Keynote speaker Katrina Marson delivered a powerful presentation on the need to safeguard sexual wellbeing through Relationships and Sexuality Education, dispelling the idea that 'ignorance is innocence'. Drawing on her expertise as a senior prosecutor, Ms Marson showed why it is not enough 'to put our faith in justice alone'. She presented her Churchill Fellowship research, which highlights comprehensive Relationships and Sexuality Education needs to start young, be age-appropriate, repeated and consistent.

Tim Bavinton, Executive Director, Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT, invited us to 'listen and learn' to young people, who are reinventing this conversation for the better. Mr Bavinton highlighted the significant expertise that already exists within the field of comprehensive Relationships and Sexuality Education and identified opportunities to partner with community groups to ensure its delivery is evidence-based, inclusive and relevant.

Providing an important youth perspective on the day, ACT Youth Advisory Council representatives, Lily Hannen and Matilda Webb, articulated young people's need for

comprehensive Relationships and Sexuality Education, that starts earlier, is more inclusive of difference and is delivered by skilled and confident educators. The Youth Advisory Council members stated, 'We want an education that speaks to us in all of our diversity and equips us with what we need to know to take care of our health and wellbeing'.

Expertise and experiences were also presented by leaders across Public, Catholic and Independent school sectors and universities responsible for training teachers, who shared a common commitment to serving the needs of students and supporting teachers in their important work.

Attendees worked together to identify and prioritise issues, reflecting on what they had heard on the day and their own expertise. Key themes that emerged included recognition of the benefits of a cross-sector approach, the need for a whole-of-community response and that the voices and lived experiences of young people must be central to any community wide solution.

A wide range of perspectives and ideas were shared, creating opportunities for further collaboration and alignment of approaches between sectors and beyond. The Education Directorate will continue to work with stakeholders, to build on the learning from the Roundtable and strengthen Relationships and Sexuality Education in the ACT.