



# A Youth Movement Comes of Age in Australia

by Jan Owen, CEO of the Foundation for Young Australians



Over the past ten years, Australia has experienced more social activism by young people than in the previous twenty. Young people's way of thinking, organising and collaborating is leading to a new global conversation. Our young people are creating a new narrative about not only the kind of world in which they want to survive, but one in which they can live, love and thrive.

There have been movements for change throughout history, but never has there been the vast range of tools (offline and online) now available: the ability to mobilise millions of people around global causes and the capacity to raise significant funds through crowdsourcing platforms. Add to this the vast range of talented people from diverse backgrounds—lawyers, indigenous youth, artists, scientists—all collaborating to solve problems in magnificent and innovative ways.

Armed with these tools and resources, young social entrepreneurs are competing for the hearts, minds and wallets of their peers and the general public. They are challenging our notions of centralised, hierarchical leadership. They are also hungry to learn, ready to get their hands dirty and willing to fully immerse themselves in new ways of working with, and leading, others. Yet few organisations are preparing them with the skills to do so.

Promoting organisational and financial sustainability while achieving real and systemic change, for example, remains a challenge. Such efforts may take another set of skills altogether. Stanford University's work on Collective Impact—the commitment from different sectors to a common social problem-solving agenda—has shown the profound importance of 'backbone' organisations that provide operational capacity and support to society's change makers. The fundamental premise here is that we can all better leverage our resources, time and talent by collaborating with others.

At the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA), we see ourselves as one of these 'backbone' organisations, supporting young people in two ways. Firstly, we build platforms to enable organisations and sectors to collaborate around common objectives. Secondly, we directly support groups of young people through skills, investment and leadership development. To do this, we are deepening our expertise in finance, communications, corporate and philanthropic partnerships, government relations and youth marketing and engagement.

For example, this year we established the National Indigenous Youth Leadership Academy to identify and develop Australia's next generation of indigenous leaders while they are still at school. The founding partners are FYA and the National Centre of Indigenous Excellence and the Stronger Smarter Institute.

Change It Up supports teams of young people to generate ideas to improve their local communities. Diverse members of the community—from youth workers to business leaders to local government officials—come together to 'host' a Change It Up in their community and then invest (both financially and in-kind) in young people's ideas for change.

Our Young Social Pioneers initiative is part of the International Youth Foundation's global youth entrepreneurs program *YouthActionNet*®, where young people from across Australia participate in a 12-month intensive program to accelerate their venture and enhance their personal leadership skills.

This year we partnered with global investment bank UBS in a mentoring program for our Pioneers with the firm's senior executives. In the past three years, the Pioneers have, among other ventures, engaged 55,000 people in tackling Australia's binge drinking culture; transformed volunteering through leading-edge technology; started new democracy movements; and spearheaded ventures in sustainable fashion, architecture and design in developing countries.

I am fortunate to be surrounded by under-30-year-olds and constantly seek their support, advice and know-how. They challenge and enrich my life, my thinking and my worldview. Any senior executive, manager, politician or leader without a group of young mentors may well be missing out on critically important personal, professional and business growth opportunities.

We have an opportunity right now to invest in young people and their ideas. With half the world's population under 30, we have a profound responsibility to ensure they are fully equipped with the courage, imagination and will to take on the challenges that lie ahead in an ever-changing world. **Y**