

Workplace Rights for Young People in the ACT

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Issue

For many young people, especially students in highschool and college, getting a job is the first step to growing independent as an individual, so the experience plays a huge role in how young people perceive employment and their right to work. A major issue is that in many workplaces, young people are not taken seriously or treated unfairly compared to other, usually more experienced and older staff. Issues often include unequal rostering, with young employees who are willing to work not receiving shifts at all, and employees with limited availability being rostered more hours than they can manage. Many young people, especially at present, have experienced applying to numerous jobs yet not receiving a response, or on the other hand, being hired without an interview or training process which results in the employer exploiting the employee. A significant amount of employers use the method of not rostering young employees as leverage to eventually coerce them into quitting, especially to avoid the process of firing. Most of the time this may be for no significant reason. Ultimately, these unfair practices not only undermine young people's confidence in the workplace, but also restrict their trust in their work rights and the ability to reach out for help.

Effects

Unfair work environments and undermined work rights not only puts psychological strain on young people but also raises significant barriers to their awareness of work rights and motivation to enter or pursue employment. 43% of youth surveyed by Westjustice (2023) reported not knowing their rights. Low awareness stems from inadequate education, including language barriers for migrants, and employer failures to provide mandatory Fair Work Information Statements, leaving many young people vulnerable to exploitation, wage theft and unsafe conditions. Workplace health and safety is sometimes not taken seriously, especially in fast food settings. Places like McDonalds, KFC and Domino's work with many hazardous appliances that young employees as young as 13 are working around. These include ovens, hot boxes, deep fryers and large coolrooms. Any employee has the right to a safe working environment, however injuries that occur in these spaces, especially if they're considered small, are usually brushed off by employers and preventative measures are usually not taken following an incident.

Solutions

These issues with unfair rostering, unsafe work environments and undermined youth work rights can be addressed through methods such as mandatory 7-day roster notices, minimum 3 hour and maximum 12 hour work weeks for casuals who are still in school, and safe staffing ratios. A Youth Workplace Safety Fund would be extremely helpful for equipment upgrades and free, frequent audits to ensure the safety of young workers. School based work rights education and a possible youth employment hotline would boost significant awareness. Emphasis on specific legislation such as the Fair Work Act (2009) and organisations like Unions ACT would build trust and reliability towards fair work and employment guarantees for young workers. These possible reforms would empower ACT youth to thrive in safe workspaces, fostering a generation of confident, productive contributors to the Territory's future.

Sources

- **EMPLOYMENT EQUALITY LAW SERVICE PROGRESS REPORT FIRST YEAR OF SERVICE.** (2023). Available at: [https://www.westjustice.org.au/cms_uploads/docs/employment-equality-law-progress-\(4\).pdf](https://www.westjustice.org.au/cms_uploads/docs/employment-equality-law-progress-(4).pdf) [Accessed 28 Nov. 2025].
- **How Australia's Employment Laws are Failing Young People YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM IMPACT AND INSIGHTS REPORT.** (2025). Available at: [https://www.westjustice.org.au/cms_uploads/docs/westjustice_yep-impact-and-insights-report-\(2025\)-web.pdf](https://www.westjustice.org.au/cms_uploads/docs/westjustice_yep-impact-and-insights-report-(2025)-web.pdf) [Accessed 28 Nov. 2025].