

FYA DEBUNKS THE MYTH THAT GEN Y'ERS ARE LAZY, SELFISH AND DISENGAGED

The Foundation for Young Australians has launched *In Their Own Hands: Can young people change Australia?* a new book debunking the myth that Gen Y'ers are a homogenous group of lazy, selfish, disengaged consumers.

"This book is groundbreaking and timely. It documents and celebrates young people's active participation in social, political and civic life and describes the many ways in which they are leading vital social change," said Jan Owen AM, CEO of the Foundation for Young Australians.

In Their Own Hands challenges the view that often characterises young people as disengaged and apathetic. Through showcasing the work of a range of young people it demonstrates that many young people are engaged, active and seeking to shape their world in different and sometimes surprising ways.

Samah Hadid, Australia's United Nations Youth Representative for 2010 and spokesperson for the book, said at the launch "Young people need to be inspired, not just wired".

"And in the absence of inspiration from our political leaders, we just get on with it and make change happen ourselves," continued Ms Hadid.

"We break through despite the mixed messages we receive. For example, we are expected to work and pay taxes before we are 18 but we can't vote. It just doesn't make sense. Particularly when we get criticised for being politically inactive," said Ms Hadid.

Ms Owen continued, "Gen Y'ers are active, although the paradigm of involvement has shifted to more entrepreneurial ways of participating. The use of social media to communicate and as a tool for change is a key part of this shift."

Young people face many challenges and barriers along the way. *In Their Own Hands* also highlights that in the process of effecting change, Gen Y'ers are often confronted by barriers that exclude them from participating in shaping their world. Racism, lack of opportunity to participate in work, decisions about their education, and intimidating bureaucratic processes all contribute to young people's exclusion. However, others interpret this exclusion wrongly, as examples of young people being lazy and disengaged and more often than not they are viewed as cynical because of their lack of participation. The book shows however that sometimes they are just simply left out!

Individual case studies of young people involved in FYA programs such as Young Social Pioneers and ruMAD? showcase examples of Gen Y'ers breaking through the barriers as active citizens shaping their futures.

Kat Ettwell, a Young Social Pioneer featured in *In Their Own Hands* and a member of the OUTthere rural Victorian Youth Council for Sexual and Gender Diversity, feels lucky to have the opportunity

to stand up for her rights through OUTthere and so help reduce the traumatising effect of discrimination against same sex attracted young people.

"Growing up and experiencing discrimination certainly had a big impact on my life. To have the freedom and opportunity to engage in a community that supports and encourages young people to work with Government and formal social institutions (such as schools), without necessarily relying on them to change that for future generations, is a great opportunity for me," said Kat.

The book draws on the work of the Foundation for Young Australians and its legacy of significant research into the education, wellbeing and participation of young Australians. Written by Dr Lucas Walsh, Director of Research and Evaluation at the Foundation for Young Australians and Ms Rosalyn Black, Senior Manager of Research and Evaluation, it also draws on the expertise of renowned commentators in youth research, policy and practice.

"This book shows that young people can make change, but they can't do it alone," Dr Walsh says.

"To debunk the myths about Gen Y we need to break down the barriers, recognise their contributions and allow them to play a meaningful role in shaping their world. In the end it is *in their own hands*," said Dr Walsh.

Books are available for purchase from ACER Press <http://shop.acer.edu.au>

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Available for interviews:

Dr Lucas Walsh – Director of Research and Evaluation, FYA

Ms Ros Black – Senior Manager of Research and Evaluation, FYA

Ms Kat Ettwell – FYA Young Social Pioneer

Ms Jan Owen – CEO, Foundation for Young Australians

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