

# REVOLVE

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## GENERATION Y

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'Generation Y', 'The Millennials' and the 'Echo Boomers' are terms referring to young people born roughly between 1980 and 2000. As with any description of a generation, stereotypes and generalisations about a group of people do no justice to the group in consideration. Young people, no matter when they were born, are not a homogenous group. Each young person has different characteristics, issues and needs. It is even more important to consider the stereotypical nature of these descriptions since a considerable amount of writing about Generation Y is predominantly found within marketing and church literature. It is not a term often referred to in sociology and youth work fields. Cautious about contributing to the array of generalisations about today's young people, what follows is a description of general trends and characteristics that can be correlated to the experiences of the particular group of young people that Youth for Christ Australia is wanting to reach.

### THE FACTS

- There are over 5.5 million Gen Yers who were born between 1980 and 2000 (making up over a quarter of the Australian population) (ABS, 2001a).
- 2,824,224 male Gen Yers
- 2,689,417 female Gen Yers
- 75% access the Internet regularly
- Most education-minded generation in history
- Gen Yers are more positive and optimistic about life, work and the future than the previous generation (Generation X)
- Gen Yers are extremely tolerant and accepting of difference
- Gen Yers are very socially conscious
- Although classified as the most spiritual generation, Gen Y is the most unchurched generation in history

## YOUTH POPULATION

To be more specific, our programs and ministry generally target 1.9 million young people (12-18 year olds), however in the generation Y age group there is a potential 3.3 million. The following table shows the teenage population by age and gender.

**Table 1**

Age	Males	Females	Persons	
12	137,667	130,912	268,579	
13	134,914	128,583	263,497	
14	135,103	127,860	262,963	
15	137,336	129,993	267,329	
16	136,985	131,439	268,424	
17	135,497	129,454	264,951	
18	134,698	128,888	263,586	Total 12 - 18 years of age: 1,859,329

*ABS Census 2001, A Snapshot of Australia, Spreadsheet 3.*

## TECHNOLOGY

Technology is inextricably linked to the experience of this generation in Australia. Computers, the Internet, mobile phones, pagers, and associated digital revolutions are the norm. Generation Y in Australia have come of age in an era of “instantaneous global communications, media saturation and material excess”. *At least one in three young people own a mobile phone (Wade, 2002). Over 1.8 million young people aged 10-19 use a computer at home (ABS, 2001b) with over a quarter of secondary students owning their own computer (Meredyth, Russell, Blackwood, Thomas and Wise, 1999). At least 75% of young people under 18 are accessing the Internet (Hillier, Kurdas and Horsley, 2001).* Technology is particularly important to this generation, as it is the means of a significant amount of their communication. According to Tulgan and Martin (2001), technology has also played an important part in empowering this generation. Through technology ‘Yers are now usurping “intellectual authority, in their homes and classrooms... They can access worlds of information and master increasing complex systems so much faster than their elders”.

### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YFC?



We need to continue to ‘stay in touch’ with young people by the means most comfortable to them, especially through the Internet (online chat, email, etc.) and mobile phones. Programs like E-Discipleship are fantastic mechanisms for building relationships with young people.

## Education

Closely linked with this ability to access information, Generation Y has been described as very knowledgeable. In fact, Generation Y is described as the most education-minded generation in history. They recognise that education is the key to their success. An American study found that 90% of high school seniors expect to attend college, 70% of them expect to work in professional jobs, and 70% of teenagers believe college is necessary to meet their career goals (Tulgan and Martin 2001). Although statistics would vary in Australia, similar valuing of education is apparent.

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### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YFC?



As Christian youth workers, we need to have God's perspective of young people. Rather than relying on assumptions and negative stereotypes, we need to know that young people do have a head on their shoulders, do have great aspirations for the future and aren't void of knowledge. It's important for us to not talk down to them, but empower them through affirming their own experience and knowledge of life.

## SELF-ESTEEM

The influence of technology and education, as well as the influence of humanistic theories of childhood psychology (which emphasise the worth and power within the self to achieve fulfilment) that have permeated parenting, education and counselling, has meant that Generation Y have emerged as the 'self-esteem' generation. They generally have a more positive and optimistic outlook on life, work and the future, compared to Gen Xers (Tulgan and Martin, 2001).

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### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YFC?



Despite the seeming optimism of this generation, self-esteem will always be an issue that young people will deal with. We should always affirm young people's worth and value, and encourage them to foster self-respect. Our ministry is great at encouraging the self-esteem of the young people we work with, so let's keep doing it well.

## DIVERSE AND ACCEPTING

Generation Y has grown up immersed in a postmodern society, a society accepting of all experiences and 'truths', of changing racial, familial, sexual and religious values. Consequently, Generation Y are considered extremely tolerant and accepting of difference. Generation Y is the *most ethnically diverse generation ever*. An estimated *one-third of this generation are from minority groups* (Krotz, 2002). Young people have grown up in an era where *21% of Australian families are one-parent families* (AIHW, 2002). It's an era where every secondary school student seems to know someone who is practicing homosexuality and where customized spiritual paths are promoted.

### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YFC?

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The obvious application of this is for us to also be accepting of difference. As Christians in ministry we should be examples of Jesus' acceptance and grace. Our programs and ministry should be inclusive of different ethnic, religious, and sexual groups. For example, we can't just target our programs for white young people, but need to consider the needs of all ethnic groups of young people in our communities. It's good to ask ourselves these questions:

- are there any young people who are being excluded in this?
- does this program include marginalized young people?

## SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS

This acceptance level has promoted a great social conscious among the young people of this generation. Generation Y have grown up benefiting from major social movements, including the environmental and women's movements. They have grown up with an understanding of patriarchy, the global effect of multinational greed and exploitation, the past and present oppression of Indigenous Australians, and other social injustices. This understanding, along with messages that they can make a difference has motivated them to work towards a more just society. Part of this involves participating in volunteer activities. *Almost a third of young people participate in volunteer activities*, with 40% of these young people doing so to help others and the community (Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services, 2001)

### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YFC?

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We need to encourage the participation of young people in politics and social movements. Be aware and understand the causes that young people in your area are fighting for and support their passion for a more just society. Also encourage young people to volunteer and help out in your programs, especially the young people in the churches you are working with.

## **MOST UNCHURCHED**

The most recent National Church Life Survey (NCLS) found that young people are underrepresented in church life. Young people make up 28% of the general population. However, *only 14% of church attendees are young people* (NCLS, 2002). Young people are now less involved in organised religion than ever before. However, young people have a very positive view of spirituality. *Two thirds of 20 year olds consider spiritual life important*. Rather than participating in organised religion, young people are opting for individualistic and self-constructed spirituality. There is a variety of faiths and religions available, and in this society of pluralism, young people mix and match them to form their own spirituality.

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### **WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YFC?**



**It's OK to be real about our faith! It's OK for the young people we're working with to know that we're Christians and we are spiritual beings. We need to emphasise that our faith isn't about a set of rules, but is a spiritual journey towards knowing God, which is something we can do because of Jesus Christ. Realising the decline in young people coming to church should give us a greater sense of urgency to reach out to young people.**

## **SUMMARY**

Generation Y are technology-wise, optimistic, diverse, tolerant, socially aware, and place a strong value on education. YFC needs to be aware of the characteristics of this generation. We should be aiming to incorporate this understanding into our programs and services. We should also endeavour to incorporate community and peer-to-peer relationships in our ministry. YFC needs to be authentic and honest in all that we do so that we can be more effective in giving every young person the opportunity to become a follower of Jesus Christ.

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### **WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YFC?**



**Generation Y has been described as looking for certain values around authenticity, honesty and community (Stannard, 2003).**

- **How authentic, honest and community oriented are our staff in their relationships with young people?**
- **Are our programs and relationships with young people real and transparent?**
- **Do our programs and relationships with young people communicate what we believe?**
- **Do our programs include and target minority and ethnic groups of young people?**
- **Do we incorporate technology in our communications with young people?**

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