

THE CITY OF
GREATER GEELONG

YOUTH COUNCIL FINAL REPORT TO COUNCIL

Tuesday 11 December 2023

DEPUTY JUNIOR MAYOR –

ALEENA EFTIKHARI

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Junior Mayor's Message

Introduction

Youth Council would like to acknowledge the Wudawurung people, the Traditional Owners of the land, waterways, and skies, and pay their respects to Elder's past, present and emerging.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to outline the development, activities and achievements of Youth Council since the previous report was presented to Council on 24 October. The final Youth Council report contains advice that participants would like to provide to Council on matters of importance for young people. These matters were discussed during the Councillor Connect Mentoring Program (CCMP) sessions and validated through youth engagement activities undertaken by Youth Council members across the Municipality. Youth Council would like to thank all those who helped to shape and validate the advice contained within.

Personal Reflections

2023 Junior Mayor – Irene Mulilo

The 2023 Youth Council program has been the highlight of my year. It has provided me with a platform where I can speak out and be heard, and where all participants can share ideas about how the Geelong community can consider and respond to the needs of young people.

Attending training sessions, and workshops, as well as receiving mentoring and coaching from staff has equipped me with the skills and knowledge to attend local events and opportunities as Junior Mayor and to speak out on issues important to young people. Some of my personal highlights have included interviewing Ali Watson from Code Like a Girl, at the City's International Woman's Day event and participating in the Growing Up in Cities Deakin Project, which challenged us to imagine a more youth enabling Geelong.

However, the biggest highlight for me, was attending a brunch with Councillors and advisory committee members that welcomed the Governor General, The Honourable David Hurly and his wife, Linda Hurly. The Youth council program has been full of incredible opportunities like this one that will have a long-lasting impact on our lives.

Finally, after years of struggles with confidence, my position on Youth Council has helped me rediscover my voice and has provided me with the opportunities and knowledge to rebuild my confidence. With the added support of Council staff and Youth Council members, I feel like my communication skills and confidence are steadily improving.

2023 Junior Deputy Mayor- Aleena Eftikhari

Youth council has been a unique experience to say the least. Accepting my role as a Youth council member and furthermore as the Deputy Junior Mayor was nerve wrecking. But as I come to the end of my term on Youth council, I can proudly say I do not regret my choices.

Youth council has provided me an experience no other program could. In my position on Youth council, it has provided me with the power and confidence to talk about topics to young people and ask for their inputs to better represent them, and as a result advocate for their needs. Moreover, the experience of advocating for youth issues and engaging with our diverse community has been truly eye opening. Youth council has been a unique platform for both my ability to make an impact in my community and provide me with opportunities to increase my personal development.

Confidence has been my biggest take away from youth council and the many leadership opportunities have been instrumental in cultivating that confidence. My growth has been evident throughout the opportunities I have been involved in, from chairing the youth council meetings to delivering the Youth Council Report speech at a council meeting, where I was able to speak with conviction and confidence and connect with my audience.

As my term comes to a close, I reflect on the speech I delivered for the Junior Mayor position at the induction, to the speech I delivered at the International Woman's Day event, and I can't help but notice the transformation in my demeanour and delivery. At the beginning of my journey with the Youth Council, standing in front of an audience felt like an insurmountable challenge. However, the opportunities and responsibilities that came with my role gradually moulded me into a more self-assured individual.

I am filled with gratitude for the invaluable experiences and newfound confidence that will undoubtedly shape my future endeavours. As I bid farewell to my term on the Youth council, I carry with me a profound sense of accomplishment and the knowledge that I have played a role, no matter how small, in making a positive impact on the youth community in Geelong. Youth council has indeed been a transformative and invaluable chapter in my life.

What Youth Council Has Achieved Since the third Report

September Meeting

In the September meeting Youth Council heard from a senior community development officer from the community inclusion team at the city who presented to participants about the 2024-2028 Access and Inclusion Plan. The presenter wanted to gain feedback from youth council about how to make the community more accessible and inclusive for people living with a disability and their carer's. There was a broad range of perspectives gathered from those who live with a disability, those who have family members living with a disability and those who provided their observational perspectives without lived experience. Participants were challenged to think more broadly about access and inclusion across Geelong, including reviewing the spaces and places where they access in their lives. Youth Council were asked a series of several questions about community inclusion and access and provided a breadth of responses about how to improve Geelong. The consultation reinforced the importance of representing young people living with a disability at a local level.

October Meeting

In the October meeting Youth Council heard from Ali Wastie, the City's new CEO. Ali shared with participants her transition from state government to local government and shared her passion for working in the level of government closest to the community. Ali expressed her commitment and enthusiasm for her new role, outlined her vision for the city, and discussed what her role as CEO will involve. Ali congratulated and thanked participants for their volunteer service and expressed gratitude for their commitment to contributing to civic processes at the city. Youth Council enjoyed the opportunity to speak with Ali, to ask her lots of questions and hear all about why she chose to work for the city and move to Geelong.

The next consultation received was from the social infrastructure team who provided information about the central youth hub project. Participants were provided with information regarding the history of the youth council advice over the last two years pertaining to the central youth space and the actions including the youth hub feasibility study that have followed. Youth Council participants are excited about the development of the central youth hub and look forward to contributing to this project.

Events and Opportunities

Catholic Care Leadership Program

Youth Council members Anastasia from the Kardinia Ward, and Ali from the Windermere Ward were special guests at Catholic Care's Leadership Program for culturally and linguistically diverse young people. The students involved participated in a leadership program across the year, facilitated by YACVIC, Victoria's peak body for youth. Over the course of their sessions, students developed pitches advocating for issues they were passionate about and delivered these to youth council members and members of the school's leadership teams at a final event in October.

At the October Youth Council meeting, all Youth Council members were provided with the opportunity to hear the pitches and provide feedback to them, that Ali and Anastasia, the two youth council members attending delivered back to the students on behalf of all members.

Youth Council received several informed and passionate pitches from dedicated members of the youth community, that were developed around topics important to their lives. Topics included racism, language barriers, climate change, pollution, sexual assault, and substance abuse. Youth Council members discussed relevant and previous advice they have provided to council throughout the year relating to racism, and e-cigarette use, and shared this with participants and discussed how the pitches delivered will assist in providing further evidence to The City about the issues affecting young people at a local level.

Youth Council members were also able to share their knowledge and understanding of local government, including how it works to support the community, and how it operates outside of the school environment, which was a key focus of many of the pitches delivered. Notably, all pitches advocated for better community education on each of these topics so that children and youth know where to find support and who to tell if they are in a difficult situation.

The Youth Council members involved were excited to connect with their community members to hear what they are passionate about and how they can advocate for them in their positions on Youth Council. It also provided youth council members with an opportunity to practice their public speaking skills using both a script and speaking unscripted providing their thoughts and opinions to participants. Overall, these sessions connected Youth Council with like-minded youth in Geelong who are passionate about making a valuable impact in their communities. Additionally, it also provided the opportunity for youth council members to discuss the youth council program and why it is important for young people to step up and have a voice and a say in decision making.

2024 Youth Council Nominations Promotion

Youth Council would like to say a special thank you to Mayor Sullivan, Deputy Mayor Aitken, and Councillor Harwood for promoting the youth council program across schools in Geelong reaching thousands of young people about the opportunity to self-nominate for the 2024 program. Youth Council would also like to thank all other councillors who put their hand up to attend a school to promote the program but didn't get the opportunity. Because of your efforts, over 100 nominations have been received, creating an extremely competitive applicant pool for 2024. Across all promotions including through social media and cinemas, Councillor presentations are by far the most effective at engaging, inspiring, and reaching young people to put in an application. Having the support of the Mayor and Councillors is what sets the Geelong Youth Advisory Committee apart, and participants would again like to say thank-you for your support of the youth council program.

Connecting With the Community and Testing Recommendations

Youth Advisory Board Meetings

The addition of the Youth Advisory Board program has been incredibly valuable for Youth Council participants to effectively test the proposed report advice with young people across Geelong. Further, the opportunity to speak with young people across Geelong adds further perspective, ideas, and value that informs and effectively shapes the advice provided to council, to ensure advice is relevant to all young people. At the October youth advisory board meetings, which included all four wards across Geelong, youth council discussed the central youth hub planned for Geelong. Youth Council members gained further understanding and insight about the requirements and location of a potential hub where all young people can access and feel safe. Thank-you to all the young people who have provided their feedback about the new youth hub and have participated in the youth advisory board meetings this year.

Youth Council Advice

The 2023 Youth Council participants are excited to contribute their final advice to the youth-specific space for central Geelong. Members are overwhelmingly supportive of all preceding advice in relation to the youth space provided through previous youth council reports. The 2023 Youth Council believe that providing young people with access to a secure setting, will have a positive effect on those who use its services and allow young people to reclaim space within central Geelong. The central youth hub needs to be a setting that young people can access services and supports as well as enjoyable activities. Youth Council believe that young people need to be involved in the planning and design of the youth dedicated space, but further, believe that young people need to be at the centre of the decision making for the space from its initiation.

Youth Council's first piece of advice:

Ensure that widespread and place-based consultation is undertaken with many young people to ensure that the space is well received by young people and there is considerable buy-in from the youth community. Further, provide multiple opportunities and methods for young people to voice their opinions about the central youth hub and ensure that young people are genuinely listened to.

Youth Council's second piece of advice:

Once the site has been chosen, establish a youth committee, through an EOI process where young people can sit on a committee to guide the activities and events at the space. Ensure this committee of young people play a key role in the opening of the space that enables young people to lead the event process and take ownership over the new youth hub.

Youth Council's third piece of advice:

Ensure there are ongoing opportunities for all young people to participate in consultations throughout each stage of the social infrastructure process where feedback and input can be considered in the design and delivery of the youth space.

Conclusion

To conclude, Youth Council would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to the dedicated staff who have been instrumental in running the Geelong Youth Council and to all Councillors who have taken the time to be involved in this amazing program. Being part of the 2023 youth council has been an incredible educational journey, offering invaluable insights into leadership, community engagement, and demonstrated the power of youth-driven solutions. The skills acquired through youth council will undoubtedly be carried forward into all our future endeavours, enabling us to make a positive impact on society. The Geelong youth council has undeniably been the highlight of the year, offering a unique and unforgettable experience. The Junior Mayor and Junior Deputy Mayor would like to thank our fellow Youth Council members for their enthusiasm, passion and for their support to us in our leadership roles. All members will forever cherish the friendships and connections they have forged, and are deeply grateful for the opportunity to be a part of such an inspiring and dynamic community. Thank you all for making this year a remarkable one.