

THE CITY OF
GREATER GEELONG

YOUTH COUNCIL PRESENTATION TO COUNCIL

Tuesday 11 August 2020

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JUNIOR MAYOR – FARZANA HUSSAINI

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Junior Mayor's Message

INTRODUCTION

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge the Wadawurrung People, the traditional owners of this land, and pay my respects to their Elders past, present and emerging, as well as acknowledging all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People present this evening. Good evening Mayor Stephanie Asher, Greater Geelong Councillors and Directors, Youth Councillors and the gallery.

PURPOSE

The purpose of tonight's presentation is to highlight what the Youth Council has achieved since our last report that was presented by the Junior Deputy Mayor Ashley Delaney on the 9 June 2020. I will also outline the recommendations being made by Youth Council, informed by our discussions with Councillors, Council officers, young people and people that work with them.

WHAT WE HAVE ACHIEVED OVER THE PAST TWO MONTHS

June Meeting via Zoom

Our June meeting was held via Zoom without a problem. In this meeting we were able to discuss the mental health of the youth in Geelong, with a presentation from Sheldon, the Community Engagement Officer at headspace.

Before inviting Sheldon into our meeting we undertook a minute of silence for those who were or who are still suffering from mental health illness in our region. When she came in to our meeting, Sheldon acknowledged that it is a tough time for the young people in Geelong and we need to encourage each other to speak about our feelings and how we are going. Sheldon also provided information about headspace, which we thought was helpful for young people to know. To summarise, headspace is for everyone for the age group 12 to 25, with a main office in Geelong that offers counselling, GP access, alcohol and other drug use issues and work and study support. Physical, emotional and sexual health advice and information is also provided. If a young person ever wants to speak to someone personally, they can always access their online website, give them a call or visit them in person.

After Sheldon's presentation we had a few questions by the Youth Council members. By answering these, Sheldon gave us many resources so that young people could get help. From the presentation by headspace we learnt about ways to talk to our peers, how they feel about their mental health and also where we can help them get support from. We also learned that it's alright to have a mental health issue but it's never ok to keep it to yourself.

The other presentation we had was by Emma, a lawyer at Barwon Community Legal Service, who works to provide free legal services linked to funding agreements. One of her key roles is community education on legal rights, understanding of the legal system and services. She is currently working at Western Heights twice a week, providing educational information and legal support. Emma provided an overview of the services available. She advised that young people have gotten large fines from COVID-19 restrictions. She also asked all the Youth Council members to complete a survey, about the best ways to share legal information with young people. Once Emma was finished with her presentation, she asked us a few questions to get a better understanding of how young people like to learn and what we know.

It was a great night with the opportunity of meeting two different people and learn new things. I think they are both an important topic to be discussed by young people, especially going through such a tough time. I would like to take this opportunity to thank both presenters for their useful information.

Engaging with Young People and the Community

Youth Council believe it is important for young people to have a voice and for that voice to be heard, especially in this very tough time. Using different opportunities for us to engage with young people, like our social media page, is especially good for people who are not very confident sharing their ideas with their peers.

The Youth Council Instagram page is going very well so far. All our Youth Council members have been introduced and shared some information about themselves, through photos of their interests and questions that they have answered. In our Youth Council, we have a talented group of people who are working on these posts so that we can create and promote new ideas for the youth of Greater Geelong.

Youth Council have also been in the media lately, with our work being shown in articles in local newspapers and online. For example, I was recently involved in a piece to celebrate Refugee Week. I wanted to be a part of this as I thought it was a great way for other people to be inspired by a peer. I was able to share my story and give other people the confidence that they can be someone like me.

The articles in the local newspaper about our discussion on mental health were also very positive. It was a great way to share what we are doing with adults, who can then support the young people that they know or work with. We are very grateful to the people who are listening to our voice and sharing what we are saying, as it is helping us use our platform and share the work we do – and that Council does – with a wider group.

Councillor Connect Mentoring Program

As well as engaging with other young people, the Councillor Connect Mentoring program has given us the chance to speak with and learn from the Councillors. So far, we've been introduced to our Ward Councillors, taken on advice about public speaking and gotten a deeper understanding of how Council meetings and local government processes work. In general, we have learnt a lot from them and one of the key points we learnt was how Councillors got to the point where they are now. We can hopefully use those skills ourselves and promote them to other young people, who want to be in politics or local government.

More specifically, we have had some interesting and helpful conversations about key points the Youth Council are looking at. We have spoken with the Councillors about what Youth Councillors can do and the skills they can develop in a 12-month term in office, the process Council goes through to create more youth spaces like the fOrT Youth Centre and what role Council can play in advocating for youth mental health.

I would like to take this opportunity to show how grateful the Youth Council is for the time and knowledge that you have shared with us. Thank you very much.

YOUTH COUNCIL FEEDBACK

Youth Mental Health

An absorbing point that was made in our June meeting's presentation by Sheldan regarding youth mental health was that we need to encourage the young people of Geelong to reach out and ask for help, as it is unusual for them to go through so much as they have during this tough time. Somewhere they can get help is headspace as they are offering counselling, GP access and many other helpful sources by professional and trusted members. Young people aged between 12 to 25 can get help from their online services or in person from their offices located across Geelong.

Youth council advocates that:

Council promotes sources like headspace to the community using methods like social media, City News / Community Updates and other appropriate channels.

Youth Council Terms of Reference – Term of Office

The Youth Council believes that there have been many opportunities in the first 6 months of our membership term. We are grateful for these and feel we are starting to successfully use our time together. However, there are also challenges not only to this year – with COVID-19 restrictions – but also to a 12-month term in general.

We used a small part of our Youth Council meetings together to think about the positives and limitations of serving as Youth Councillors for 12 months, as well as the key points to consider if advocating for a longer term in office.

To get more information, Youth Council developed points that we discussed with Councillors during our Councillor Connect Mentoring Program sessions.

We are grateful for how clear and honest Councillors were in these sessions. We were able to provide input on the opportunity to spend more time as a team with all the members of the Youth Council in person and the benefit from the opportunity to learn more and have a better understanding of Council. By really getting to know and use what we have to connect with young people in our wards, Youth Council believes a second year in office would be even better at capturing and amplifying these new voices and ideas.

Youth Council also believes there could be a program created for those who are interested, where young people can learn about and be involved in local government, either through or outside of their schools. The 4th and 5th Objectives of Youth Council talk about civic leadership and an understanding of Council. A program dedicated to these objectives means that more young people can follow their interests in being active and informed citizens while, at the same time, Youth Council can more effectively use their platform to advocate and advise Council on issues specific to young people.

Youth Council advocates that:

Clause 4.3.2. of the Youth Council Advisory Committee Terms of Reference, which states “Members are not eligible to nominate for re-election”, is considered for removal.

A program where young people can learn about local government is created and promoted to schools within the local government area.

OUR PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT TWO MONTHS

There are many things that are soon to be happening for the Youth Council. We will be speaking to the Commission for Children and Young People, to give our perspective on how COVID-19 has affected young people in the Greater Geelong region. We will also have the opportunity to share our ideas on the City’s Environment Strategy and Climate Action Plan, to give our feedback on actions and goals that we think might be missing.

I want to restate what Ashley had previously stated in her report, that it is important for us to continue to work together in a tough time like this. The reason why is very clear and we want to take this reason to keep our focus on cooperating with as many young people as possible in the Greater Geelong area, on their mental and physical health, through virtual and face to face activities.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the Geelong Youth Council have been working productively over the past few months and have come across difficulties concerning COVID-19 and the restrictions. Through all this the Youth Council has been working together and are able to keep up with everything. We have used what we have learned to make informed recommendations to Council.

The next report to Council will be presented on 8 December, with another update on Youth Council's work and achievements.