

THE CITY OF
GREATER GEELONG

YOUTH COUNCIL THIRD REPORT TO COUNCIL

Tuesday 24 October 2023



DEPUTY JUNIOR MAYOR –

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Deputy Junior Mayor's Message

Introduction

Youth Council would like to acknowledge the Wadawurrung 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 June 27. The third 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 recommendations contained within.

What Youth Council Has Achieved Since the Second Report

May, June, July, and August Meetings

Across the May, June, July, and August meetings, many people from across the organisation attended the Youth Council meetings to consult with youth council. Participants learnt about the budgetary process, had an opportunity to provide feedback on the Geelong waterfront urban redesign plan, and Youth Council members had an opportunity to reflect on their roles in Youth Council, along with completing their mid-year evaluation surveys. Youth Council were presented with the Covid-19 Youth Impact Survey one final time, with Youth Development staff helping participants understand the results and validate them.

Youth Council participants also received training on social inclusion, focusing on the LGBTQIA+ community. Youth Council were provided with information highlighting the substantial proportion of young people identifying as LGBTQIA+ and the inequities they faced across multiple domains of life. The Youth Council is committed to authentically representing the diverse voices of youth, so this educational opportunity empowered participants with a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and triumphs faced by the LGBTQIA+ community. By enhancing participant awareness and knowledge, members are better equipped to advocate in a manner that promotes inclusivity, respect, and equality for all.

A highlight for Youth Council participants was a consultation from Barwon Health's Healthy Communities team, who presented and discussed the pressing issue of e-cigarettes or more commonly known as vapes, amongst young people. What participants heard from the team included some very concerning trends, statistics, and facts from data collected in a study titled 'Generation Vape', an Australian first study aiming to examine attitudes, behaviours, and knowledge of those aged 14-17, 18-24, as well as those of parents and teachers. What the study found was that 1/3 of the sample reported that they vape, 80% found vapes easy to access, and 31% bought a vape from a retail store even though it was illegal for them to do so. Further, people who used vapes were found to be 18 times more likely to smoke than those who never vaped, which is the first increase seen in smoking in 20 years among any age group.

Presenters also provided information to participants about the toxic chemicals found in a vape, the effects of nicotine on the body, the health risks of using vapes, the environmental implications of vapes and presented members with information about how vapes have taken hold of young people, including accessibility, taste, size, social influences, marketing, and packaging. Further, poor mental health, including self-esteem issues, anxiety, and the experience of loneliness are also factors that influence a young person's likelihood to vape.

During the meeting participants discussed their thoughts about why young people vaped, what would motivate them to stop, whether vaping was common among their peers and what they are seeing in their local communities and schools including prevention against the uptake of vaping.

Participants also heard about the work happening across the region to help combat the issue and learnt about the role that local government can play to tackle this issue. Youth Council agreed that vaping is an ongoing issue

in the community, needing urgent attention and the presentation served as a valuable opportunity for members to deepen their understanding of vaping and its implications for young people. Youth Council is dedicated to this matter, which was evident not only in the insightful discussions that followed the presentation but also in Youth Council's continuous efforts to include vaping and young people in the discussions with Councillors with the goal to bring about change.

Events and Opportunities

The Common Ground Project

After a presentation earlier in the year from a staff member from the Common Ground Project, Youth Council were invited to attend the community space and farm for a tour and to participate in a consultation about how they could engage more effectively with young people. The farm tour was a great experience, youth council members got to see how the farm operated, learn about the different stages of plant propagation, planting and harvesting. Youth Council participants heard about the different community and school programs and activities happening across the project and the opportunities available to young people to get involved in their yearlong traineeships. Many Youth Council members were inspired to see young people involved in transforming the food system and contributing to a better future in our region.

Visit from His Excellency, the Governor General

Youth Council members were delighted to be invited to meet His Excellency, The Governor General for a morning tea at Wurriki Nyal. It was a lovely event, where advisory group members were invited to an informal meet and greet. The Governor General was very interested in Youth Councils work, he enquired about the advice Youth Council provides, and how the program contributes to the community. Youth Council members also enjoyed the opportunity to participate in a sing along with the Governor Generals wife, Her Excellency, Mrs Linda Hurley which was very fun and a highlight of the day. Overall, the whole experience was one that each participant will reflect on and cherish for the rest of their lives.

Youth Round Table with Minister for Youth, Anne Aly

Young people across the Bellarine, and Kardinia wards were invited along with young people from the Surf Coast shire to participate in a 'youth round table' with the Minister for Youth, Anne Aly, and Labor MP Libby Coker. Each participant had an opportunity to talk about the issues that affected their lives. Many discussed the ongoing impacts of Covid 19 on mental health and many also discussed their struggles with the Victorian Education system. This opportunity was a great experience for all, as Youth Council representatives were able to discuss topical issues with state politicians, whilst hearing the views and opinions of young people from across Geelong.

YMCA Advocacy Training

In late August, Youth Council members participated in advocacy training delivered by the YMCA. Youth Council members learnt about the different strategies that exist to effectively advocate for an issue they are passionate about, and then discussed ways to specifically advocate to local council. Participants got into groups and drew what their ideal world would be like. Participants then brainstormed ideas about what needed to happen, specifically at a local government level, to get there. Each group chose a Youth Council priority area to focus on and developed a one-minute elevator pitch to convince the rest of the group about the importance of their issue and why it needs to be addressed. Participants enjoyed the session and learnt more skills about how to effectively advocate and speak about an issue they are passionate about.

Gender Equality Forum

In July, two Youth Council members had the opportunity to attend the Track C Consulting Gender Equality Forum at Wurriki Nyal. The event hosted close to 90 people and guests heard from 5 women discussing their experiences of inequality and the intersection between gender and race. Guest presenters included Sarah Ayoub, Aunty Nellie Flagg, Kgshak Akec, Sultan Cinar, and Nos Hosseini who each shared their stories and unique experiences of challenges they have faced as women within their communities. The opportunity to hear the deeply moving experiences and struggles faced by women here in Australia and overseas was a humbling experience. Youth Council members would like to thank all the guest speakers for sharing their stories.

Youth Council Nomination Promotion

Youth Council members had the opportunity to participate in the development of the promotional materials for the 2024 Youth Council nominations. Four Youth Council members had the opportunity to record Spotify and radio adverts at Pulse Radio Station. Another four members had the opportunity to feature in short clips for cinema and social media advertising. There was a lot of laughter and excitement exchanged, as it was the first time for some recording their voices and featuring in clips for advertising. It was a bittersweet moment as each participant understood that the 12-month term on Youth Council is slowly coming to an end, however members were excited to be involved in the marketing campaign to attract next year's members to the program.

Connecting With the Community and Testing Recommendations

Youth Council participants had the opportunity to connect with the broader youth community interested in having a say across the youth advisory board program facilitated over the months of July and August. This opportunity allows Youth Council participants to speak to the young people they represent and test the advice they would like to put forward to Councillors. This is a new program that allows Youth Council participants to ensure they are representative of the broader youth community. This program is now running across three wards with many young people attending and contributing to the youth informed advice provided to Council.

Youth Council tested their two topics with participants, the first was the use of e-cigarettes or vapes among young people. What Youth Council participants found, was that participants agreed that vaping is a significant issue for young people in Geelong. Majority of respondents told the youth council members that more than one in three young people they know use vapes. Most participants agreed that young people wouldn't use vapes if the flavours and colours weren't so appealing to young people, however many are now addicted to the nicotine. They also told youth council members that accessing vapes is relatively easy, but if young people cannot access vapes, they are likely to resort to smoking cigarettes. Vaping among young people in Geelong is currently perceived as the norm and many are concerned about the ongoing effects of vaping on young people into the future.

Youth Council's second topic for discussion explored young people's attendance and experiences at major events across Geelong. What they found was that young people are not engaged when they attend events with their families. Many either aren't interested in attending at all because there's nothing there for them to do, nowhere for them to hang out with friends, and no stalls, or markets targeted specifically to them. Many young people agreed that if events did have a youth space, activity, or targeted music performances (either opportunities for young people to perform or music that appealed to young people) that many would attend.

Youth Council would like to say a big thank you to all the young people who attended the Youth Advisory Board program and provided their input. Your feedback, and guidance has been extremely valuable in informing the advice that Youth Council has presented below.

Youth Council Advice

Tackling the issue of vaping among young people:

1. Update and increase signage across Geelong that identifies both vape and smoke free zones. On this signage take a strength-based approach and include information about where to seek help from Barwon Health's 'Be Smoke Free' Clinics and services so people can seek help for their nicotine addiction.
2. The City of Melbourne has developed a vape and smoke free zone map for the community, Youth Council would love to see Geelong produce a vape and smoke free map to promote smoke free spaces and places across the city centre.
3. As the City of Melbourne has done, consider implementing a ban on tobacco and e-cigarette product sales in COGG owned or managed sites.
4. Advocate to the State Government for more extensive tobacco and e-cigarette regulations, as Victoria is significantly lagging behind when compared to other states. Consider specifically advocating for the implementation of a tobacco retail licensing scheme which requires all retailers to have a licence to sell tobacco and e-cigarettes.

Events at the City:

1. Develop a council policy that ensures young people are considered as a key demographic to attract and attend at events across the City, similar to the City's prevention of single use plastics policy, which effectively guides staff in reducing their impact on waste by restricting the use of single use plastics at events across Geelong.
2. When allocating council funds to supporting major events, consider allocating a portion of the budget to ensure young people are considered and have age appropriate and youth informed entertainment at events.

Youth Council's Priorities for the Next Two Months

Youth Council participants will focus their enthusiasm and commitment over the next two months into the final opportunities available to provide advice to both council via the last youth council report, and to the guests at the monthly meetings who are seeking youth advice and input into their work. All members are dedicated to making the most of the final four months in the program. Youth Council will work diligently in collaboration on projects that strongly align with the Youth Council priority areas, utilising each individuals' skills and expertise to create positive change for the youth of Geelong.

Conclusion

Youth Council look forward to taking advantage of this unique opportunity to increase impact and ensure the 2023 Youth Council participants leave a legacy that will be felt long after their term has finished.