



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

20 years of the SA Youth Environment Council



Government
of South Australia

Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Board
Department for Education and Child Development

Background

The original Youth Environment Council (YEC) was a ministerial advisory group formed in November 1997 from a number of inter-departmental environmental education initiatives.

Today it is a joint initiative of the Department for Education (DE) and the Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management (AMLR NRM) Board's Education program.

The aims of the Youth Environment Council of South Australia are to support youth leadership for students aged 11 to 17 years:

- to find their voice and know that it is capable of helping make a difference
- develop skills such as leadership, team work and public speaking
- raise youth awareness and encourage involvement in our environment
- empower youth to take action on sustainability issues
- develop a network of youth sustainability leaders
- enable students to share sustainability ideas and actions.

Student leadership skills are developed through a forum and camp, supported by student mentors and staff from the Board's NRM Education program.

At the conclusion of the year, students share and celebrate their projects at an environmental showcase held at Cleland Wildlife Park. The Minister for Environment and Water, or a representative, has attended past showcases. This has provided high level validation for the journey these young students have taken, affording a very rewarding and encouraging event.

Some 600 students have been YEC members during its twenty year history; taking action, influencing their communities, teaching others and representing the views of young people in government decision-making processes.

Over the 20 year history of the YEC, successive environment and education ministers have supported the council and provided an opportunity for YEC representatives to visit their offices and share the views of young people regarding environmental issues of critical concern.



Being a part of the YEC has changed how I see the world, and I am forever grateful

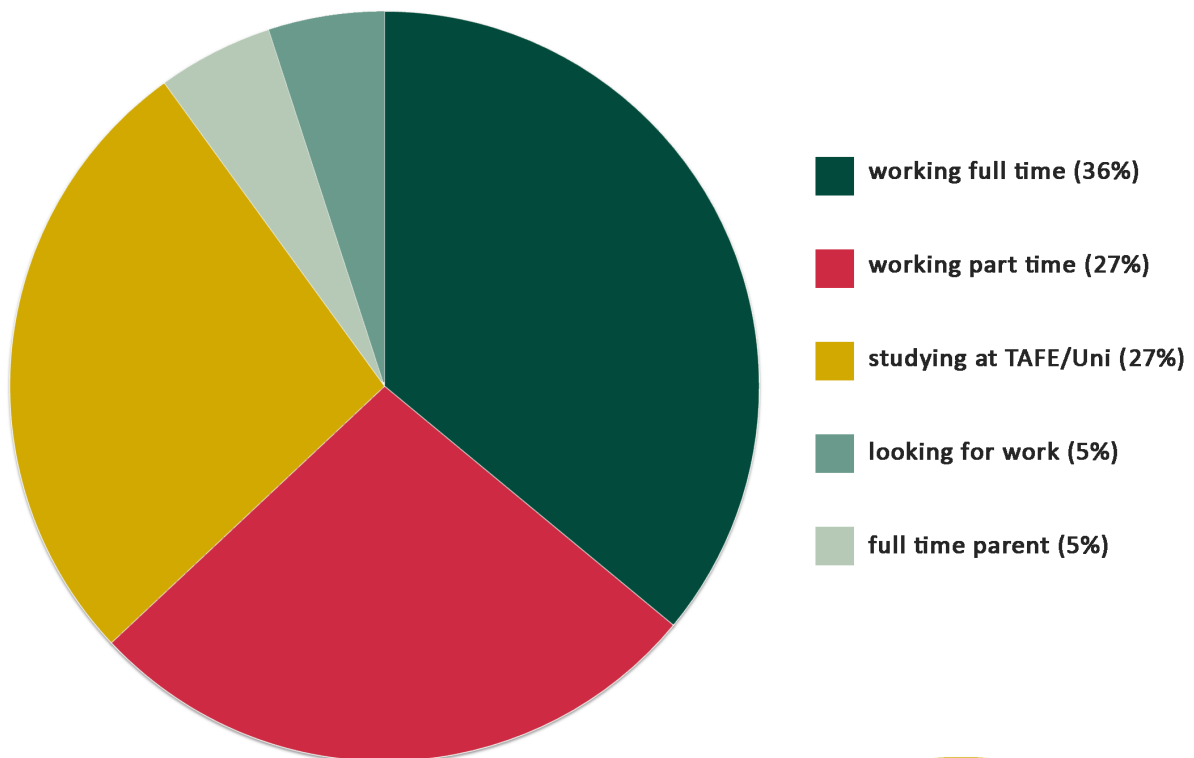
20 Year Survey

To mark the 20 year anniversary of the YEC a survey was developed for past members and distributed to all members whose email addresses were still on file. It was also shared on social media, where members were encouraged to tag others they had kept in touch with.

There were 96 responses to the survey:

- *72% were female*
- *68% were still at school.*

Of those who finished school



The **environment or sustainability** affected the work of **19 out of 28** who were employed, and was directly or indirectly part of study for **19 out of 27** who were studying.

The **YEC experience was influential** for the **53 out of 75** who were thinking about future study choices, and for the **55 out of 76** who were thinking about future work choices.



Learning leadership roles and improving my confidence in a committee situation definitely helped to shape me and push me towards my ultimate career as a teacher

96% said their **public speaking skills improved**.

91% said their **leadership skills improved**.

97% found their **awareness of environmental issues increased**.

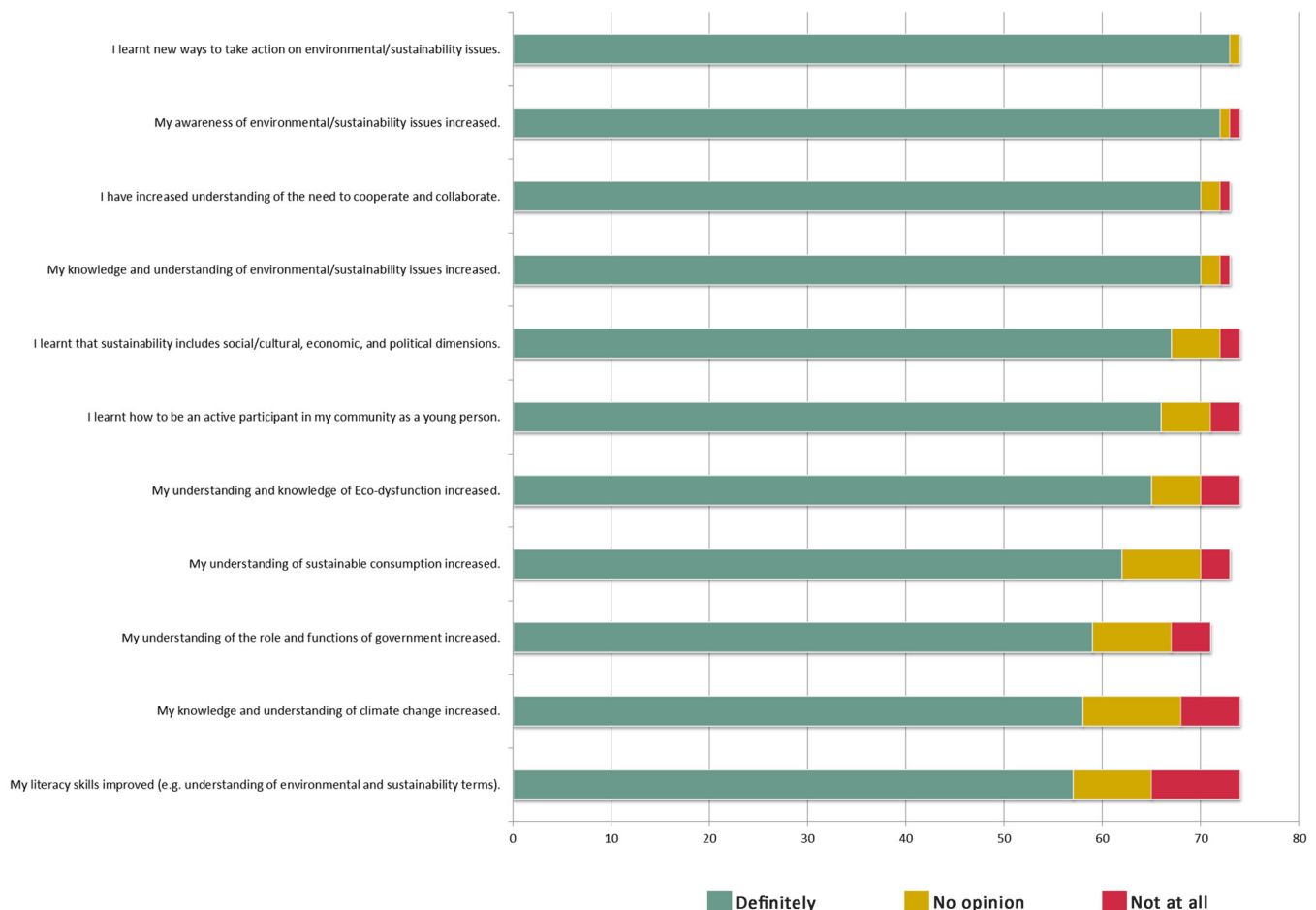
91% learnt that **sustainability includes social, cultural, economic and political dimensions** as well as the environment.

99% learnt **new ways to take action on sustainability issues** and **95%** felt **empowered to take action**.

86% learnt how to be an **active participant in their community**.

85% inspired or **influenced their school/community to make changes** to improve the environment/sustainability.

Learning new ways to take action was the biggest change



What are they doing now?



Of the respondents in paid employment, **a high proportion worked in roles involving young people.**

- 6 had become teachers themselves
- 2 were youth workers

There were also several careers directly related to sustainability.

- 2 worked in renewable energy
- 1 in sustainable architecture
- 1 in marine biology
- 1 in climate activism

Three respondents were in **roles related to politics and policy.**

Some respondents commented further on their experience and how it had shaped their study and career choices. It was very clear from the number of positive comments that YEC has had a lasting impact and influence on many past members.

It helped in my schooling years, and the skills continue to be used in my workplace where they make me stand out from others.

It has influenced me to think about working in a job that will create visible change in our world.

Realising that I could make a difference in the world led me to studying environmental management and volunteering my time to protect the environment.

Follow up interviews were conducted over the phone with a number of respondents who had indicated they had more to share. NRM Education Officers asked them further questions about their work, study and life since YEC and used these detailed responses to develop a series of written case studies. A selection of these is included on the following pages.

Where are they now?

Elinor Cozens

Years involved

2003-05, President 2005

Current role

Primary school teacher

I teach a Year 5/6 class at a state school in Melbourne, and the environmental awareness I picked up early through YEC is something I try to impart to my students now as part of everyday teaching. My students are actively involved in writing letters and finding solutions to sustainability issues in their community, and I'm really proud of them.



What was the most significant change that came from your involvement with the YEC?

I think it was realising that there were others who - although I assumed everyone else was like me - had very a strong passion and were honestly experts in some really specific issues. I think some amazing changes came out of the YEC in different communities - such as one student I remember managing to get a local marine species listed as protected in their area - and although that wasn't something I was personally involved in it stuck with me and I realised how real the possibilities are to make change if you care about something enough.

Why was this important?

What I learned during my involvement with YEC has influenced me in the way I teach today. I think sometimes it's easy to get bogged down and quite depressed by the enormity of some of the environmental problems we face today; and even more so if you're a child and not as well equipped to deal with that. But when you make very young people aware of some of these issues, they do get over the initial shock and they actually start to think about action, and that's something everybody needs to encourage.

What advice would you give to current and future members of the YEC?

As a young person, if you're willing and have the nous to work within an adult framework (such as the YEC), then people will listen to you. And that's really powerful.

Is there anything else you would like to share?

I had so many opportunities opened up for me as a YEC member; such as being nominated as President and being invited as a keynote speaker for an AAEE (Australian Association of Environmental Education) conference at the age of 16. But I think at the time I didn't realise the gravity of that, and the position I was in to actually make some real change if I considered it carefully enough. So really, just know that you have so much to give and when those opportunities come up, make the most of them.

Where are they now?

Mark Cawdron White

Years involved

2000 – 08

Current role

New Home Consultant, Metricon Homes

I studied Environmental Law at university and now I'm studying architecture. The YEC helped to give me a sustainability-focused mindset that I'm able to use in my current job. I talk to my customers about sustainable home design and really get them thinking about their lifestyle and how the proposed home will match this.



What was the most significant change that came from your involvement with the YEC?

The most significant thing for me to come out of my YEC experience is the self-worth and self-confidence side of things that you get. It gave me an option to focus my energy on what I can do, what my options are, and what I can do as a member of society. You don't always get the opportunity to do that at the age I was then. It was so important as a teenager. It helped me with my mental development; this is who I am and what I stand for.

Why was this important?

The YEC helped me to develop confidence and the ability to articulate my point of view. Also critical thinking; am I standing for the right thing? What would I do if I was the devil's advocate? Being in the YEC definitely challenged my thoughts and taught me to think about other people's point of view. I learnt how to coordinate people, challenge others' thoughts and opinions, how to play devil's advocate, to question things, how to educate others, and about influencing. I also learnt that it's ok to turn around and admit you're wrong.

What advice would you give to current and future members of the YEC?

Just do it! Just jump in legs first. What's the worst that can happen? Grab the bull by the horns and ride it! We all make mistakes and mistakes can be fixed.

Is there anything else you would like to share?

I'm glad the YEC is still going and offering an output for young people.

Where are they now?

Erin Henson

Years involved

1998-2004

Current role

State Government

I started as a graduate working with Zero Waste SA (now Green Industries SA) as a Project Manager, which was fantastic. I first managed an Australian Government project for waste oil and then managed the Wipe Out Waste program.



What was the most significant change that came from your involvement with the YEC?

My involvement in the YEC led me down a path to getting a job with State Government first thing out of university. I think it really helped that I knew the Chief Executive of the Department for Environment and Heritage through my involvement. When I first joined YEC, I never knew it really would have helped me to get my first full time "proper job"!

A main role of the YEC was to advise the Minister on what young people thought about environmental issues and what they felt was important. We spoke at various events about the environmental issues that concerned us. It was so worth it, not only for the students, but also the Minister to get a sense of 'this is what's important to young people'. That was the point of the YEC at the time, to speak to the Environment Minister about current issues, and that's what kept us going.

Why was this important?

Because of the long time I spent with the YEC, I experienced the benefits of a good community of people that had formed. When you're high school age you don't necessarily have those opportunities, ones that put you with adults as well as other young people doing this sort of stuff. I always saw it as a huge privilege to be involved with the YEC.

What advice would you give to current and future members of the YEC?

Hang in there and get involved. Get involved a bit beyond your comfort zone. What kept me going were the relationships and ultimately the friendships that were formed.

Is there anything else you would like to share?

One thing that I remember well was the passion and determination of people who were adults, working so hard to get youth involved with the decision makers in government. They put so much effort in and as young people with that support it was invaluable.

Where are they now?

Thomas Milham

Years involved

2009-11, Mentor 2011

Current role

Youth Development Officer, Scouts SA

I have a casual paid role with Scouts SA, but that's about 5% of the work I do for them as I'm also involved as a volunteer in many other programs. I also volunteer for Scouting Australia.



What was the most significant change that came from your involvement with the YEC?

The YEC was the first youth council I sat on external to school. This provided me with the inspiration and skills to join other youth councils through scouting, such as the branch youth council (Scouting SA) and the national youth council (Scouting Australia). I now sit on the branch rover council (SA) providing support to rover crews across SA and collaborating with scouts from all around Australia.

Why was this important?

The YEC was a launch pad for me to get out and see the bigger picture, and provide motivation and growth for leadership and organisational skills. I didn't care about the title, but began to see myself as a leader of others and this has helped with my work in a number of roles since then. I've been involved with Scouts for 15 years, but the YEC has taught me to recognise that more opportunities present themselves as you get older and I've been able to act on them!

What advice would you give to current and future members of the YEC?

I think it's important to take opportunities when they come up, and push outside your comfort zone. It's actually really good fun to meet other people, even though it can be scary at first to be part of a group where you don't know anyone. You can also get some really good projects happening with others when you share the same values.

Is there anything else you would like to share?

I am still really happy I had the opportunity to have been a mentor, because that leadership role helped me in mentoring other young people in leadership roles in turn. I actually saw a membership application for a committee I sit on recently, from someone who flagged their involvement with the YEC and that was really cool; you never know who you might come into contact with again.

Where are they now?

Sophie Rogers

Years involved

2003-08, President 2004

Current role

NRM Education Officer, Adelaide Mt Lofty Ranges NRM Board

I work in the NRM Education team which now oversees the running of the YEC! This is just one of the things we do; we also run a school-based young environmental leaders program, Professional Development for teachers, and work with schools and preschools to embed sustainability practises through meetings, resource development and support.



What was the most significant change that came from your involvement with the YEC?

I was involved throughout high school and first year Uni, where I studied Environmental Policy and Management. The networks I formed in that time were a huge thing to come out of YEC for me. I became state convenor of SASSEN (South Australian Student Environment Network) and was invited to be a keynote speaker at an Australian Science Teachers Association conference. I also had the amazing opportunity to be part of the Greenpeace Youth Delegation at the Montreal Protocol in 2007.

Why was this important?

Through my involvement in the YEC and as President, and networking with lots of different people, I began to have a sense of those who were influential. Realising that the buck stops at your adult mentors, as a young person that you need those people to listen to you, really stuck with me in how I work with young people now. I also came to understand the formal processes involved in taking action, through being part of the Executive group and meeting with the Minister. I saw that there were ways to get around resistance and other issues, and learned to be persistent.

What advice would you give to current and future members of the YEC?

There is something really satisfying and worthwhile in doing smaller projects at a school level. In hindsight I realised it was really valuable learning for me in terms of project management skills and communicating with other people to make things happen. It's easy to talk about the bigger things that happen, but it's the little things that are the building blocks for creating bigger change.

Is there anything else you would like to share?

The YEC was instrumental for me in developing skills I now use every day without thinking about it. Skills like project management, communicating with others, problem solving and leadership. It was the first place I was invited to share my opinion and have this valued, and that has opened up so many other opportunities for me!

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Gareth Bailey

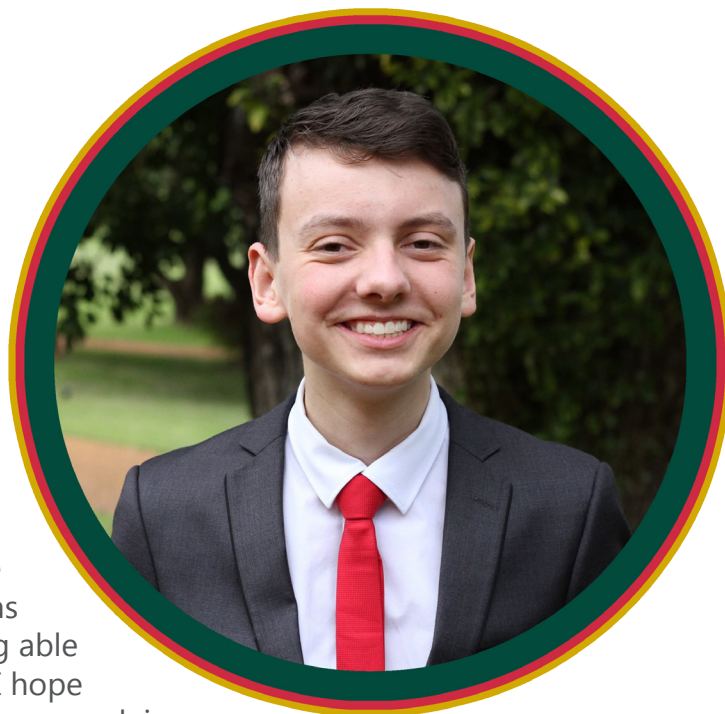
Years involved

2013-2016, Mentor 2014-16

Current role

Union worker

Coming straight out of YEC, I was very passionate about environmentalism and certain I would follow a career in that area. My thoughts on possible careers have since broadened a little, but one thing the YEC has highlighted to me is that I really enjoy being able to communicate and articulate myself – so I hope whatever roles I do hold in the future, that I can work in that communication with others.



What was the most significant change that came from your involvement with the YEC?

I think it's helped me to understand better aspects of communication and how I can pass on aspects of environmentalism to others. At school, I remember having recycling bins brought into all the individual classrooms and I also had various discussions with leadership about things like solar panels and renewable energy. I like to think I have also had some influence on my friends in that they try to use less electricity, produce less waste and things like that. And in my volunteering role in local politics, I've been able to bring up sustainability as a priority at our group meetings.

Why was this important?

It bought about a greater interest in being active in my local community, and trying to influence my local area. In my case that's been a political activism, which has been a really positive thing for me and wouldn't have come about if it weren't for my involvement in the YEC. The YEC has been really good in inspiring leadership and personal confidence; in really inspiring people to do the best they can to bring about solutions to environmental problems. To that end, I've also done some volunteering to help a local MP with their state election campaign.

What advice would you give to current and future members of the YEC?

One of the best things you can do there is just try to meet as many people as you can. Talk to everyone; the fact is there are very few other spaces where people our age can find so many others interested in the same sorts of things we are. For me, socialising like that not only enabled me to learn a lot from others, but I made many great friends who I still talk to today.

Is there anything else you would like to share?

One thing about the YEC is that each activity can fit well with an individual's learning style. For me that was the ability to communicate my ideas, and being involved for a number of years I got the chance to strengthen those skills over and over and I knew I had to really be efficient in getting my message across. I found the YEC really did educate me on my own actions and their impacts.

The Youth Environment Council has been valued and supported by a partnership between the Departments for Education and Environment, and Water. The Council provides a wonderful opportunity for our young people to develop their social skills, self-awareness, confidence and leadership skills, while making a worthwhile contribution to their community in an environmental area of personal interest.

Marianne Nicholas, Project Officer Australian Curriculum and teaching for Effective Learning, SA Department for Education

I'm always inspired by what is possible when you create a safe, nurturing space for young people to pursue their passion in sustainability and the environment. YEC members consistently grow in confidence and make changes in their own lives, their schools and their communities.

Amy Blaylock, NRM Education Officer

I've been able to pass on the passion and love I have for the environment and others have found it admirable and refreshing and have learnt also.

Tamekka Leicester, YEC alumni

