



Youth Environment Council of SA: Where are they now?

Name: Amy Ralfs

Years involved: 1997-2003 (Executive Member)

Current role: Ministerial speech writer

Getting involved in developing and running different programs has influenced where I've ended up in terms of working in politics – because I wanted to be in a place that was about making action happen and making a difference. The public speaking I did, often on national and international stages, also helped a lot in my law degree and subsequently.

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

I started in the YEC when I was 15 and I found a place that connected me with other like-minded young people who were passionate not just about the environment, but social issues such as empowering and engaging young people and creating real change in the community. It was a genuine opportunity to be involved in something meaningful and to have an impact. I was on the Executive which was a key driving group, and one particular piece of work that we accomplished was the publication of a community plan in 1999. Once that was done, I remember clearly sitting around a table with two or three other executive members and coming up with this idea of running workshops to help implement the plan, and that's how the Y4EA workshops began. We wanted to help young people develop skills in order to run their own locally based environmental programs.

Why was this important?

I did a bunch of things, like presentations at different levels, that meant I had to represent the work we were doing and so I had to develop my public speaking skills and the ability to interact with lots of different people and audiences. Developing the Y4EA workshops involved talking to quite young kids, to adults in senior positions in their fields- right up to the Minister for Environment- and that allowed me to become a confident and articulate spokesperson for what we were doing. Through our mentors and the interest different groups showed in us at the YEC, we really felt like we were treated not just as leaders of tomorrow but leaders of today. Our work was really highly valued.

Is there anything else you would like to share?

All that work I did with the YEC in terms of helping other kids to get them actively involved, maintain the group atmosphere and keep the interest up- those skills have all translated to my life now which is useful. For example I now run the parents and friends committee at my children's school and am on the governing council, and my time in the YEC has helped change my focus and allowed me to push those groups in a more environmental direction. I guess what I'm getting at is that this experience has shaped me in ways I couldn't have perceived when I first joined at 15, and that reflects just what a powerful experience it was.