



Youth Environment Council of SA: Where are they now?



Name: Matthew Key

Years involved: 2000-2008

Current role: Teacher and Counsellor, Coober Pedy Area School

Although not explicitly focussed on the environment in my current role, it is a big focus area which I understand well. I'm working to create more opportunities in Coober Pedy for the local youth, as I understand firsthand how big a difference this can make.

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

I was fairly young when involved in the formation of the Y4EA workshops, which involved fortnightly meetings to establish a vision and philosophy for the group, and fleshing out the model in a board room in town where we would smash out scripts. I gained strong leadership skills from this, as it was a group of only about eight members who were selected to represent their peers. I also developed confidence and self-belief at a time when I really needed it, and my involvement had a flow on effect at home where I got my parents on board with better waste management and sustainable gardening practises.

Why was this important?

I wasn't very academically focussed, so my experience in the YEC made up for what was missing elsewhere. It was like a second family, somewhere I actually felt my opinion and ideas counted and I could express them in ways that appealed to me- such as creating a YEC rap that we performed at a conference. Prior to involvement I would say that I seriously lacked direction, but now I've been a teacher and counsellor for five years and I love the chance to work with young people and to encourage them in the same ways YEC encouraged me.

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

Give things a go, there is nothing quite like it- the YEC is a safe place to take risks and have your voice heard!

Is there anything else you would like to share?

Cherish your time with the YEC. This is a truly youth-led model, which is something that's really rare to come across these days. It has definitely helped shape me in where I am now.