

# Youth Environment Council South Australia



ANNUAL REPORT  
2020

GREEN  
ADELAIDE

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## 1.0 Executive summary

The Youth Environment Council (YEC) has now been running for 23 years, providing young South Australians interested in improving the environment with a suite of life-long skills and a space to develop their enthusiasm. The program is geared towards giving YEC members a greater understanding of sustainability; how it applies to their lives and the issues that face society. It also aims to empower young people by showing them that their voices are not only valued, but are far more powerful when they work with others to make a difference. In addition, YEC members develop skills in social entrepreneurialism and leadership.

Students take part in a year-long program to help them implement action projects within their schools or communities. To support them in this they are led through a series of activities which challenge them to think about how they can improve sustainability and/or their local environment in a broad context. Over the course of the program the students develop their skills as powerful learners; able to make decisions, solve problems, communicate their messages and collaborate with others. This enables them to build and develop planning and organisational skills, teamwork, public speaking, personal responsibility and social skills. They also come into contact and create friendships with new people who have similar passions, leading to a boost in their confidence and self-belief.

The general capabilities in the curriculum are strongly woven through the YEC program. This has resulted in a strong program that contributes to the goals set out in the 2008 Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians and the subsequent Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration 2019. The goals declare that young people should be supported to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens.

It is important for these students to understand that they don't have to wait until adulthood to be leaders in their community. As part of a network of skilled, confident, like-minded students, they are equipped to tackle environmental and sustainability challenges today and into the future.

Green Adelaide Board recognises the value of authentic student voice. Student voice empowers young people and provides them with the skills, curiosity and creativity to take action for the environment and to live more sustainable lifestyles.



## 2.0 Background

Since 1997 the YEC has provided a forum for young people to voice their concerns about key environmental issues facing South Australia, and it has given them opportunities to take action towards a more environmentally sustainable future. The YEC has historically been a joint initiative of the Department for Education (DfE) and the education program of the Green Adelaide Board. The Green Adelaide Education team values young people as equal partners and active participants in making decisions that affect their lives.



Green Adelaide Education also has a program dedicated to strengthening student voice within schools and the community, and providing access to authentic learning opportunities as part of its commitment to empower young people to be leaders and drive change in their communities.

## 3.0 YEC aims

The Youth Environment Council of SA aims to:

- develop skills such as leadership, team work and public speaking
- raise youth awareness about and encourage involvement in our environment
- empower youth to take action on environmental issues and lead sustainable lifestyles
- ensure students see themselves as active citizens today and not just “leaders of tomorrow”
- develop a network of youth environmental leaders
- enable students to share ideas and actions.

## 4.0 How YEC aligns with partner targets and priorities

The Youth Environment Council’s outcomes align with the Green Adelaide Board priorities, DfE priorities and the Australian Curriculum.

### 4.1 Green Adelaide vision and priorities

The vision of the Green Adelaide Board is to create a cooler, greener, wilder and more climate-resilient Adelaide across SA’s 17 metropolitan councils. To align with this, Green Adelaide Education works to develop the capacity of the community with a focus on schools by supporting school sustainability initiatives and their opportunities to extend education to their connected communities.

Green Adelaide Education has also identified nature education as one of its key priorities. The team works towards this priority in many ways, one being through youth voice. The term ‘youth voice’ or ‘student voice’ describes *“the many ways in which youth might have the opportunity to actively participate in school decisions that will shape their lives and the lives of their peers”* (Mitra 2004). Youth voice, in its authentic form, allows young people to identify issues and be the drivers of action to address those issues.

The Youth Environment Council has been very effective in developing young engaged leaders who are advocates for sustainability, communicate strong messages to their wider communities and involved in taking action. The Youth Environment Council also encompasses the remaining six priorities of Green Adelaide through members’ action projects. YEC members work on an environmental issue of their choice and some of these projects include; supporting native animals, waste management, water quality and storage, sustainability behaviour change, and increasing native plants.



## 4.2 Department for Education priorities

The YEC program adopts best practice pedagogy through the Teaching for Effective Learning (TfEL) Framework. This involves:

- encouraging students to voice their passion and concerns for sustainability and the environment (2.1 Develop democratic relationships)
- students sharing what they have learnt and experienced in varied modes: displays; speeches; newsletter articles and workshops (2.2 Building a community of learners; 4.4 Communicate learning in multiple modes)
- expecting students to drive their own learning around a sustainability or environmental topic of their interest, with staff support when needed (3.1 Teach students how to learn)
- students skilfully solving problems and being proactive in new situations (3.2 Foster deep understanding and skilful action)
- recognising and building upon students' prior knowledge about projects, their community and sustainability (4.1 Build on learners' understandings)
- encouraging students to participate in the community by joining local groups, advocating for change and getting involved in local on-ground projects (4.2 Connect learning to students' lives and aspirations)
- students applying their learning in real world contexts by taking action to support a positive change for our world (4.3 Apply and assess learning in authentic contexts).

As a result, Green Adelaide Education has different approaches to engage with young learners, catering for all learning styles and challenging the students to think about the sustainability issues faced by society and particularly their local community. The program builds resilience by helping members to explore potential solutions and/or actions. There is also a strong focus on engaging others in developing more sustainable lifestyles, with the philosophy that we are a far more powerful force when we work with and hear the voices of others. From this, YEC students develop valuable skills to become active global citizens.





### 4.3 Links to the Australian Curriculum

Sustainability is one of the three cross-curriculum priorities in the Australian Curriculum, and the focus of the YEC program. If YEC students are to take ownership of the sustainability issues they are researching, they must have a deep understanding of how these issues apply to them and their local environs. As a result, the YEC program content is developed in collaboration with YEC mentors (see section 5.2) to ensure activities provide skill development and are engaging and relevant for the whole YEC audience.

The Youth Environment Council creates opportunities for student empowerment because students design and direct their own learning through a community-based project. The skills and knowledge that students are exposed to through the YEC are aligned to six of the seven general capabilities (as outlined below) and strongly associated with the subject areas of Geography, Biology, Health and Physical Education, and Civics and Citizenship.

The cross-curriculum priority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures is also emphasised throughout the YEC experience and incorporated into several areas of the program.

#### Literacy

Students undertake a range of literacy-based tasks and take charge of their own learning. They identify an issue of interest to them and undertake research, analysis and development of a project. Students often challenge themselves to gather information from professional sources, thereby developing oral and written communication skills, which require them to explain, justify and deepen their understanding of their chosen issue. YEC members present their findings and outcomes to their peers, teachers, families and Green Adelaide Education staff, justifying their findings and reflecting on their learning experience.

*Learning Area Links: Civics and Citizenship (ACHCS055), (ACHCS084); Geography (ACHGS061), (ACHGS071)*





## Information and communication technology

The use of online platform Padlet challenges members' skills in accessing online communication tools and allows them to keep in touch throughout the program. The Padlet program used in 2020 is interactive and multi-modal, enabling students to take responsibility for and control of how they interact with the group during the year. Members are encouraged to develop their discussion skills, using the platform to pose questions and share their project research and progress. Throughout 2020, virtual catch-ups facilitated by Green Adelaide Education staff enabled members to interact in real-time, share their progress and troubleshoot issues, as face-to-face events were not possible. As part of their project, some students choose to produce websites, make films/videos, and produce online surveys. Many students choose to use both new and traditional models of technology when developing their project and obtain research material through various sources.

*Learning Area links: Civics and Citizenship (ACHCS085); Geography (ACHGS061)*

## Critical and creative thinking

YEC members undertake a major project that requires them to identify an issue they are passionate about, take action within their community, and present the outcomes to an audience. The students develop creative solutions and challenge traditional processes to arrive at a solution. In order to develop confidence in their ability to create, adapt and think logically about an issue, they are deliberately exposed to challenging scenarios and situations that require a creative solution. Throughout their project and at the final sharing day in 2020, students participated in outdoor learning experiences that required them to communicate and work cohesively as a team.

*Learning Area links: Civics and Citizenship (ACHCS057), (ACHCS055), (ACHCS085); English (ACELY1720); Health and Physical Education (ACPPS079), (ACPMP105); Geography (ACHGS061)*



## Personal and social capacity

The focus of the YEC experience is to empower students with skills and strategies to lead change within their local community. They learn that in order to be successful, many projects require participants to have skills in leadership, negotiation, collaboration and perseverance. Throughout the program members share experiences and develop new and healthy relationships with students they may not otherwise have met in their normal lives. Members are encouraged to apply to be a student mentor in subsequent years, taking an active role in leading activities, modelling responsible and respectful behaviours, and providing feedback to students and staff.

*Learning Area links: Health and Physical Education (ACPMP086), (ACPPS079), (ACPMP105); Science (ACSHE120); Civics and Citizenship (ACHCS057), (ACHCS085)*

## Ethical understanding

Members examine their values and attitudes, justify their opinions with evidence, and reflect on the rights of individuals and the responsibilities of society. They discuss and debate differing opinions amongst themselves, learning to listen and respect opinions that differ from their own. The concepts of sustainability and environmental stewardship – balancing the needs of society, the economy and the environment – are presented through a number of tasks. The individual projects allow students to research a topic in greater detail in order to understand the complexity of an issue. They are then asked to justify and support their views with research and challenged to present their findings to their peers and invited guests.

*Learning Area links: Geography (ACHGK051), (ACHGK052), (ACHGK070); Civics and Citizenship (ACHCS057); English (ACELY1720); Science (ACSSU116); Health and Physical Education (ACPPS093)*

## Intercultural understanding

YEC members can come from anywhere in South Australia, representing rural and urban environments and a variety of backgrounds. Therefore, members may be exposed to people who live quite different lifestyles to themselves and who may express very different opinions. As a result, the students have the good fortune to be introduced to people they may not have had the opportunity to meet in their normal social life. Members learn that they are citizens of the world with the power to create change locally, by connecting with local issues and examining the role of communities in creating change. In 2020, students were delighted to participate in an art activity with a local Aboriginal educator at the final sharing event and learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and connections to the local environment.

*Learning Area links: Health and Physical Education (ACPPS093), (ACPMP086), (ACPPS079); Civics and Citizenship (ACHCS057); Geography (ACHGK065)*





## 5.0 Membership in 2020

This year 55 students in Years 7 to 10 from 38 schools across South Australia were chosen to be members of the YEC (seven of whom were mentors selected from the previous year). Unfortunately, some members had to withdraw during the year, but the remaining students represented the voices of young people from schools across South Australia.

They represented the Green Adelaide, Hills & Fleurieu, Murraylands & Riverland, Northern & Yorke, Kangaroo Island, Eyre Peninsula and Limestone Coast regions. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of representation from Landscape regions in SA.

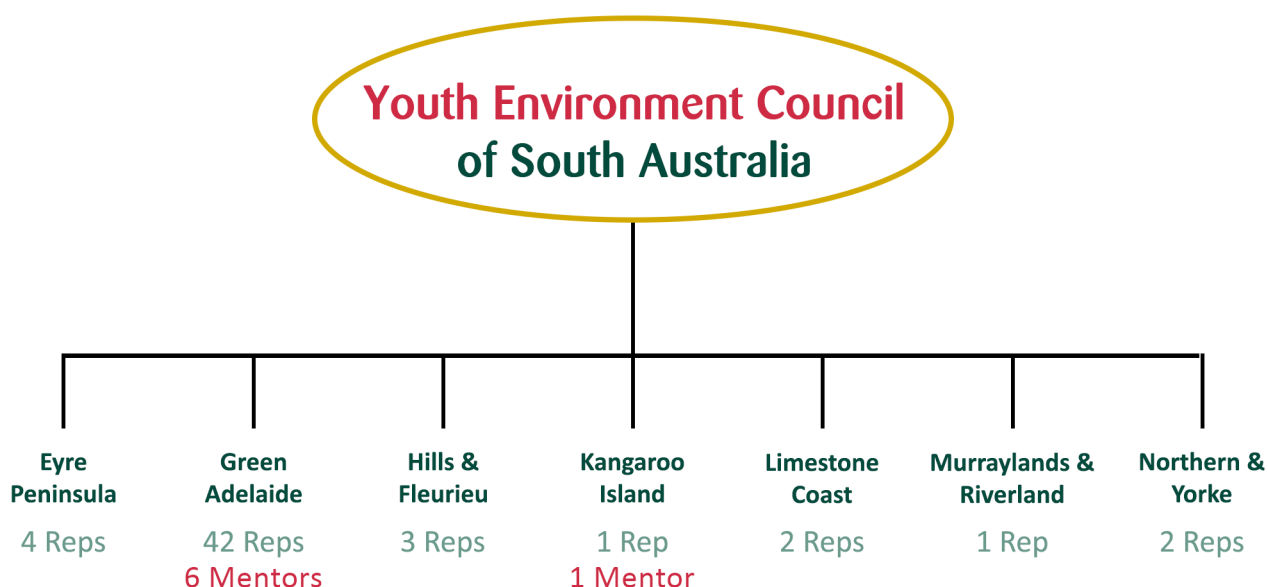


FIGURE 1: Youth Environment Council Representation Breakdown for 2020

### 5.1 Roles within the YEC and the 2020 selection process

Other than the seven students who were offered roles as mentors, all students interested in being a Youth Environment Council member were required to apply. The opportunity to apply was promoted through the YEC website ([www.yecsa.net.au](http://www.yecsa.net.au)); Green Adelaide and Murraylands & Riverland education email lists; the Green Adelaide Youth Environment Leadership Program; emails to schools from Landscape Board Regional Officers across SA; and via emails to every Department for Education, Catholic and Independent high school in South Australia.

Any student in Years 7 to 10 was eligible to apply, but required signed support from a parent/care-giver and a teacher at their school. Selection of students is based on gaining a balance between city and regional locations; males and females; and primary school and high school aged representatives. Fifty-seven applications were received, with 53 applicants being selected as members, and 48 accepting the offer. The successful applicants joined the student mentors to form a council of 55.



TABLE 1: breakdown of member numbers for 2020

	No. of students	No. of schools represented
Department for Education	36	22
Independent	14	12
Catholic	5	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>38</b>
Primary Schools	18	14
High Schools	16	8
R-12 Schools	21	16
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>38</b>

All members participate in the Council for one year and must reapply through the application process if they wish to be involved in successive years. This ensures that the YEC can cater to a wide audience and provide opportunities to a new cohort of students each year.

## 5.2 The mentor program

The mentor program is an innovative peer education program where selected YEC members are trained in student leadership by Green Adelaide staff to help run the YEC program over the year. The mentors interact with and influence other YEC members by running many of the year's activities and by providing peer support. Mentoring the YEC students also enhances the mentors' own leadership skills and further embeds the inclusive and supportive culture of young people taking action for sustainability.

With three of the 2019 mentors moving into senior secondary school in 2020, seven new mentors were chosen to join the continuing mentors. Each brought 2-4 years of experience as YEC members, as well as a diverse range of leadership skills and potential. One was from Kangaroo Island with the remainder from metropolitan Adelaide.

After the success of the 2019 Mentor Training Day, a single day event was planned but had to be transitioned to a half-day Zoom meeting when COVID-19 restrictions were introduced. This was a relatively new delivery mode for both the staff and students but the mentors provided positive feedback about the experience. It was also a good taster for what was to come; with most of the year's interactions occurring virtually. Topics covered included the mentor role and our expectations, individual goal setting, planning, exploring different leadership styles, and developing skills in encouraging the participation and inclusion of all YEC members in structured and social activities.

Some of the goals that the mentors identified for themselves were:

- inspiring and supporting YEC members
- teaching YEC members to aim higher
- demonstrating leadership
- improving their active listening
- living more sustainably
- expressing themselves more clearly
- improving their self-confidence
- improving time management and organisation skills.



Despite the shift to an online environment, the mentors were still able to provide YEC members with support by sharing their experiences and engaging directly with members through the eight online forums and the Padlet pages. Ten members rated the online forums as the most useful form of support they received for the year. One mentor attended seven of the eight catch ups, which was a great contribution. At the final event, when restrictions had been relaxed to allow face-to-face gatherings, the mentors were able to put more of their skills into practice by welcoming the members, supporting their participation, and running short activities such as ice-breakers.

Because the lack of face-to-face events reduced the opportunities for the mentors to practice, refine and improve their mentoring skills in 2020, the YEC members were not asked to reflect on the role of the mentors in their end of year evaluation. Notwithstanding the change in structure, the mentors still reported that their involvement in the YEC had assisted them to further develop many of the skills they had identified at the start of the year. Feedback from Green Adelaide staff reflected this and more:

- very active in school, happy to talk to others, and present
- willing to get involved with discussions and activities.
- friendly and helpful
- mature, engaging, brings a regional perspective and experience to the mentor team
- very bright and bubbly
- able to make friends easily
- very committed and not afraid to share her views with others
- friendly, welcoming, enthusiastic, funny
- very keen and responsible
- great leadership and people skills
- personable, caring, engaged, excellent people skills
- very helpful when asked to do a task by one of us
- driven, mature, supportive of others, very engaged
- future politician in the making!







## 6.0 The YEC program

YEC members take part in a year-long program to help them implement environmental action projects within their schools or community. To support them in this they are led through a series of activities which challenge them to think about how they can improve sustainability in a broad context.

### 6.1 Mentor Training Day

The Mentor Training Day in April kicked off the 2020 YEC program. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the event was delivered as an online meeting with the seven mentors and Green Adelaide Education staff.

The mentors play the important role of supporting the other YEC members, acting as role models and helping to deliver activities as part of a fun and engaging program. The training session aimed to give mentors the opportunity to get to know each other, build self-confidence, leadership, public speaking and group work skills. Throughout the training, mentors developed skills to create a welcoming and supportive group environment for members and how to run get-to-know-you activities, particularly those which could be delivered online, given the uncertainty of future restrictions.

The mentors enjoyed participating in various activities, helping them to better understand their own leadership and thinking styles. Additionally, this gave the mentors the opportunity to learn more about the way each other works, so that they can perform well as a team.

Staff were impressed by the mentors' enthusiasm, and willingness to learn and adapt to a new online environment. They were left assured that the members would make confident, supportive and flexible leaders of the 2020 YEC program.







## 6.2 Online sharing

COVID-19 restrictions required modification to the traditional YEC program. The usual face-to-face events, including the welcome forum and YEC camp, were replaced with online forums and tools to bring together the YEC members in a virtual space. This allowed members to continue their important role of representing their school and region, and collectively as the state's youth, on environmental topics.

A more flexible approach was taken with how the YEC members participated in the program. They were provided with the option to work across a range of topics and invest time in developing specific skills and knowledge in creating change. This was particularly useful for those members who found committing to one environmental action project throughout the year a challenge. A rubric was developed to guide members in how they might apply these skills over the year.

An online platform called Padlet was used and a secure YEC page was created. This was launched on June 5, which aptly coincided with World Environment Day. This online platform was tailored to allow members to share their progress, provide updates, upload content, connect with other members and be supported by YEC mentors, Green Adelaide staff and each other. Padlet performed as a 'one stop shop' for everything the YEC members needed to know about the program, upcoming online events and it contained a range of short videos and informative content related to different topics and skills.

YEC members were provided with additional support through eight online forums. These catch-up sessions allowed the members to meet and share their progress, experiences, ideas, get inspiration and, most importantly, to feel connected and have some fun. These sessions were facilitated by Green Adelaide staff and supported by the YEC mentors.

The online sharing forums and the Padlet platform became the foundation for keeping the YEC council connected and for the YEC mentors to exercise their leadership skills throughout the year. Green Adelaide staff were impressed with the ability of the YEC members to adapt to change and are planning to integrate some of this new technology into future YEC programs.



### 6.3 Celebration Forum

As COVID-19 restrictions eased, the YEC eagerly awaited the highly anticipated celebration forum to be hosted at the Adelaide Botanic Gardens in late September 2020. The lovely spring day saw 37 YEC members from across South Australia gather in front of the Noel Lothian Hall to meet each other face-to-face for the first time and to proudly discuss or display what they had been working on throughout the year. The focus of the event was to celebrate each YEC member's involvement in what ended up being a different but rewarding program.

The day provided the opportunity for YEC members to work together through different team building activities and a chance for everyone to share their journey in developing their skills and knowledge and/or environmental action project achievements. Some YEC members shared this through visual displays, which were pinned up for everyone to view and which acted as great prompts for further conversation. The displays covered a diverse range of topics including climate change, urban and non-urban biodiversity projects, impacts of waste, sustainable fashion, native bee hotels, environmental awareness and wildlife surveys.

YEC members had the opportunity to listen to a panel of past YEC members discuss their experiences since participating in YEC. This was followed by a Q&A session where students asked a number of great questions and the panel members provided advice around overcoming challenges and how to create successful projects. The council was also fortunate to partake in an Aboriginal art activity, where they created individual paintings using Aboriginal symbols to reflect their YEC journey. The activity was guided by local Kaurna man, Corey Turner.

The Minister for Environment and Water, the Honourable David Speirs, attended part of the day and engaged with the YEC members by viewing the displays and he participated in an activity where members shared their experiences and challenges of the year. The Minister gave a speech encouraging YEC members to be active in, and champions of, their local environment and he congratulated each member on their involvement in the YEC by presenting them with a Certificate of Achievement.





## 7.0 Projects undertaken by YEC members

In 2020, YEC members initiated projects to support student voice and action in both school and community contexts. These projects have been summarised below.

### Biodiversity

Planted native plants at school and on private property. Built and installed nest boxes in a local park and on their farm. Created interpretive signage for a local lagoon. Wrote a children's book on the Glossy Black Cockatoo. Organised a community event to clean up rubbish at Port Noarlunga River. Undertook creek restoration works. Created a frog pond at school. Built a native bee hotel. Conducted experiments on the best germination method for endangered plant species. Propagated native plants. Participated in bushfire recovery tree planting at Lobethal. Ran a caring for wildlife workshop for students at their school. Researched the impacts of weeds. Researched local endangered animals. Researched the Glenthorne National Park proposal.

### Climate change

Researched the impact of the coffee industry on climate change. Wrote a proposal and presented it to the school Principal to install solar panels. Created a petition against the development of a port at Lipson Cove. Created and shared a slam poem about climate change with schools and community groups. Participated in the Student Climate Rally.

### Cultural change and awareness-raising

Raised funds for Kangaroo Island bushfire relief. Developed a pamphlet about the benefits of fake meat. Surveyed students at their school about insects.

### Food gardens

Developed a school veggie patch. Began using Vege Pods and created an African keyhole garden.

### Waste

Conducted a waste audit at school. Established composting and paper recycling systems at school. Created an information pamphlet about sustainable shopping choices. Made jewellery out of recycled plastic. Researched marine pollution. Made cotton fruit and vegetable bags to sell.



### Case study: Grace and Caitlin (Year 8)

Grace and Caitlin wanted to raise awareness about sustainable fashion and the impacts of fast fashion. They felt that not many people knew about the impacts of fast fashion on the environment and that it was something individuals could positively influence.

They decided to create a flyer with information, tips and tricks. The pair consulted with their art teacher who gave them some graphic design advice to make the flyers more appealing. They then letterboxed 250 flyers to their local community and created an Instagram page.

Caitlin initially felt nervous about sharing her opinions about fashion with the general community. However, she knew that they had good intentions and that it's okay for other people to not be interested.

Originally, they wanted to do lots of op shopping together and show what could be done with op shopped clothing. Unfortunately, op-shops were mostly closed due to COVID-19 restrictions. However, they were able to make some coffee cosies from scrap fabrics. They wanted to show how materials can be reused rather than thrown away.

Grace and Caitlin learnt that getting an idea off the ground and turning it into action is a lot harder than just thinking about it. By looking at other ethically-minded Instagram accounts, they realised that an issue can be seen from many perspectives and tackled with multiple approaches. Next year they plan to sell more of the coffee cosies and keep their Instagram account active.



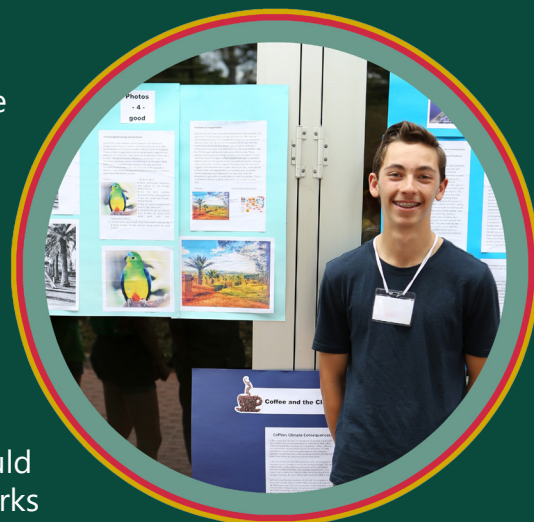
### Case study: James (Year 9)

James spends a lot of time in his local parks, Hallett Cove Conservation Park and O'Halloran Hill Recreation Park. When he heard about the creation of Adelaide's newest National Park, Glenthorne, he wanted to find out more about a place he plans to spend lots of time in. James began researching the proposal for Glenthorne National Park and his research led him to critically review the proposed master plan for the site and provide his personal recommendations.

As part of his project, he conducted his own field work including surveys of park visitors, plants and animals seen, and weed species present. James concluded that while the plan would benefit the environment, he was concerned that the existing parks that will be absorbed into Glenthorne, would be neglected.

A side project of James's was 'Photos 4 Good'. This project is for budding photographers with an interest in animals, plants and landscapes. The aim is to use photographs to raise awareness of our natural environments and the issues facing them. James is working on a website for Photos 4 Good and has been promoting his work through classes at his school.

James found making the time to get out on-site the most challenging part of his project and because of his busy schedule he found it difficult to involve others. The thing James enjoyed most while doing his project was being out in the environment. He said he feels really connected to Hallett Cove Conservation Park; it's what got him into photography, interested in geological landforms and in caring about the environment. His advice to other students is to work on something you're passionate about, persevere through challenges, work hard and it will pay off.







## 8.0 YEC evaluation

YEC students completed an evaluation after the end of year Sharing Forum at Cleland Wildlife Park. Feedback was also sought from the seven YEC mentors following their Mentor Training Day held in April. The evaluation feedback demonstrated a strong link between participating in the YEC and improved skills, knowledge and ability to develop and lead sustainability projects at their school or in their community, whilst also acknowledging the constraints imposed by COVID-19 restrictions. Feedback was also received from teachers and parents at the end of the program regarding the impact of their student's/child's involvement in the YEC.

### 8.1 Mentors Zoom meeting

The use of Zoom as a delivery mode was quite new for the education team and therefore, we were keen to get feedback from the mentors on the experience. The mentor feedback was very positive about the experience and it acted as a good trial for the many online events to come.

Some of the feedback included:

- I really enjoyed it, a cool way to connect
- I like sharing documents on the screen
- I learnt how to use Zoom
- nice to be able to see people's faces.

Mentors also responded that they were happy the YEC wouldn't be cancelled, that they were inspired by different learning types and they felt more confident in their abilities.

### 8.2 End of year evaluation

An end of year evaluation process asked students to identify any growth areas in terms of skills, opportunities and/or personal growth as a result of participating in the YEC program over the year. A total of 35 student evaluations were collected.

Students were asked to select from a list which skills they had developed more fully as a result of participating in the YEC. A total of 31 students selected project planning, this was followed closely by public speaking and promotion and awareness raising.

Students wrote about how the YEC has met their expectations:

*“YEC still went ahead which was good as a lot of other things got cancelled. Having experience of previous years it was certainly a very different year this year, but by still meeting everyone, getting to do a project and share that project at the Sharing Forum, it met my expectations.”*

Inika, YEC member 2020

*“Yes, it still has met them. To me, the most important part is doing the action, and sharing it. Because we still had this forum, it made it much better. I do miss the camp though”*

Mick, YEC member 2020

*“YEC has exceeded my expectations. The support that we have gotten has been really great and I think that it was put together really well.”*

Lauren, YEC member 2020

*“YEC has been good but it has been hard to continue engagement throughout the year. It was great to have the forum.”*

Amber, YEC member 2020

Students wrote about one thing they felt they got out of their YEC experience that will be useful in future:

*“The skill of stepping up and independently taking initiative of goals and putting plans in action.”*

Caitlin, YEC member 2020

*“This has really helped me be less nervous around new people. Everyone makes you feel good.”*

Maria, YEC member 2020

*“Mentor skills, such as doing an activity with YEC members.”*

Sharif, YEC member 2020

*“I think I will take away what I have learned from my research and change my life style because of it.”*

Daisy, YEC member 2020



### 8.3 A parent's perspective

All parents of YEC members were invited to complete a short survey on their child's experience over the year. Surveys were emailed to parents after the Sharing and Celebration Forum.

- Parents were asked the following questions:
- What did your child gain from being a part of the YEC?
- Has your child's involvement in the YEC had an impact on what they do at home or in the local community?
- What helped/would help you to support your child?



Parent responses were positive in relation to the YEC in 2020, outlining members' increased ability to act as leaders and work on local projects. The disruption of COVID meant that some sessions were done online. There were mixed responses to the non-face-to-face sessions, but most thought the program worked well in spite of this. A selection of quotes from parents (both verbally and in writing) regarding their child's involvement with the YEC include:

*"Firstly, a great pride and sense of achievement for her getting into the Council. A greater level of awareness about environmental issues. A more responsible approach to recycling and raising these issues at school level and with teachers."*

*"Building on his experience from last year; becoming more 'sustainably aware' and joining in the school environment group; growing plants at home etc."*

*"She has gained a wealth of public speaking and leadership experience this year from being part of the YEC. She has taken the lead in YEC group projects at school, as well as having to speak fortnightly at assembly in front of a minimum of 700 people.... dressed as a tree! This has helped her to step outside of her comfort zone and successfully apply for a speaking role at the year 7 graduation."*

*"Yes, he participates and helps run the EcoSquad at school and has had many opportunities through the Council."*

*"Part of his project ended up being involved in our local fauna/fauna park. He is still in the process of designing a new interactive sign for this. Hopefully it can be completed by the end of the year. We will also continue to liaise with our local Landcare group in monitoring endangered animals on our property and provide nesting boxes for them."*

*"He enjoys people contact and info sessions – obviously this year has been difficult but perhaps next year more catch-ups."*

## 8.4 A teacher's perspective

All supporting school staff were emailed a survey on their students' experiences. The survey questions were:

- Have you noticed a change in your student this year as a result of their participation in the Youth Environment Council?
- Have there been any changes/benefits/outcomes for the whole school as a result of this student's involvement in the YEC?
- Would you encourage your students to apply for the YEC next year?
- What helped/would help you to support your student?

This year teachers and/or principals' responses to our survey were overwhelmingly positive about the YEC program and how it benefited their students. They also thought that the YEC program ran well in light of all the disruptions of COVID. In answer to the question of whether they would encourage students to apply again next year, all of the respondents said yes. The perspective of teachers is highly valued as they are the people with long term relationships with the students who are able to see changes in values, attitudes and behaviours within the school setting.

A selection of quotes from teachers and/or principals (both verbally and in writing) regarding their students' involvement with the YEC include:

*"She has always shown enthusiasm and confidence. She had focus this year and showed great leadership."*

*"Courtney has developed a stronger set of skills such as communication, research, organisation and time management through her involvement in YEC."*

*"They show care for other people in our school community and beyond. Responsible/respectful behaviours."*

*"Yes, there have been more initiatives to do with sustainable practices at our school as a result of her and her group's awareness campaign."*





## 9.0 Summary

Despite the challenges that arose in 2020, with some adjustments to the program, the YEC was able to successfully continue and complete its 23rd year of giving a platform to the voice of young South Australians advocating for the environment and sustainability. It was a year of embracing technology to enable YEC representatives to connect and share, and we were fortunate to be able to bring the Council together at the end of the year to celebrate.



At the Celebration Forum, students were given the opportunity to celebrate their involvement in the 2020 Youth Environment Council. Representatives participated in a range of activities and were able to share their action and research projects. We were pleased to have the Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation, David Speirs MP, once again attend the event. The YEC members were excited to have a representative of the Government attending to see their work and were encouraged by Minister Speirs to continue to be champions for their local environment.

YEC members developed many skills through their involvement this year including:

- gaining self-confidence and belief in their own abilities
- confidence in using new technology
- making new friends and developing support networks, and
- planning and undertaking actions that lead to a more sustainable future.

In their feedback, members frequently cite feelings of agency and power to take positive steps for the environment, challenging themselves and others to live more sustainably. They are encouraged to see themselves and their peers making a difference, challenging the notion that young people do not have the power to create change.

As a result, their schools and communities have gained young people equipped with skills, knowledge and values to create change. As engaged and active citizens, they are a positive force for their communities, educating and empowering others. These outcomes all meet the aims of the Youth Environment Council of SA.

At the end of each year, we are re-inspired by all that has been achieved by the YEC and its countless members, mentors and friends. The continuing success of the YEC as an authentic, futures-focussed program for youth voice highlights the strength of the previous partnership between DfE and the Green Adelaide Board (previously the Adelaide and Mt. Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Board).

The events of this year have shown how adaptable and flexible the YEC program can be. The coordination team looks forward to using the learnings from 2020 and incorporating new technologies (for example, Padlet) and the opportunities they provide, moving forward. Most importantly, we look forward to continuing to deliver the program for the young people of South Australia to have their voices heard.



## 10.0 Proposed program for 2021

Given the unexpected changes to our program in 2020 and the resulting move to online events, the YEC program for 2021 will incorporate the elements of this that worked best, combined with face-to-face delivery.

Date	Event	Intended outcomes
Mon 12 April (Term 1 holidays)	Mentor Training Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build leadership, mentoring and communication skills.</li> <li>• Practice team building and group facilitation skills.</li> <li>• Participate in hands on conservation/taking action skills.</li> <li>• Review Welcome Forum and YEC Camp agendas, roles and activities.</li> <li>• Assist in planning program of online events for the year.</li> </ul>
Thu 29 April (Term 2 Week 1)	Welcome Forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Induct new YEC.</li> <li>• Overview of YEC expectations and events (both online and face to face content).</li> <li>• Team building activities.</li> <li>• Develop group norms.</li> <li>• Establish shared understanding of sustainability, youth voice and taking action.</li> <li>• 2020 members share their experiences.</li> </ul> <p>By the end of the session members will have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connected with other YEC members that have a common interest.</li> <li>• Shared their knowledge and opinions to hone in on their area of passion.</li> <li>• Started documenting the people who make up their sustainability network.</li> <li>• Participated in hands-on sustainability learning based on the environments and species within Cleland Wildlife Park.</li> </ul>
Term 2-4	Online catchups (optional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share project and skill development ideas and invite feedback from other members as desired.</li> <li>• Seek support from staff, mentors and other members to help overcome any challenges faced.</li> <li>• Report back on progress of research, event or initiative throughout the year.</li> <li>• Keep up regular facilitated contact with other YEC members between face to face events.</li> </ul>



Date	Event	Intended outcomes
Mon 10 May - Wed 12 May (Term 2 week 3)	YEC Camp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build on leadership, teamwork and communication skills.</li> <li>• Deepen sustainability and ecological knowledge and skills.</li> <li>• Participate in hands on conservation tasks.</li> <li>• Work with YEC members with similar interests to share and plan projects.</li> <li>• Network with staff, mentors and other members, as well as potential guests, to gather ideas and perspectives about taking environmental action.</li> </ul>
Term 3 (between Mon 19 Jul and Fri 24 Sep)	Regional YEC events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate networking and project sharing amongst students from the same Landscape region.</li> <li>• Encourage contact with relevant organisations and individuals which could be useful for framing and addressing local issues.</li> <li>• Feed into any opportunities to address or prepare submissions to local Landscape Boards and Green Adelaide (as relevant).</li> </ul>
Thu 2 Dec (Term 4 week 8)	Celebration Forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognise and celebrate achievements over the year and share these with invited guests.</li> <li>• Plan steps to sustain the initiatives started.</li> <li>• Reflect on personal experiences over the year, the impact of the YEC and provide feedback to improve the Council for next year.</li> <li>• Hear from past YEC members about how their experience has shaped their lives and careers.</li> <li>• Extend their environmental knowledge through various hands on activities at the Adelaide Botanic Gardens.</li> </ul>
As required	Contact with regional Landscape Boards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide authentic opportunities for YEC members to feed into Landscape Boards on environmental issues of concern to them and their proposed solution</li> <li>• Provide youth representation and input to Boards and other departments as required.</li> </ul>

## 11.0 Appendix

### Member school representation

- Adelaide High School
- Alberton Primary School
- Athelstone Primary School
- Belair Primary School
- Bellevue Heights Primary School
- Burnside Primary School
- Burton Primary School
- Cabra Dominican College
- Cleve Area School
- Concordia College
- Cornerstone College
- Glencoe Central Primary School
- Immanuel College
- Kangaroo Island Community Education-Parndana Campus
- Loreto College
- Miltaburra Area School
- Mitcham Girls High School
- Nangwarry Primary School
- Nuriootpa High School
- Parafield Gardens R-7 School
- Redeemer Lutheran School
- Roma Mitchell Secondary College
- Sacred Heart College Champagnat Campus
- Salisbury East High School
- Scotch College
- Seymour College
- Southern Montessori Middle School
- St John's Grammar School
- St Michael's College
- St Peter's College
- Stirling East Primary School
- Urrbrae Agricultural High School
- Waikerie Primary School
- West Beach Primary School
- West Lakes Shore
- Westminster School
- Wilderness School
- Woodcroft College

