

Reflection from Youth Council Member Ben Johns

Dear Reader,

I offer you my reflection of my time with the Illawarra Centre for Enablement's Youth Council as I'm leaving the youth council due to personal commitments.

I have worked closely with Diann in the past while doing little events with the Illawarra Centre for Enablement, but when I was invited to join the Council by Diann in August in 2021, I joined because I like the idea – to help grow our leadership skills as Diann saw us (and still does see us) as being the leaders of tomorrow and helping our community out as well and having the opportunity to work with her in the future.

The first couple of meetings were to meet each other and come up with a topic to speak about and to see how we can assist youth in the Illawarra. Diann gave us a few ideas, the main one being about climate change. We all thought and agreed that climate change would be an ongoing thing and we needed to do something about, but felt at that point in time in August 2021, the main problem was Covid-19, and as we felt like that our local Council, state or federal governments weren't doing a thing to assist youth, we decided this was going to be our project. Working out what we were going to do and how took a little while. We then wrote up a survey and finalised it working with Diann and it took off with more than 100 youth responding and from their responses to our survey, we wrote up a 58-page report and invited local MPs to endorse it.

While being with the Youth Council, I learnt a lot of leadership qualities. I learnt to be more trustworthy of myself. I grew a lot of new friendships with the other Council members and had a lot of opportunities as well. The main two opportunities were being the Stakeholder Engagement Coordinator of the Council, which helped me grow to learn how to get other parties involved and how to get our survey/report out as well. The second opportunity was an offer to join the NSW Youth Taskforce which I knocked back due to other commitments but do want to personally congratulate Ben Healey on joining it. But to top it all off, as a team we got awarded an award for Outstanding Citizen of the Year. This was community recognition for what we had achieved being in the youth Council and for our survey and the survey report.

My personal reflection as to what I got out and will still use after leaving the Youth Council: This one is hard to write as I got so much from it. Within myself I felt like I have grown to be a better person and to trust myself a lot more. As I suffer from a verbal disability (which is called verbal dyspraxia) I find it hard to speak to different people and I'm very thankful that other Council members appreciated my work. All the skills that I have learnt from the youth Council and the leadership program, I have used in my professional leadership program role to help me as a production supervisor in The Flagstaff Group Fine Food division.

I do want to say thanks to the following foundation Council members: Alvin, Amar, Ben, Tristan and Ishan. Thanks for making it a great experience and a huge thank you to Diann for being there to support me, coach me and for just everything. Good luck to all the current and new members

While I'm leaving the Council I will still be there for each member of the Council if they need help or just need someone to chat to and will be a life-member of the Illawarra Centre for Enablement.

"Today I close the door to the current chapter and open the door to the new chapter."

Yours truly

Benjamin Johns

Youth Council member/ former Stakeholder Engagement Coordinator & Honorary Advisor.