

2.3 THE JUNIOR ADVISORY GROUP

(CS)

Responsible Director: Natalie Reiter

RECOMMENDATION

That Council notes the outcomes of the pilot Junior Advisory Group and the planned activity for 2020.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to note the success of the Junior Advisory Group pilot under the leadership of Cr Fergeus and Cr Paterson – Cr Paterson and Cr James have been appointed by Council as the supporting Councillors for the two sessions in 2020.

Students participating in the Junior Advisory Group (JAG) program benefited from an introduction to Local Government, as well as direct access to Monash Councillors. The program complements Level 4 Civic and Citizenship Victorian Curriculum outcomes and ensures continued engagement with the community as active citizens.

The expected outcomes were as follows:

- Direct engagement of students with nominated Councillors (Cr James & Cr Paterson in 2020) – up to 16 students per session
- Demonstrated commitment to the Victorian Child Safe Standard Number 7 – Strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children
- Opportunity for education and awareness for students from participating schools of the tiers of government in Australia, the role of Local Government, Monash Council, and the services Monash delivers for children and young people
- Provide Middles Years students' access to Council as Active Citizens.

BACKGROUND

Council endorsed the Child and Young People Friendly Cities (CYPFC) initiative - as first outlined in the Monash Children Young People and Family Strategy and Action Plan 2016 – 2017, and further in the Healthy and Resilient Monash Integrated Plan 2017 – 2021.

The continuing aim of the CYPFC initiative is to:

- Ensure children and young people living/ studying in the City of Monash are Active Citizens of their municipality.
- Raise community awareness of the services and support Council provides for children and young people.
- Ensure children and young people are engaged and consulted with in matters of relevance, such as the redevelopment of areas utilised by children and young people.

- Activate access to Council for children and young people to a level equivalent to the access available to adult residents, such as through a Junior Advisory Group, providing a forum for regular meetings to connect young people with councillors.
- Support the Victorian Charter for Child Friendly Cities and Communities.
- Support the Victorian Child Safe Standards.
- Identify areas where there can be organisational improvements in our engagement with children and young people.

The CYPFC project included six months of community consultation. The JAG was developed as a result of this consultation. The JAG aims to connect with an age group that has traditionally been underrepresented in direct engagement with local government.

For an organisation to be truly considered child and young people friendly, it must offer access to its services for all residents. Monash residents are offered an opportunity to attend a Council Meeting once a month – this meeting is not currently suited to children and young people. The JAG offers an alternative forum to Council meetings for Middle Years Students. Students attending secondary colleges have a voice through the Monash Young Person's Reference Group.

The Monash Student Space newsletter is another example of the CYPFC project enabling access for our younger residents via electronic and hard copy newsletters – an alternative to the Monthly Monash Bulletin.

DISCUSSION

As reported at the Council Meeting of 29 May, 2018, the JAG was originally piloted in 2018 and 2019 (3 sessions) with 9 schools participating in the program (two of schools participated more than once).

Cr Paterson and Cr Fergeus attended all 3 sessions, and offered the participating students answers to questions regarding their community.

School visits preceded each session, with all grade 4 students engaged via a presentation "What does the Monash Council do?" an introduction to the three layers of government in Australia, with a drill down into Local Government, and then specifically Monash.

Feedback received from teachers, students and parents post the sessions, cited the content as highly suited to the age group. Many teachers requested copies of the presentation for future reference.

Engagement through the JAG served as a line of communication between participating schools and Council, providing support for other organisational activities requiring consultation with young people, including workshops and surveys for the Parks and Playgrounds Strategy.

In summary the JAG offers:

- Student's active engagement with their Local Government and community.

- Answers/ solution to questions / issues students may have about their community.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The JAG supports the full suite of Child Safe Standards Policies and processes including 1.0 Safe Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy Statement along with Standard 7.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are a number of positive social implications for children and young people in our community that may result from this initiative including -

1. a sense of community – children and young people’s opinions and feedback are actively sought by Council developing a strong sense of community by considering all age demographics;
2. awareness – promoting the range of services available to children and young people within our community; and
3. education and skill development – The JAG enhances classroom learning with real life application of local government activity. Promotion of government and its processes may lead to active citizenship at later life stages.

HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS

The Victorian Charter for Child Friendly Cities and Communities has been developed specifically for local governments, organisations and individuals to take action. The Charter is a statement of the principles and actions that underpin the right to be considered child friendly.

Recognising the need for increased participation by children in decision making forums and creating child friendly environments, we support the following Principles as supported through resolution of Council Meeting, 29 May 2018 Section 2.3 - Page 4: Junior Advisory Group:

1. Freedom for children to experience environments that consider their needs.
2. Respect and dignity for children to express their individual opinions, participate in and contribute to decisions about their communities and wellbeing.
3. Equitable access to supportive environments and services for children regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion on or ability.

CONSULTATION

Residents and children were surveyed by the Child and Young People Friendly City Project Officer for insights around “What does being a Child and Young People Friendly City mean to you?”

Based on some of the responses, the children interviewed seemed to have a limited understanding of what a Council does and how it operates, along with its relevance to them as young residents.

The JAG directly addresses the inherent knowledge gap by providing students with an opportunity to participate in local government decision making, and ensure they have a voice.

CONCLUSION

The trial of the Junior Advisory Group demonstrated a great opportunity to showcase the voice of Children and Young People within Council as active citizens.

The JAG concept complements the Victorian Education Curriculum outcome for Civics and Citizenship. The learnings offered as part of the program were welcomed by teachers in 2018 and 2019 who were happy to boost the robustness of their own study programs through the Council contribution.

Continued access to Council through the JAG ensures engagement at a crucial part in a child's development, creating a sense of belonging to and pride in one's community.

Monash is a Child and Young People Friendly City and initiatives such as the JAG ensure we continue to offer access to council in various formats to all our residents.