



The Young Mayors model:  
**Spotlight  
on Cairns**



**Snapshots of  
Insights & Impact**





## We acknowledge.

FYA acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land throughout Australia on whose unceded Countries we conduct our business. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and those yet to come. We acknowledge that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people continue to live in spiritual and sacred relationships with this Country. This always was and always will be Aboriginal Land.

## About the Young Mayors Model

The Young Mayors model supports young people aged 11 to 17 in LGAs across the country to run for election and form their own Youth Council. Elected by their peers, together the Youth Council set an agenda for their Term in Office and work with their local council on specific issues.

**With access to training, mentoring and money to run local projects and campaigns, the Youth Council don't just have a voice - but a platform to take action on the issues that young people in their community truly care about.**



Young Mayors is a pilot run by the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA), in partnership with councils around Australia and with the support of state-based Electoral Commissions in Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales.

FYA is a national non-profit organisation that exists to back young people across the country to beat injustice and transform the future.



# The Journey to Here

Cairns Regional Council joined the Young Mayors pilot in February 2023.

Following a period of community engagement and momentum-building, the inaugural Cairns Youth Council was elected in partnership with the Electoral Commission of QLD in October of the same year.

The first Cairns Youth Council served an 18 month Term in Office addressing the priorities of their constituents and laying the foundation for the next Youth Council to continue their legacy.

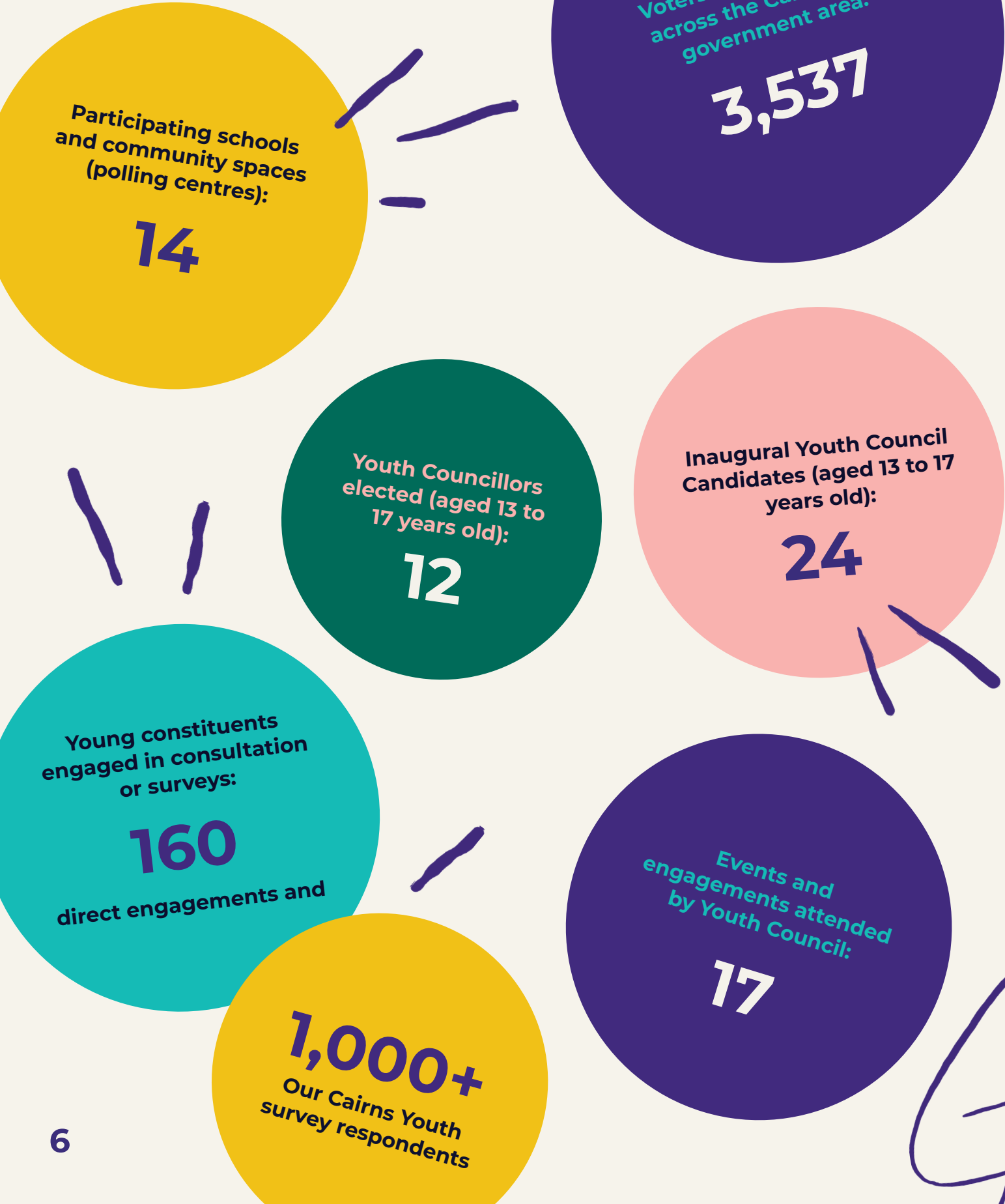


## Timeline





# Local Program Reach in Cairns



## Serving a Term in Office

Elected Youth Councils focus their Terms in Office on delivering interventions that address their constituents priorities.

The Cairns Youth Council built their Priority Agenda from community feedback, narrowing down their interest areas from eight to focus their attention and \$10,000 Youth Fund on three key priorities:

- Improved safety and safety awareness on the bus network and bus shelters
- Enhanced arts and culture opportunities accessible to young people
- Improving communications between schools, young people and organisations offering skills and development opportunities.

A report written by the Cairns Youth Council on their process, considerations and vision in each key priority can be viewed at [fya.org.au/young-mayors-cairns](https://fya.org.au/young-mayors-cairns)





# Youth Council Contributions Across Council

During their Term in Office the Cairns Youth Council have made real contributions to at least six different business areas, with projects aligned to their Priority Agenda or Council Objectives. Examples include:

Business Unit	Project	Type of Engagement
Sustainability	'A little litter is a big problem' – Litter reduction campaign, aiming to highlight the importance of keeping waterways clear	Consultation; Active participation in script development and video content waterways clear
Strategic Planning	Towards 2050 Community Summit	Active participation: presentation of key themes from the youth summit at the whole of community summit
CEO'S Office	The Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters – Inquiry into civics education, engagement and participation in Australia	Active participation: preparation of statement and live appearance before the enquiry
Marketing and Communication	International Women's Day Awards	Active Participation: Youth Council representative evaluated nominations and sat on awards judging panel
Community Spaces	Cairns Esplanade Skatepark redevelopment consultation	Consultation
Creative Life	Live Music Industry Working Group	Active Participation: Youth Council member on industry working group feeding into the development of the region's Live Music Strategy

## Antonije Dimitrijevic

Experience of a Young Mayor



"If there is one commitment in my life that I am most grateful for, it is truthfully this program. From the first campaign poster I designed to our most recent community consultation and planning work, the Young Mayors program has taught me more about civics, leadership, and collaboration than any formal education setting ever could. It has instilled in me a deep sense of civic pride and responsibility and has shaped my belief that anything is possible through effort and vision.

Because of this program and the amazing people who run it, I have been empowered to discover not only my passion but my potential. I went from being someone who feared speaking in front of a class to regularly addressing constituents, councillors, and my school in a leadership capacity. I've developed real-world skills in leadership,

communication and rhetoric, as well as confidence that I know will shape my future in the civic realm.

But the true power of this program lies in how it empowers us to give back. Over the past 14 months, our Youth Council has taken an active role in key community issues—contributing to initiatives like the Youth Climate Summit, Cleaner Creeks Project, and the Urban Regeneration Project. We're also leading our own major projects in transport and culture/opportunity—two focus areas identified through extensive consultation as critical to young people in our city. Every step has been shaped by genuine youth voices and collaborative community planning.

The Young Mayors program is a life-changing experience that forges the leaders of tomorrow while giving us a platform to create real, meaningful change today."

Antonije Dimitrijevic,  
Inaugural Cairns Young Mayor



# Insights and impact

## Early evaluation of Young Mayors in Cairns has shown:

- The Young Mayors model offers a way of working with young people that centres their ideas and perspectives, and Cairns Regional Council is seeing the benefits. Council has consulted the Youth Council on multiple projects and gained valuable input on plans, events, and communications. Young people have helped identify gaps, raise awareness of Council initiatives and bring fresh, practical ideas.

“They have identified practical things that would help them and actually then some of their ideas were taken on board [by CRC]... [For example] we’re looking at increasing live music in Cairns, and a lot of their feedback was there’s not stuff for under 18 year olds.”

Cairns Regional Council Adult Councillor

“It [the youth councillor’s speech] sparked conversations... about what it meant to have young people involved in projects at a council level. A few people I spoke to were already wondering if they could bring them in to work with them.”

Cairns Regional Council Staff Member



- Youth Councillors’ perceptions of Council have shifted through their involvement in the Young Mayors model. Previously unsure about what councillors did and how the Council worked, they now have a better understanding of the Council’s responsibilities and appreciated the complexities of the role.

“Because it’s kind of hard to understand what the local council actually does. [Before the Young Mayors program] I didn’t know that council was in charge of the bus stops but not the bus routes like. It’s like stuff like that, [that I gained understanding of].”

Cairns Youth Councillor

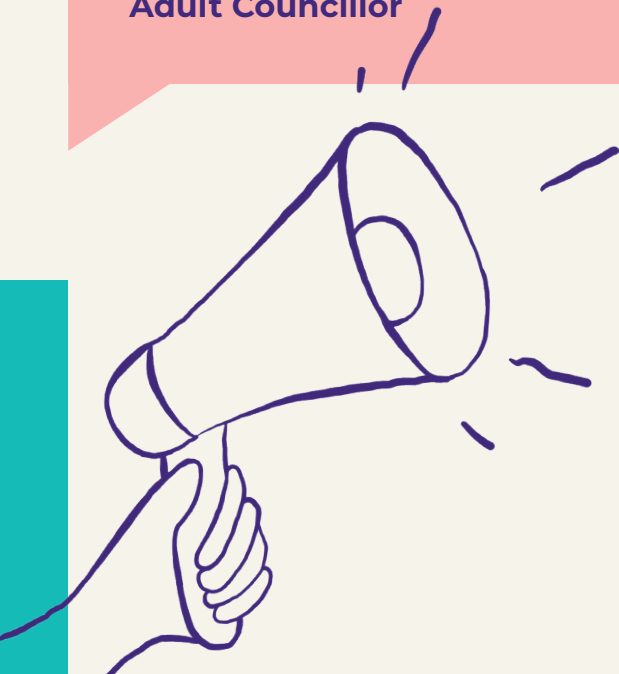
- Participation in the program increased Youth Councillors’ confidence, motivation, and opportunities to speak up on issues that matter to them and their peer. It also opened doors for further civic engagement from young people and leadership opportunities for youth councillors. Young people also reported feeling more connected to Cairns through their involvement in the program.

“Sometimes I think there’s an impression that young people [...] don’t understand how things work, but actually they’ve [youth council] done a lot of work on how they would implement things “

Cairns Regional Council Adult Councillor

“[The youth councillors] actually stole the room, just beautifully prepared, really, really insightful, you know, just really clever”

Cairns Regional Council Adult Councillor





Want to know more  
about the Young  
Mayors model?

Visit [fya.org.au/program/  
young-mayors](https://fya.org.au/program/young-mayors)

