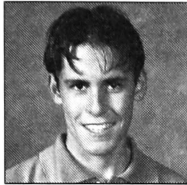


STORIES FROM PRACTICE

Having Our Say: The Youth Environment Council

Peter Clark

Year 12 student
Glossop High School



On May 12–13 1997, at the instigation of the Chief Executive officer of what was the South Australian Department for Education and Children's services a student forum held in Adelaide dealt with many issues surrounding the idea of ecologically sustainable living. It was attended by 250 students from Years 4–12 with participants coming from most parts of the state. At the end of two days of group discussions and guest speakers students presented group responses to the Ministers for Education and Children's Services and for Environment and Natural Resources. Student responses addressed the following questions:

- What and how should we learn about ecologically sustainable living in school?
- What do schools need to do to be places that follow the principles of ecologically sustainable living?
- What could the Department for Education and Children's Services do to support students and schools to achieve ecologically sustainable living practices?

In acknowledging the students' ideas, and all the thought and hard work they had put in, the Ministers announced that they were going to form a Youth Environment Council to be initiated by the committee which had organised the forum. The Council was intended to have, and has been given, direct access to the Ministers.

organisations with environmental commitment such as Rural Youth. Delegates take information back through newsletters and other communication processes being established by Districts. They also collect information on environmental projects happening in their districts and opinions about current environmental issues of students in the districts, and report back to Council meetings. The Council carries out its work through a formal meeting involving all delegates once a term, and the Executive has several planning meetings between formal meetings. I chair these Executive meetings—and all the representatives take the meetings and their responsibilities very seriously. The Council's continuing work is jointly funded by the two Departments which hosted the 1997 Forum, now those for Education, Training and Employment and for Environment, Heritage and Aboriginal Affairs. We have also been helped a lot by the Departments' making two senior officers available to mentor us in a variety of ways. They are Ms Jo Bishop, Senior Policy Adviser, Community Partnerships in the Department for Environment, Heritage and Aboriginal Affairs, and Mr David Butler, Curriculum Officer, Key Learning Area of Studies of Society and Environment in the Department for Education, Training and Employment. All of us at the Council have been grateful for their assistance—for being there when we need it, and for staying in the background when we want to get on with things ourselves.

'There are many issues which young people are concerned about'

The Council was formed to support young South Australians in being active in caring for the environment and to provide advice to the Government on the environmental perspectives of young people. It intends to write a list of suggestions of key things that need to be done by schools, other groups and communities for the environment. The list will come from ideas given at the 1997 student forum and what we are hearing from young people. The list will be presented to the Ministers as the opinions of young people with ideas of how the Council could help make the things it lists happen.

There are many issues which young people are concerned about, which ones really depends on what geographical area they are from. For example, young people from Kangaroo Island are really concerned about over

which had organised the to have, and has been

for several months. It

ut, which ones really depends on what geographical area they are from. For example, young people from Kangaroo Island are really concerned about over population of koalas. From the Riverland, young people are concerned about pollution in the river, damage from

geographical ble from ut over people are

that they were going to form a Youth Environment Council to be initiated by the committee which had organised the forum. The Council was intended to have, and has been given, direct access to the Ministers.

The Council has now been active for several months. It

about, which ones really depends on what geographical area they are from. For example, young people from Kangaroo Island are really concerned about population of koalas. From the Riverland, young

'opinions from a different group which sometimes has not had its opinions counted'


The voice of the youth is a very powerful thing, and I believe that the government and other organisations are taking notice. We are the voice of the next generation and people are very interested to know what we, the future leaders, have to say. Our voice adds a new perspective to environmental issues, as there is an opinion from the people who will experience in the future the results of environmental decisions taken now. It also adds new ideas and opinions from a different group which sometimes has not had its opinions counted in the past. This is one of the reasons why the Council was formed—to communicate young people's environmental voice to the Government.

We have used several methods to achieve this, the most prominent being that the YEC Executive meets with the Ministers after the Council's quarterly meetings to inform them of what we are doing, our opinions, interests and so on. We give the Ministers minutes from meetings, the YEC Newsletter and other information. Another method is that I send the Ministers a letter after each meeting to inform them of our progress. We also send many newsletters out across the state, and soon there will be an interactive web site up and running.

Before the Council existed it was far more difficult to do this as young people would have to write a letter to the government on a personal, singular basis, which was probably not taken much notice of. Since the Council has been formed, it has greatly increased ways to communicate the opinions of large numbers of people—and it encourages the decision makers to take notice.

Over the past year we have achieved a lot—organised a constitution; seated two sets of delegates; proceeded in getting the Council up and running; promoted the Council; met with the Ministers several times and provided them with several written reports; witnessed a range of presentations from other like-minded groups such as Urban Ecology and the local Threatened Species Network—and obtained some great ideas; released the first YEC Newsletter and developed an initial plan for a YEC web site. We have also started collecting information about what projects are going on in schools so that we can support and promote them by developing a database of who is doing what, and we have been developing our opinions on different issues. Now that we are up and running, we will make more and more headway.

We hope to have an influence on projects that are being undertaken by South Australia's young people, and we also hope to have influences on issues that other, older groups and organisations are involved with by promoting them and encouraging young people to get active for the environment. In getting the Council operational it has been clear that everyone, even the students who were very quiet to

start with, has grown up a lot and grown in confidence about putting their point across at Council and back at their school and district. I think the fact that the Council is a group of young people who strive to cooperate as a team to work to improve the environment will make us a group able to discuss important ideas with the decision makers. As a team we are going to discuss ideas at meetings, and work towards the ultimate goal of repairing and protecting the environment. 

As President and Riverland representative of the Youth Environment Council Peter spends much of his time on YEC matters. After Year 12 in 1999, he intends to study Law and Commerce, and to follow this with employment in addressing environmental issues. His interests include spending time in the natural environment, playing football and golf—and working with others towards his ultimate goal of helping to sustain the environment for future generations.

Environmental Adult Education in Canada: Growing Jobs for Living

Darlene Clover

University of Toronto



As in many parts of the world so too in Canada blossoming socio-environmental problems are having adverse effects on many communities. The environmental consequences, for example, of sustained over-fishing of Newfoundland cod, of west coast deforestation by logging of the Great Lakes area and of soil and water contamination caused by industrial activities are now fairly obvious to all. The associated depletion of employment possibilities, folklore and other cultural capital has often been coupled with an increase in violence and feelings of powerlessness and helplessness. But, according to public opinion surveys there is a positive weave to this web of adversity. People's concern for their planet remains high—and their knowledge of the gravity, scope, and root causes of environmental problems and the