**Invercargill City Youth Council Annual Report 2022**

Compiled by Ollie Mortensen and Gemma Crawford

with comments from the Invercargill City Youth Council members

The 2022 Invercargill City Youth Council has continued to build upon its previous successes. A return to some sort of normality was well received by members after the previous two years being affected by the constraints of the pandemic. However, some valuable adaptations from the pandemic times have continued to be employed, for example video conferencing.

There were 24 applications for the 2022 Youth Council which resulted in a selection process taking place and offers of a position on Youth Council being made to 24 young people. The maximum allowance is 25 members, as stated in the Youth Council Terms of Reference. The 2022 Youth Council employed a Recruitment Committee to help with assessing and interviewing potential members. The twenty-four applicants offered membership were a mixture of experienced members and new members. There were 10 returning members. There were no member resignations throughout the year, however one member moved regions and connected via video conference for the remaining meetings of the year.

The previous model of two Youth Councils, students Year 11 and under, and students Year 11 and over, was discontinued and the whole Youth Council met as one group. This was decided by members and this did not detract from all members being able to participate at a level they felt comfortable at.

Youth Council meetings were held on a four-weekly basis with committee meetings held in between. This format was decided by the 2021 Youth Council and was a change from the previous format of fortnightly meetings. This did not overly affect the function of the Youth Council and encouragingly, most often meetings ran over the scheduled time due to the positive engagement of members and the amount of information and topics to get through.

Councillors Alex Crackett and Darren Ludlow were the Youth Council – Council Liaisons for 2022. Councillor Crackett was unable to participate in many meetings due to timetable clashes. Councillor Ludlow was able to attend most meetings and was able to make a valuable and positive contribution. Members were pleased to have regular input from Councillor Ludlow during their meetings and were bold in asking questions about decisions the Invercargill City Council was making.

The Invercargill City Youth Council has evolved over the years and the 2022 rendition was a departure from some previous methods of engagement with the members. In some aspects engagement from Youth Council members about Council topics was certainly enhanced and the 2022 Youth Council still proved as an effective way for the Council to engage with youth in the city.

Participation of Youth in Local Government is always a difficult concept. This is because perceptions of youth and how they wish to engage is forever changing. What may have worked in the past may not necessarily be the best method for future cohorts. Furthermore, tokenistic or top-down approaches tend to alienate and undermine the integrity of participation. That said, the 2022 Youth Council embraced more youth-focused participatory concepts, where the youth had an active part in the decision-making processes of the Youth Council and how it operated.

Though not always straightforward, the aim for the Youth Council members to have ownership and a level of autonomy within the Youth Council is the gold standard of any youth engagement in civics. The 2022 Invercargill Youth Council achieved this, and the outcomes and successes of the process speak for themselves.

As Youth Council Coordinators we are thankful to have had the opportunity to get to know and hear the opinions of the 2022 Youth Council. Each year brings new challenges, consultations and projects. The membership for 2022 was a great mix of young people from different backgrounds, ethnicities, and schools which made for interesting discussions. The respect that members offered towards each other created a safe space for members to discuss some sensitive or controversial topics. Consensus was often achieved through this engagement. Members of the Youth Council are well informed and have considered opinions about the topics of the day.

As mentioned, the Youth Council utilised video conferencing for members to connect to meetings and this was well used by members. Members were also referred to external agencies who wished to engage with them. The number of requests of the Youth Council to offer an opinion on a topic has certainly increased and this is encouraging for the future. Members were always given the option to choose what they wished to engage with, and this proved as another opportunity for members to have ownership over what they engaged in.

*Gemma Crawford and Ollie Mortensen – Youth Council Coordinators*

The 2022 Youth Council is my last year as a full time Youth Council Coordinator. This is unfortunately a necessary decision for me due to my other commitments, however, I still hope to be called upon when needed. I started my Youth Council journey in 2013 and during my time connected to the Youth Council, I completed my Master’s Thesis on Youth Participation in Local Government. I have many wonderful memories of my time and am very proud of what the Youth Council has achieved and the voice it has in the local community. It has been a pleasure to watch the young people engage with civics and offer opinions, sometimes which are very different to the status quo. I have watched Youth Council members grow and develop into successful young adults, and for me it was always more than just a job. I hope that it still exists when my own children come of age as I believe that the Youth Council offers a unique experience not only in educating young people about civics and having their voices heard, but also knowing the development opportunities that exist that do not occur as readily in modern society. I know I leave the Youth Council in a good space and am confident that the Youth Council coordinators who I leave to take the steering wheel will continue to steer the Youth Council in a positive direction.

*Ollie Mortensen – Youth Council Coordinator*

The 2022 year of Youth Council has flown by, with ten formal meetings in total, and six project committees formed, there was a lot to box on with, as well as fun to be had. I am so proud of the team this year, they have achieved some fantastic feats including a submission on the speed review which, although, perhaps not in line with Council’s views, was well researched and thought out submission which gained consensus from the group as a whole. Incorporating a Chairs Meeting this year – reflective of the Council process – enabled our leaders to decide the trajectory of the meetings and was a great addition to the Youth Council timetable. Having Rev. Evelyn Cook attend early on in the year to carry out a Te Ao Māori workshop was beneficial to the membership, with some reciting their learned pepeha/introduction when speaking at Council meetings. As a funding administrator, I have much enjoyed hearing the views of the young representatives from ICYC that sit on both the Community Wellbeing and Creative Communities Funding bodies.

Youth Council’s local election candidate’s forum – Quiz the Candidates – had to be one of the best events this year. Feedback from candidates and audience alike was very positive and I was delighted to be involved with the committee that organised it.

With Ollie stepping down this year, I just want to acknowledge what an amazing colleague and asset to the Youth Council he has been. His support and direction have been valued by myself and members over the years, and always brought an integral and grounded lens to topics and situations. Ngā Mihi Aroha Nui Ollie, you will be sorely missed.

To those young people that are leaving us this year, I wish them well for their time ahead. It has been wonderful to see local rangatahi democracy in action and I know the future is safe in their hands.

*Gemma Crawford – Youth Council Coordinator*

**Youth Council Activities**

The 2022 Youth Council endeavoured to hold specific committees to facilitate projects throughout the year. Committees were open to members to choose and were seen as a good way for peer leadership opportunities, with the older and more experienced members imparting their knowledge and experience to the younger members. Youth Councillors were also offered the opportunity to sit on the Creative Communities Fund Committee, the Community Wellbeing Fund Committee and a role as a Library Ambassador.

The following is a description of some of the committee projects, achievements and activities that the 2022 ICYC have been involved in this year.

***Civics Education***

A number of different Civics Education components were offered to members as part of meetings. These educational workshops provided information about citizenship, Local Government processes and services Council is responsible for, and Local Government voting systems. Youth Council members engaged in the activities well and they created a lot of discussion and understanding about how Local Government works.

***Youth Week Committee***

The Youth Week committee decided to collaborate with United Nations Youth New Zealand to facilitate a UN Youth Hui. This was held on 14 May 2022 at the Federated Farmers Building. There was a good turnout for this event and the Youth Council have created an ongoing relationship with UN Youth.

***Charities Committee***

The Charities Committee worked together with a local charity called the Shoe Booth. The Shoe Booth collects donated ball outfits and rents them to students. The event was a catwalk showcasing the donated ball dresses and suits. The event was held on 26 October 2022 and attracted a large audience. The event raised over $1,000 dollars that is to be donated to local Youth Charities.

***Electoral Forum Committee***

Being an election year, the Youth Council held an electoral candidates forum. A specific committee was formed to organise the event. Members decided on the format of the event and it was creatively hosted by youth council members Liam and Lydia. Youth Council members felt the event was successful, well attended and it gained some media exposure.

***Social Media Committee***

This year the Social Media Committee was responsible for all of the Youth Councils social media accounts, including Facebook and Instagram. Posts were fairly light on both platforms suggesting that these platforms are now not the go-to social media platforms for youth. This said, the Youth Council and Committees utilised messenger chat groups and this proved an effective way of communication throughout the year with polls and specific thread chats on dedicated topics.

***United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Committee***

This committee, which focusses on one or two of the United Nations Global Goals for 2030, decided on Goal 4 – Quality Education. Small hui/meetings were held within some schools and feedback sought about what the big issues within schools in Invercargill were. Using the data from the UN Youth Hui also, the UNSDG Committee decided to focus on uniforms and write letters to the Board of Trustees at each school, suggesting changes that could be implemented.

***Secretariat Committee***

The Secretariat Committee was a new edition to the 2022 Youth Council and was aimed at not only providing members with the opportunity to learn about some of the processes of meetings, for example minute taking, but also give members the opportunity to take ownership of their meetings by creating their own agendas. It was certainly encouraging to see the level of engagement increase when members had the opportunity to decide discussion topics which they felt were important to them.

***Invercargill City Council Appointments***

* Library Ambassador
* Creative Communities Fund Committee Member
* Community Wellbeing Fund Committee

***Submissions, Consultations and Feedback***

During 2022, the ICYC made a number of submissions and were consulted on their viewpoints over a number of different topics. These included the following:

* Sandy Point Master Plan
* Vodafone Aotearoa Foundation Rangatahi Feedback
* Speed Review Hearing
* Annual Plan – Te Unua Museum Consultation
* Strong Communities Murihiku
* Invercargill Library Strategy Development
* Creative Communities Scheme Marketing
* Smokefree 2025
* Environment Southland Climate Change Hui

***Events Attended***

During 2022 members represented the ICYC at a number of events. These included:

* Host for talk with Iraqi Oud musician/composer Rahim AlHaj of Letters from Iraq
* Festival for the Future
* UN Youth Hui
* Welcoming Communities Local Democracy workshop
* Welcoming Communities Human Library
* Young person engagement at Invercargill Central Mall

***Guest Speakers***

During 2022 the Youth Councillors invited a number of guest speakers to their meetings to hear about different topics. These included the following:

* Alice McIntosh – Youth MP
* Gemma Marnane – Southland District Council Candidate
* Reverend Evelyn Cook – Te Reo Māori greetings and pepeha
* Steve Gibling – Annual Plan
* Patricia Christie – Council funding and spending
* Lesley McCoy – Roading queries from Youth council
* Bonnie Mager – Environment Southland

**Member Comments**

My year in youth council can only be summed up by one word, challenging. Every day youth are challenged by problems at local, national and global level. From standing, to presenting in front of the councillors and mayor, to meeting the people I shared debate with in Wellington for United Nations Youth events, Youth council has paved the way for a whirlwind of a year. The best part of a challenge is that we don’t know what is next and so, although 2022 has been a success, I hope 2023 comes with just as much challenge and excitement in the Youth Council of 2023!

*Ebony Stevenson*

During my first term on Invercargill City Youth Council I have highly enjoyed my experiences. These included:

* Attending PPP meetings
* MC for events including the Election year forum and interviewing Rahim Alhaj
* Taking the opening prayer/whakatauki at Youth Council meetings
* Having a say in submissions like the Speed Limit Committee

I found Youth council a safe and enjoyable environment where like-minded rangatahi could share their ideas and what is important to them. I highly recommend this opportunity to all youth who are interested in knowing how local government works and how to have a say in decisions. I felt as a member of the youth council I was a valuable member of this group.

My favourite activity of Youth Council was the Election year forum where myself and fellow youth councillors hired Repertory Theatre and invited all candidates for the 2022 election to a public questionnaire. I felt pride and responsibility when organising this event and hosting it. I look forward to my next term on Youth Council.

*Liam Calder*

I thoroughly enjoyed my time on the UNDSG Committee this year, being given the opportunity to focus on goals which were most important to the youth of Invercargill. With Goal 4: Quality Education being the main focus of the committee this year. I was happy to be able to share my own and other SBHS student’s views on the issue, especially regarding uniforms. My time on the committee was a great opportunity for me to contribute to the wider Invercargill community and ensure the voices of rangatahi are heard.

*Ruairidh MacCallum*

**Chairpersons Comments**

Being one of the two deputy head chairs this year has been a big confidence boost for me. Initially I was scared, but co-chairing really developed my skills that I never knew I needed to be a good leader. What a fantastic way to end my final year as a youth councillor here in Invercargill.

*Nasywa Amaliya*

I have had such a fabulous time this year on the Invercargill City Youth Council. It was my first year on it and I will most certainly be going for it again. The experience has taught me so much about local government and politics, two things that I never knew I would be into. I was lucky enough to be elected to be one of the chairs for this year. This added an extra level of involvement, which I highly enjoyed. Running meetings was quite intimidating, but a challenge I enjoyed undertaking. My highlight of the year would have to be when myself and Liam Calder were the MCs for the Youth Election Forum where we got to quiz the candidates and watch things heat up. It was also quite fascinating to get to attend a PPP meeting near the beginning of the year. I have loved the opportunity to be a part of something far bigger than myself, surrounded by great people. Would definitely recommend it to others.

*Lydia Blomfield*

2022 was an eventful year for the Youth Council, we engaged with, participated in, and/or hosted numerous events and committees. Some notable things Youth Council submitted on this year were the speed review and smoke-free policy. Community engagement was extremely successful this year, with the Youth Council having great success in hosting many events. An example of this was when we further developed our relationship with UN Youth by jointly hosting the Invercargill UN Youth Hui and the Invercargill Model United Nations event in May. The Youth Council also held its local body election forum in September and its charity fundraising event *Youth On The Run* in October. The Youth Council also underwent some changes this year, making improvements to our inaugural meeting structure and recruitment processes. I am delighted to say that the Youth Council finished strong this year and was successful in its objectives of engaging young people in the Council’s decision-making process as well as other activities. I strongly look forward to hopefully being able to return next year as a member of the 2022 Youth Council.

*Ryan Frost*

**Looking Forward**

The 2023 Youth Council year looks promising with a strong number of applicants. It is pleasing to note that all five of the Invercargill Secondary Schools/Kura will be represented as well as some specific community groups. The 2022 Youth Council formed a Recruitment Committee and ran an interview process for the 2023 candidates. A new Youth Council Coordinator has been selected to help guide and steer the 2023 Youth Council. With a change of Council in 2022 there poses a number of projects and opportunities for the Council to have effective and meaningful engagement with the Youth Community of Invercargill. As always, the Youth Council are hopeful for a closer, collaborative relationship with Councillors, staff and external stakeholders in 2023.

**Conclusion**

This report outlines the key successes and projects completed by the 2022 Invercargill City Youth Council. 2022 certainly had some challenges that the ICYC had to navigate, but they overcame these and had a positive impact on the achievements of the ICYC. It was great to see the camaraderie of the members and to get some collaborative success stories from the year. ICYC members have gained some valuable learning from their experiences, and they have contributed to the Invercargill Community. The ICYC continues to provide a forum for Invercargill’s Youth to become civically engaged in their city as well as providing an environment for positive youth development.