

2022 - 2023

MAYOR'S YOUTH COUNCIL YEAR-END REPORT

Introduction

In existence since 1992, the Mayor's Youth Council (MYC), a program of Youth Central, is a partnership between Youth Central and the City of Calgary's Mayor's Office, that represents the voice of Calgary's youth. The Mayor's Youth Council provides youth an opportunity to effect change, represent youth in regards to issues that matter to them, and help to create a city where the unique youth perspective contributes to a strong and sustainable community.

This year, our 21 youth were split up into 3 subcommittees, Civic Engagement, Current Issues and Careers & Opportunities.

Civic Engagement Committee

The Civic Engagement Committee aims to provide youth with the opportunity to engage in municipal politics and to provide a platform for youth to share their voices. Our initiatives, such as the Town Hall series and the TikTok Series, allowed youth to have the opportunity to share their perspective on various issues.

This year we continued the Town Hall series, where we connected with schools across Calgary to host a Youth Town Hall with the City Councillor of their Ward. The Town Hall events allow students the opportunity to engage with their respective City Councillor and discuss issues that are of importance to Calgarian youth. Students are able to ask questions and voice their own opinions on municipal issues and developments.

This year we received interest from Wards 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14. We were able to host a very successful Town Hall at Nelson Mandela High School in Ward 5 with Councillor Raj Dhaliwal. Approximately 150 students attended the Town Hall to engage in the discussion. The main topics discussed at the Nelson Mandela Town Hall included the ways Calgary can achieve net zero emissions by 2050, reducing the stigma that North East

Calgary faces compared to the rest of the city, and improving safety throughout the City of Calgary. Unfortunately, we were unable to hold Town Halls in the other Wards due to scheduling conflicts. Next year we hope to be in contact with Councillors and schools earlier in the school year in order to schedule dates for the Town Hall series.

The Civic Engagement Committee also began a new initiative, the TikTok series *Calgary for Teens*. The Civic Engagement committee realized there was a lack of knowledge regarding municipal politics, City of Calgary spaces, and local businesses around Calgary. The committee utilized TikTok, a highly used social media platform, to provide youth with updates on the current situation of Calgary while also highlighting the exciting spots for teens to explore. The goal was to bring awareness through a familiar social media platform used by youth in Calgary.

The first Calgary for Teens episode highlighted the Teen Center at the Central Library in which students can work and engage with others. The second episode was filmed at Mob Squad Cafe, encouraging teens to check out a local cafe to spend time at after school. The last episode featured the South Calgary Farmers Market to highlight the importance of supporting local businesses in Calgary. The TikTok series also featured a special episode covering the city's new park plan to inform youth on future developments in Calgary. Next year, the Civic Engagement committee hopes to cover more updates in regards to what's happening in our city within the TikTok series to further inform youth in Calgary.

In past years, one of Civic Engagement's annual initiatives is the Mayor for a Day Contest. Unfortunately, we were unable to host the Mayor for a Day Contest this year due to scheduling conflicts. While we were unable to launch the contest, we did design promotional materials, such as posters and infographics to use next year. The Subcommittee also developed a promotional plan, including social media strategy and a timeline for the contest. With our promotional plan and materials ready to go early next program year, we are confident that we can host Mayor for a Day 2023-24 with Mayor Gondek.

Our experiences this year offered insight on how to improve our work next year. We found that communication was an issue in completing our projects this year which prolonged the timeline for completion. We recognize that our communication can be improved to move projects along. While we hope to improve communication next year to avoid those

challenges, we also learned how to adapt when our timelines weren't met. When met with obstacles, we made adjustments very quickly, and looked for alternative resources and support. We also modified our project plan for the year, creating our TikTok series to inform youth in the city they live in. This demonstrated our ability to pivot ideas and provide the youth with something useful, even if it was not in our original plan.

Next year our priority will be the Town Hall Series. We have learned from our experience this year that we will need to communicate with Councillors and schools earlier in the program year to avoid scheduling conflicts. We are also considering other ways to schedule the events, beyond contacting schools directly. We also hope to carry on communication and relationships we built this year with interested Councillors and schools. We already have a school interested in hosting Ward 13 Town Hall early in our next program year.

We also hope to host other events next year, including a Mayoral Town Hall and Mayor for a Day. As mentioned, most of the preparation for the Mayor for a Day Contest is complete with posters and a timeline ready to be put into action early next year. We have left a strong lineup of projects for next year's Subcommittee to take over, and our experiences this year have allowed us to improve our plan to avoid the same obstacles faced this year.

Current Issues Committee

The Current Issues Subcommittee plays a vital role in identifying and addressing specific areas of concern that affect the youth in Calgary. We strive to create a platform for youth voices to be heard and to empower the next generation to actively engage with societal issues. Our objectives as a committee are to raise awareness regarding issues that impact youth, find solutions to address these issues, and implement constructive, community-based solutions to tackle the pressing problems facing youth in Calgary today. By undertaking these efforts, our Subcommittee aims to create meaningful change and ensure the concerns of Calgary's youth are heard and addressed by the general public, policymakers, and other relevant stakeholders.

This year, the Current Issues Subcommittee launched the Art of Awareness Contest to provide a platform for youth across the city to express their voices on the most pressing issues facing Calgary. The contest called on youth aged 12-18 to respond to the prompt,

“What is your take on the most pressing issues facing youth in Calgary today?” through art forms that could be anything from film animations to sculptures to musical performances. After releasing the art contest in March we continued to promote and advertise through social media and within schools across Calgary. We received a total of 29 submissions from students all across the city in grade 7 all the way through grade 12. The submissions we received touched on a diversity of issues, from social anxiety, to verbal violence, to the battle in understanding our identity.

The Current Issues Subcommittee selected two winners for the contest: one in the visual arts category and one in the written category. The visual arts category winner expressed their concern for how Calgary has changed over time, drawing attention to how Calgary is no longer the bright, colorful, clean city it used to be. The artist used juxtaposition between the two asymmetrical wings of a butterfly to illustrate this point.

Figure 1

Art of Awareness Contest Visual Arts Winner



Note. Artwork by Samantha Solmosan.

The written category winner, “Dear Death”, is a piece of written work that attempts to convey an inside view of vaping through the words of a dying victim. Vaping has become increasingly and terrifyingly common nowadays, as the artist, Gloria, states that, “[the effects of vaping] are felt through my generation like an unspeakable weight that lies across our backs.” An excerpt from “Dear Death” by Gloria Mutua is below:

Dear Death,

The knowledge that I am writing to you despite our future meeting being so soon pains me, but these words are ones that must be heard by your ears, seen by your pitiless eyes. And you must forgive me, but I am rather certain that the walk we must take to what comes after will not contain the time needed. So, I need you to listen carefully. You must understand why there are so many of us. Those that died by the smoke.

I do not remember when I first started. I do not remember who I was with. I do not remember where I was. But no one forgets their first time, the feeling you get when the world around you fades and you're certain you must be floating around in Andromeda, glimpsing the black hole that sits in the middle and unaware that it's slowly pulling you in. I had never felt anything like that before. All I knew was that it sure felt good to fly, be above this damned Earth for one weightless moment. But keep in mind: however high you fly, the speed of descent when those sun-kissed wings melt is even greater.

Everything down to my bones remembers the craving. Do you know how it feels to want something so bad that the want fades away and turns into need? Perhaps you do. Perhaps you have seen this happen across the ages, across the stars. A desire that grows, grows, grows until it encapsulates everything in sight. The first ethereal feeling it gave me was what my blistered feet and out-of-breath body ran towards, always out of reach but engraved in my mind. If only I could reach that again, if only I achieved that height once more, if only I could make the smoke carry me towards the sky one more time. Only if I knew what awaited me. Only if we knew how you patiently lied in wait for us.

The winners' work will be displayed at Southland Leisure Center and they, along with a representative from our committee, will be interviewed by CBC. We have compiled the results of the art contest into two infographics. We hope to share this information with city and community leaders to better address the issues that youth are being affected by today.

This information will also help us, as members of the Mayor's Youth Council, to work on initiatives that directly reflect the needs and wants of youth in our city.

In September of 2021, the City of Calgary partnered with the Calgary Public Library and Youth Central's Mayor's Youth Council to launch the Free. Period. Pilot Project. The initiative provides free pads and tampons to anyone who needs them by making them available in public washrooms. The dispensers are located in several Calgary Public Library Locations and City of Calgary facilities. Since the project started, over 40,000 products have been distributed.

The focus of the Free. Period. Project this year was centered around increasing awareness, decreasing stigma, and making the product dispensers more approachable. To address this problem, our committee helped coordinate and promote the Free. Period. Youth Art Contest. By the time the submission period closed, we had received more than 75 submissions, which we, as a subcommittee, narrowed down to 10, to be judged by our panel, which was comprised of members of our committee, a representative from the City of Calgary's Public Art department, the City of Calgary Community Strategies department, a representative from the Calgary Public Library, and Mayor Gondek. The three winners were each given a \$500 honorarium and their artwork wrapped onto the product dispensers.

Figure 2

Winning designs from the Free. Period. Youth Art Contest



Note. From left to right, Artwork by: Maya Schaal, Alice Nam, and Jasmine Andersen.

Inspired by the issues raised in the Art of Awareness Contest, our committee decided to create a sustainability report to address the ever growing environmental concerns in the city. The purpose of the report is to provide ideas to help make Calgary a more sustainable city. Our report focused on urban farming. Urban farming involves cultivating crops, raising

animals, or growing food in urban areas. The practice is important in enhancing food security, promoting local and fresh produce, reducing environmental impact, creating green spaces, and fostering community engagement and education on sustainable food production. The Subcommittee completed research, which will be written into a formal report in Summer 2023. The report will include a detailed summary of what these projects are, the benefits they would provide to the city, the challenges that they entail, and how they can be implemented.

Through the program year, we learned how to adapt our projects with the time and resources available. For example, our original hope with the Art of Awareness Contest was to organize an award ceremony event to celebrate the winners and provide the artists with an opportunity to connect with prominent artists in Calgary. Unfortunately, due to a lack of resources and short time frame, we were unable to organize the event. However, we adapted our original plan by arranging an alternative way to recognize the submissions and winners of the contest. We believe that our experience organizing the contest this year will allow us to improve the contest in future years. We hope to increase submissions and host an in person awards ceremony to promote the art scene for youth in Calgary. Next year's Subcommittee may also be able to use the artwork submissions as inspiration to shape new initiatives next year, addressing issues such as the vaping crisis which Gloria focused on in her art piece.

We also hope to continue expanding upon our other initiatives next year. The Free. Period. Project is a prime example of a project that has evolved over several program years. The program first launched with a few City of Calgary spaces offering free period products, which then expanded to more sites throughout the city. The initiative continued to evolve this year as we hosted the Free. Period. Art Contest which helped raise awareness about period poverty. We hope that next year's Subcommittee will push to add more dispensers throughout the city, and potentially explore the idea of increasing accessibility of these products within junior and senior high schools across the city.

Careers & Opportunities Committee

Our Committee aims to provide youth opportunities and information related to their interests, career, education, and leadership. We facilitate events for youth to explore new

interests, learn new skills, and provide sources of information regarding career and life through platforms they are familiar with. Our 3 main projects this year include: 2023 Career Exploration Fair, Shadow-a-Professor, and the Youth Central resources website. We also consistently posted TikTok videos as a year-long side project.

The 2023 Career Exploration Fair was held on April 29, 2023 at the West Hillhurst Community Centre and focused on exposing youth to a variety of careers and providing a means to have their specific career questions answered by professionals through four short, interactive panels in a Q&A format. The panels featured a wide range of careers, including engineers, artists, social workers, doctors, entrepreneurs, and more. We had over 30 in-person attendees and another 10 virtual attendees. The event received a lot of positive feedback from attendees, Careers and Opportunities members, and panelists alike. We hope to continue this annual event next year on a larger scale, with more panelists and attendees. By expanding the event, we can hopefully feature a wider variety of careers, including less traditional career paths.

Figure 3

Career Day 2023 Poster



Note. Poster was displayed in schools and in the community to advertise the event.

Shadow-a-Professor is an idea to offer youth an opportunity to experience a day of post-secondary education while in high school. High schoolers would spend a day following a professor or post-secondary student around on their daily life on the University of Calgary campus. This year, we managed to pitch the idea to the University of Calgary administration, but due to the lengthy approval process, we have been unable to begin the pilot initiative for Shadow-a-Professor thus yet. The framework for the pilot is ready for implementation; upon approval, next year's committee can move forward right away. Based on feedback from the Mayor and our contacts at the University of Calgary, we are hoping to modify this initiative to make it more successful. We are hoping to expand the program beyond the name "professor" and partner with other organizations/companies to develop the program beyond academia. By doing so, we hope to broaden our scope and provide youth with opportunities to explore a variety of careers.

The [resource website](#) is a compilation of scholarship, post-secondary, cybersafety, financial literacy, Indigenous, mental and sexual health, and more resources for youth. Careers and Opportunities made updates to the existing Youth Central website resources page, as well as expanded it to contain not only educational resources, but life skills and health resources.

Figure 4

Youth Resources Webpage



Note. Screenshot of the resources webpage.

Apart from these projects, we also posted several TikTok videos on the Youth Central TikTok account throughout the year, using it as a means to provide youth scholarship

search tips, post-secondary information, and as a way to advertise our initiatives. It proved to be an innovative and new way to connect youth with opportunities through a platform they already have access to.

This year we also adapted to a hybrid model for our meetings. It proved to make the Council a lot more accessible to everyone if there were slight conflicts between schedules or difficulties commuting in-person. While we hope to continue to meet primarily in person next year, we found that the hybrid model offers great accessibility during busy times of the year.

As mentioned above, our TikTok series worked well to promote the initiatives we were running throughout the year. Our TikTok videos consistently hit over 1000 views, demonstrating high marketability. We hope to continue to provide youth with ample opportunities to explore their interests, and expand our series by providing career-specific workshops. Workshop topics may include networking, financial literacy, job searching, etc. Delivering this information to youth through TikTok videos will hopefully be more accessible and informative than a presentation or classroom setting. Overall, we've had a very successful year as a Subcommittee and have adjusted well to a year with less COVID restrictions.

This report was written by the volunteers of the 2022-2023 Mayor's Youth Council.

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