YOUNG ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPIONS
PROGRAM EVALUATION

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EVALUATION OF THE YOUNG ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPIONS PROGRAM

AUGUST 2023

ABOUT THE EVALUATION PROCESS

Sustainable Schools NSW were engaged to evaluate the pilot of Action4Agriculture's new youth leadership program, Young Environmental Champions.

This evaluation focuses on the pilot delivered during Term 1 & 2, 2023 for students in the Hawkesbury and Hunter regions.

Through this evaluation process, data was considered from a range of sources including:

- Student reflections, collected via online questionnaires for students at the commencement of the project, after Workshop 1 & 3, and after the final pitch event.
- Teacher feedback collected via online questionnaires from individual workshops, and reflections on the overall program gathered via three individual phone interviews and one written response.
- Reflections from Workshop facilitator and Project Manager.

The evaluation explores how the program achieved outcomes related to:

- Building resilience skills and student wellbeing
- Sustainability knowledge, actions and environmental leadership

The evaluation also provides reflections on program delivery to support future program implementation.

ABOUT THE YOUNG ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPIONS PROGRAM

Young Environmental Champions (YEC) program supports young people and their communities to act on environmental and social issues important to them, their schools and their communities.

The YEC provides young people with the opportunity, through the SDGs, to identify a global problem and come up with a solution at a local level. These young people and their communities are connected with the best minds and ideas in government, education, industry, not for profits and the research sector to sustainably translate complex challenges into concrete problems and feel empowered to solve real world issues at a local, state or national level. This bespoke program supports young Australians to be agents of change creating a movement to embed sustainability thinking and actions in our way of life.

The program also provides them with key 21st century skills, to become confident communicators and collaborators and creative and critical thinkers. This, in turn, equips them for the jobs of the future.

The program also delivers on what teachers want: programs that engage their students and programs that show young people what they are learning at school has real-world impact.

The networks schools build through YEC illustrate to students that there are meaningful careers in this sector, and the connection to community and business leaders shows young people that what matters to them is valued and respected.

The program adopted a project based, action learning approach to engage student leaders in a sustainability project design process. The program provided three key pillars of support, networking, mentoring and empowering, with the program logic identified through the Hierarchy of Intended Outcomes.

The 10-week program was open to young people in Stage 3 to 5 in primary and secondary schools.

Term 1 – 2, 2023 program pilot was offered free to students in the Hunter & Hawkesbury region.

The program was promoted to schools via social media, direct EDM to schools in the Action4Agriculture network and via local environment and education groups including EEP, RIEP, Local Land Services and via the Sustainable Schools NSW e-newsletter. Seven student groups in the Hunter and seven student groups in the Hawkesbury registered an expression of interest via the program website. Due to a variety of barriers (including the change of date for Naplan and teacher absences) 10 student groups were involved in the program, 5 schools from Hunter region and 2 school from the Hawkesbury region which comprised of 5 student groups from 5 LGAs.

Through the program, students took part in a series of events including a regional in-person workshop which took the students through stakeholder management, investigation of the SDGs and how to build and work in effective teams, 3 online design thinking and project planning workshops, how to pitch your project and a final in-person 'Pitch, reflection and celebration' event.

Students were tasked with developing a collaboratively designed, student led sustainability action project that addressed UNSDGs.

A range of community representatives and sustainability practitioners participated in events, including representatives from:

- University of Newcastle
- Office for Regional Youth
- Hunter Local Land Services (LLS)
- Regional Development Australia
- Greater Sydney Landcare Network
- Teachers Kristen Jones and Zane Osborn
- Young Farming Champions (YFC), Katherine Charles and Danielle Fordham

Mentoring support was provided by the program facilitator Josh Farr and workshop attendees including YFC, students from University of Newcastle and LLS representatives.

At the request of participating teachers, an online Learning Management System was established for schools. The Mighty Networks platform provided a space to run events, record workshops and enable teachers and students to view recordings at their own convenience if they were unable to attend workshops. Online workshops were recorded, as was the live pitch event.

PROJECT OUTCOMES: BUILDING RESILIENCE SKILLS AND STUDENT WELLBEING

This evaluation assessed how the project impacted on student's resilience skills and wellbeing.

Resilience and wellbeing are considered to include core concepts such as building connections, competence, confidence and coping, and contributing.

Building connections. The YEC program encouraged young people to build connections through strategies such as encouraging and enhancing teamwork skills, providing opportunities to meet with experts and community stakeholders and meeting young leaders from different schools in their region.

Competence, confidence and coping: The program encouraged young leaders to enhance their communication and project planning skills, providing strategies to explain ideas to people, set goals, solve problems and plan projects.

Contributing: Through the program, young people generated ideas and designed plans to create programs that could address sustainability issues. They were asked to reflect on their ability to contribute to their community and the effectiveness of their student designed project in meeting sustainability goals.

Data gathered through the surveys shows that the proportion of students reporting 'extremely high' levels of confidence increased across a range of issues that relate to resilience and wellbeing concepts, as shown in Figure 1.1

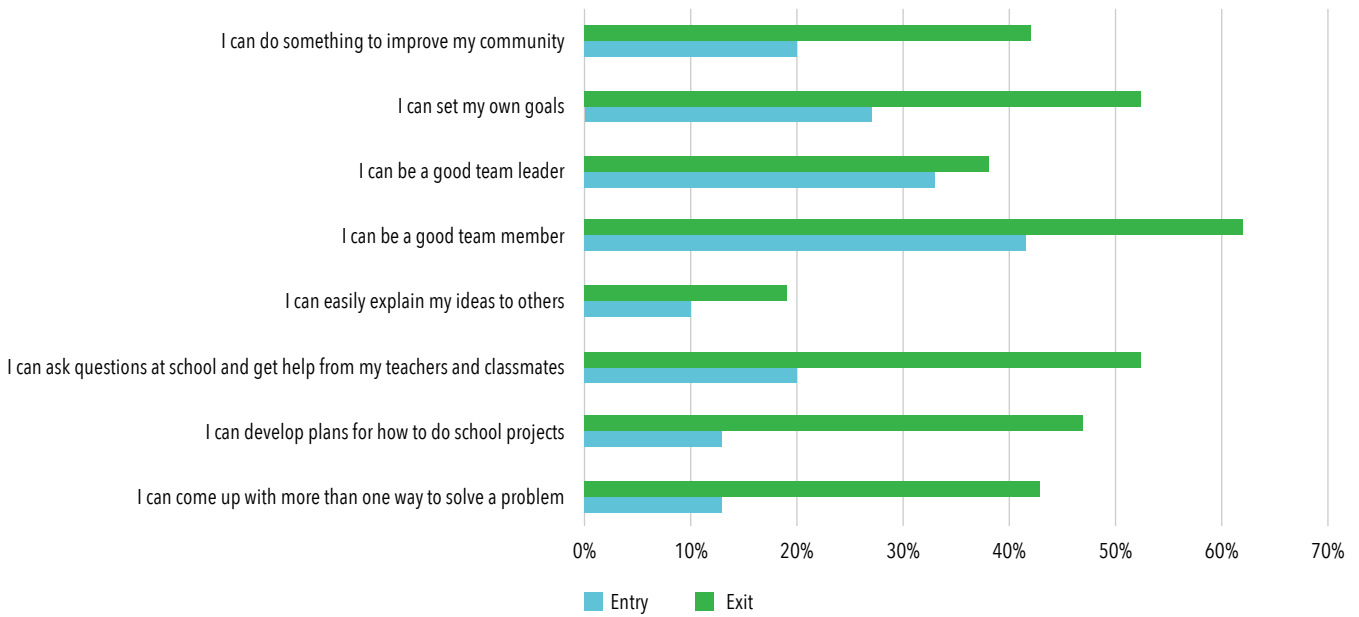## PROPORTION OF STUDENTS REPORTING 'EXTREMELY HIGH' LEVEL OF CONFIDENCE

Figure 1.1 Comparison of proportion of students reporting 'extremely high' levels of confidence at the beginning and completion of YEC program.

This data was also considered by looking at students with a high level of confidence, that is students reporting as 'quite confident' and 'extremely confident'.

At the completion of the program, most students reported high levels of confidence across all measures, ranging from 71% - 90% as shown in Figure 1.2.

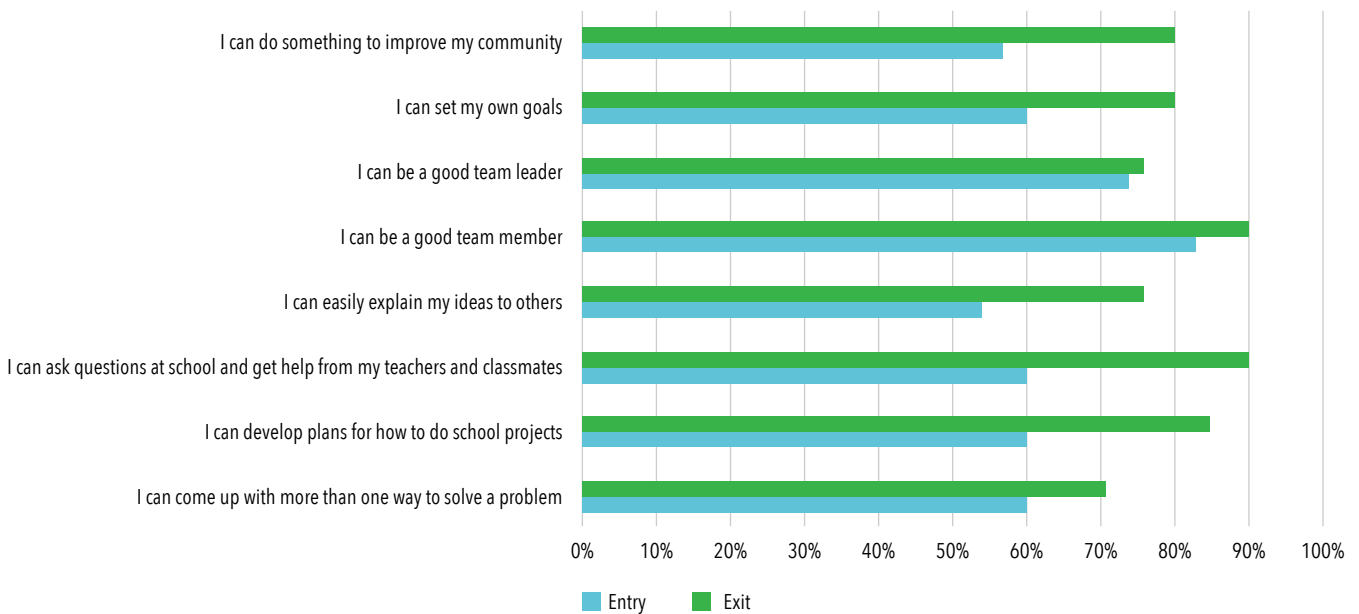## PROPORTION OF STUDENTS REPORTING HIGHER LEVELS* OF CONFIDENCE

Figure 1.2 Comparison of proportion of students reporting high levels of confidence.

This data suggests that students are entering the program with high levels of confidence, and through the proportion of students with high levels of confidence increases. At the completion of the project there is a notable increase in the proportion of students that are extremely confident across these measures.

BUILDING CONNECTIONS

Through the program, students developed the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to participate as a team member and improved their teamwork skills.

- Most students (61%) reported learning 'a lot' about working in teams and groups, with (27%) learning 'a great deal' and (12%) 'a moderate amount'.
- Students can identify different benefits and strengths of teamwork for example different types and strengths of team members, the importance of diversity and benefits of working collectively.
- The program increased students' level of confidence in their ability to be a good team member. The percentage of students that were 'extremely confident' in their ability increased nearly 1.5 times or 50% rising from 41.5% to 62%.

"*I was able to open up ideas, I looked through the lens of my teammates, and by putting our brains together we have come up with an idea that may be difficult but possible to do.*"
– Student

"*I enjoyed working in a team of like-minded people who had similar ideas to me, so that we could form together and make an impact.*"
– Student

Students benefited from opportunities to engage with and learn from experts and community stakeholders.

- 75% of students reported that they felt they had definitely "talked with experts who taught me about sustainability", and 62% felt they had definitely "met with people that are interested in environment and sustainability".
- Individual students identified 'connecting with people' as a highlight of the program.
- Individual students identified meeting likeminded people as a highlight of the program, they enjoyed 'talking to kids from other schools and hearing what they are doing' and 'meeting new people'.
- All teachers involved reflected that the connection with external stakeholders was beneficial for students.

Some students identified meeting like-minded people as a highlight of the program.

"*I liked how I was able to connect to various people and meet many professionals who have interests that I share with them.*"
– Student

"*[Students] loved talking with the external stakeholders, and people from the council, finding out, you know, how they could sort of connect with them to solve problems.*"
– Student

"*...the connection with the external stakeholders ...was surprisingly good... [students] appreciated engaging with other people who made it real for them...*"
– Teacher

"*...giving kids exposure to external people that actually do live and breathe this stuff is invaluable for them...*"
– Teacher

"*...The benefits of a project such as this is the authenticity of learning and development of real world skills. It enables young people to engage in real world systems, to understand constraints and structures on real world problems and to engage with experts ...*"
– Teacher

Feedback from one workshop was that some high school students felt that they had less connection with the younger students at the initial workshop.

COMPETENCE, CONFIDENCE AND COPING

Over the course of the program students developed and practiced skills that could help them face challenges and develop confidence in their own abilities. There was an improvement in students' confidence levels in goal setting, project planning and in their abilities to explain ideas to people. Students found public speaking challenging but rewarding and identified this as an area for personal improvement.

Goal Setting

Students engaged in the YEC program generally had a positive perception of their ability to set their own goals, both at the starting and completing stages of the program. There was however an overall increase in levels of confidence, with a larger proportion (200% increase) of students feeling 'extremely confident' at the project completion. (52%) of students at the end of the project compared to 27% at the beginning.

Communication skills and expressing ideas.

Evaluation data suggests that there was an increase in the proportion of students with high levels of confidence in their ability to express their ideas. There was a 40% increase in the proportion of students with high levels of confidence in their ability to express ideas at the end of the program (a change from 54% to 76%).

I CAN EASILY EXPLAIN MY IDEAS TO OTHERS – STARTING PROGRAM

I CAN EASILY EXPLAIN MY IDEAS TO OTHERS – COMPLETING PROGRAM

- Low confidence (not at all, slightly, somewhat)
- High confidence (Quite and extremely)

Figure 1.3 & 1.4 Comparison of high and lower confidence levels for question "I can easily explain my ideas to others"

Examples of how students developed communication and engagement skills include improving their ability to explain and articulate environmental issues more efficiently, aiming to spread awareness and encourage others to be the change. Students reported being more open, more engaged and participating more in group work.

Students identified areas for personal improvement in relating to their communication skills. Some students expressed a desire to improve their 'pitch skills', to improve their confidence in public speaking, and reflected on the importance of practicing and refining the pitch to deliver a more impactful and confident presentation.

Developing projects and planning

Students increased their level of confidence in planning school projects. This was one of the most notable increases in the proportion of students reporting high levels of confidence.

The proportion of students reporting extremely high levels of confidence increased across all questions, ranging from a 5% -33% increase.
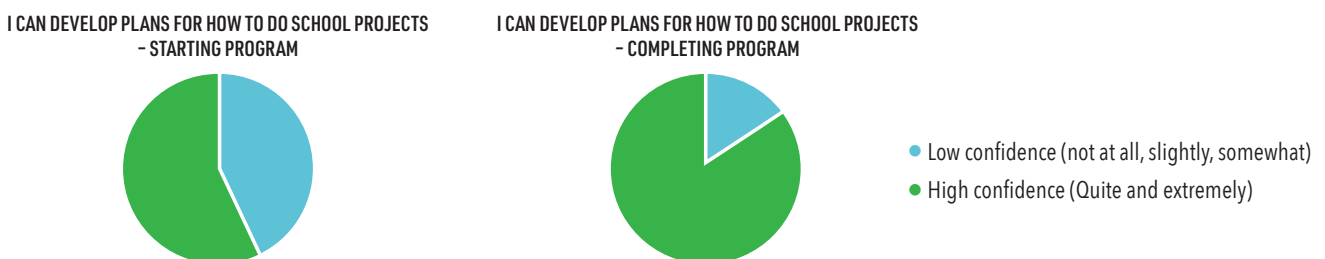
I CAN DEVELOP PLANS FOR HOW TO DO SCHOOL PROJECTS – STARTING PROGRAM

I CAN DEVELOP PLANS FOR HOW TO DO SCHOOL PROJECTS – COMPLETING PROGRAM

- Low confidence (not at all, slightly, somewhat)
- High confidence (Quite and extremely)

Figure 1.5 & 1.6. Comparison of high and lower confidence levels for question "I can develop plans for how to do school programs.

Problem solving

There was a notable increase in students' levels of confidence in their problems solving ability "I can come up with more than one solution to a problem". At the completion of the program, the majority of students felt 'extremely confident' in their ability to find more than one solution to a problem, compared to the beginning of the program where the majority of students were 'quite confident'.

Students identified a range of strategies for dealing with challenges including creative thinking and idea development, teamwork and communicating, asking questions, making connections with other people and learning who can help support, planning and goal setting and having a positive mindset.

> **"[I] learnt that planning is a big part of dealing and facing a problem."**

One teacher reflected.

> **"I was really ...surprised at how good the kids were at actually generating ideas and solutions, that was a real strong point for them."**

Reflecting on what they enjoyed most about taking part in the YEC program, some students identified issues that could impact on their competence and confidence. This included:

- learning new things
- developing public speaking skills and presenting our pitch idea
- designing and creating a prototype for their project
- learning how to formulate a good project and build a strong team.

This is shown through this teacher anecdote about a student's engagement in the program.

> **"...[A parent] rang me that afternoon to...say that she was crying at just how much her daughter has blossomed going through the program. Because it had challenged her - she had to address our assembly, she had to run our environment meetings. She had to come to that Pitch event and talk to all the people. Aside from the sustainability side of it, the opportunities to allow our kids to be involved in programs like that is really valuable..."**

CONTRIBUTING

Contributing gives a sense of meaning and purpose in peoples' lives. If young people can experience personally contributing to the world, they can learn a powerful lesson that they are important and have an impact on people's lives.

A common theme identified from students' reflections on the YEC program, was that they enjoyed the ability to act and make a difference. Students enjoyed:

- working together to make a project that will improve something in real life, that will help with the school's sustainability of animals, plants and water.
- being able to do something about issues that matter to me; Being able to do something I'm passionate about.
- to see how we can make a difference and to see how older people take our ideas on.

Students were confident in their ability to contribute to their community. The percentage of students with high levels of confidence about 'I can do something for my community' increased over the course of the YEC program (from 57% to 80%).

I CAN DO SOMETHING TO IMPROVE MY COMMUNITY – STARTING PROGRAM
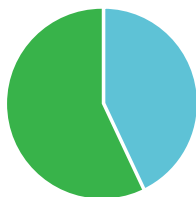
I CAN DO SOMETHING TO IMPROVE MY COMMUNITY – COMPLETING PROGRAM
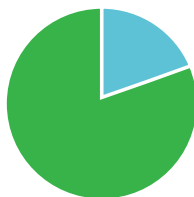
● Low confidence (not at all, slightly, somewhat)
● High confidence (Quite and extremely)

Figure 1.7 & 1.8 Comparison of high and lower confidence levels for "I can do something to improve my community".

The majority (62%) of students were 'very confident' and 14% extremely confident that their team project could drive the change they wanted to see.

> **"I believe in my ability do make positive change."**

> **"I think I can make a huge difference by doing little things."**

The learning opportunities offered by this approach were noted by participating teachers.

> **"There is so much rich learning for the kids. ...the best kind of learning happens when kids do something, and they experience something."**

SUSTAINABILITY KNOWLEDGE, ACTIONS AND ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP

Students engaged in this project are environmentally aware. They understand the breadth of sustainability issues and can identify a range of important social and environmental issues that are of concern in their community. This includes:

- Environment issues such as littering and waste, natural disasters and climate change, resource use, biodiversity and habitat conservation, transport, marine and waterway issues and

- Social issues such as interpersonal relationships, gender equity, social divisions, health and wellbeing, conflict and war.

In the YEC program, students worked in groups to collaboratively identify a sustainability issue of importance and to develop a social impact project that will bring about positive change and contribute towards achieving the UNSDGs.

Table 1 provides a list of projects, a brief description, and the related SDG.

Project Name	Description	SDG
The B Brigade	Our project focuses on increasing important pollinators in our local area by building a bee and butterfly garden in our school grounds.	SDG 15: Life on Land
People Power	Aspiring to improve the health of individuals and our community, we aim to clean the air and promote physical health by promoting modes of transport that are strictly; people powered!	SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being, GOAL 13: Climate Action
Sustainable Fishing	Students have been researching and presenting sustainable fishing benefits to local businesses and other students in our school.	SDG 14: Life Below Water
Newcastle East Public School Waste Education	Educating our school community about waste management and encouraging recycling	SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production
A Website Made by Students for Students	Development of a website to assist new students to transition to high school. The website will take a student focused perspective to reduce the stress of moving to high school, and allow students to thrive in their learning environment.	SDG 4: Quality Education
Precision of Decisions	Connecting to SDG 16.7 : making responsible decisions. We believe that the transition to high school is a difficult time for students and a complex time in their ability to form good	SDG 4: Quality Education, SDG 16: Peace and Justice Strong Institutions
Bananas and Pyjamas	Strengthening the connection of our school to our local circles. We are privileged to learn beyond our home communities and as such have a circle of learning community and we	SDG 1: No Poverty, SDG 2: Zero Hunger
Healthy Minds Thriving Learning	As we return to normal life and students start to connect back to face to face learning, we believe that students are still juggling many stressors in their daily lives. For us we travel to school outside our community daily, we set ourselves strong learning goals and we enjoy the opportunity to engage in a variety of extra curricula activities. We need to learn good habits to ensure we enjoy and thrive in all of these areas. Our project is to support students in developing good habits that will assist them in their schooling and transition to adult life.	SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being
ACTION NOW!	We are decreasing waste and increasing awareness, to take urgent action to combat climate change!	SDG 13: Climate Action

Table 1: Group projects and related UN SDG

Over the course of the program, students increased their level of knowledge about sustainability through the framework of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. At the beginning of the project, the majority of students rated their knowledge at a low level (62% rating 1,2 or 3). At the completion of the project, the majority of students rated their knowledge of SDGs at a high level (95% rating 4 or 5).

STUDENTS' SELF-RATED KNOWLEDGE OF UNSDGs
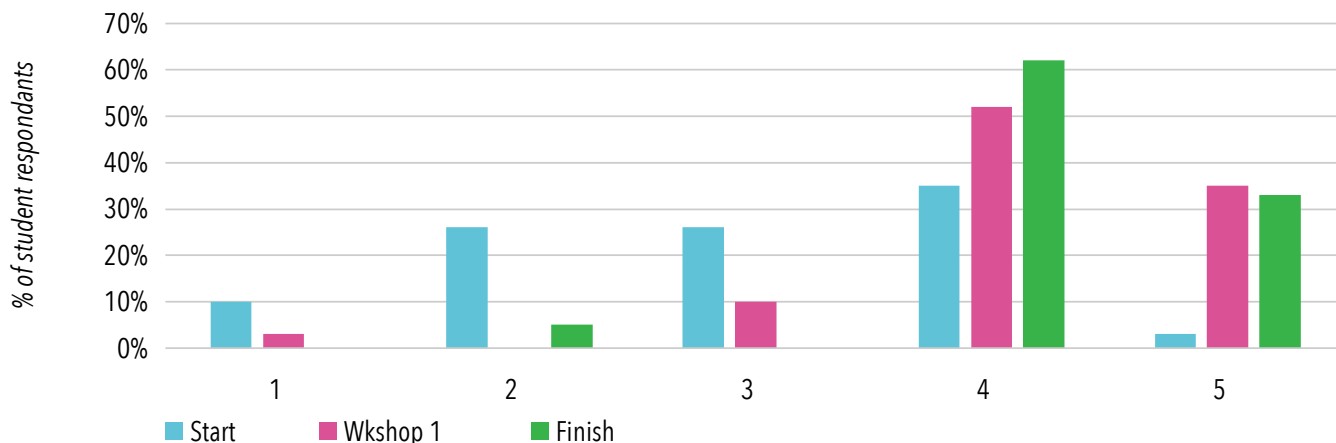
Knowledge rated on scale of 1 = Least to 5 = most

Figure 1.9. Students level of knowledge about UN SDGs

Students reported changing their thoughts or actions for sustainability because of taking part in the program. Ways that students had changed include:

- Increased knowledge, awareness and understanding of environmental issues,
- Improved communication and project-based learning skills
- Empowered to take individual action to improve environmental sustainability.
- Empowered to encourage others to take individual and collective action to make positive change.

Students reported making changes in their daily actions, such as recycling, conserving water, reducing plastic usage, and adopting safer food practices, using sustainable modes of transportation like walking and riding. They believe in their ability to make a positive change and help others understand the benefits. Appendix B details specific examples of sustainability issues raised by students.

"*[I have an] "understanding that sustainability isn't just a yes or no but is rather a scale. This way, I have tried to go up further on the scale.*"

"*You can't just tell people to change you have to be the change.*"

"*I can help others learn more about the benefits.*"

Teachers identified how the program provided opportunities for students with leadership potential to develop their skills. The program was targeted towards young people who were identified as leaders in their school community. For some schools this included SRC or School Captains, for other schools it included students from the Gifted and Talented program identified as having leadership skills. One teacher reflected how this leadership program was unique compared to other leadership programs, as it gave students an opportunity to practice skills not just listen to other leaders. It was an opportunity for students to extend learning for students who have been identified as being an area of strength for them.

"*It's really empowering for the students to...come up with an idea and then be acknowledged outside of % of student respondants school. As an assessment task that this is a real thing that could actually work.*"

Program delivery

Feedback was sought from students about the quality of specific workshops, suggestions for improvements or areas where they would like to learn more, and the overall program. Information about specific workshop issues was provided to the program coordinator during the program to inform the delivery of future workshops. This data is expanded in Appendix C.

Workshops, events and supporting resources.

Feedback from students participating in the workshops was positive. Data from Workshop 1 and 3 suggests that the students enjoyed the workshops (61% and 50%), found them interesting (61% and 75%) and gave them new ideas (82% and 75%). Note that no evaluation data was collected for Workshop 2.

Positive aspects of program delivery identified by teachers included:

- High quality presenters and organisers.
- Combination of in person and online events was effective.
- In person events were engaging and valuable.
- Online resources provided flexibility for teachers and students to engage with the program at their own pace.
- Online workshops and check ins were accountability points to ensure ongoing engagement and action.
- The Zoom of the pitch event expanded the reach of the students work, as parents and other students were able to watch and share the experience.

The Program Coordinator (Lynne Strong) reflected on the use of the Mighty Networks platform, noting that about 60% of teachers accessed this learning platform and some resources were viewed over 100 times. This tool has more potential to be used for networking between participating teachers and mentors.

Mentoring

The YEC program sought to engage student mentors through the University of Newcastle (UoN), University of Western Sydney and TAFEs in both regions. Two UoN students registered for the program and participated in the workshops. Mentoring was also provided by the program facilitator Josh Farr, and to a lesser extent the two Young Farming Champions involved in the program. A mentoring workshop was delivered as part of the Young Farming Champions program, which was recorded and made available to the UoN student mentors. Reflections from the Program Coordinator about mentoring was that this component was not explored as fully as it could have been through the program. On reflection, having an existing network or stronger connection with the universities and TAFEs could have resulted in more mentor engagement. YFC participants were perhaps hesitant to engage fully in broader sustainability discussions. The mentoring component of the program was not examined comprehensively though this evaluation.

Program highlights

At the completion of the program, students were asked to reflect on what they enjoyed most about taking part in the YEC program. Four key themes emerged: taking action and making a difference, knowledge and skill development, meeting like-minded people, teamwork.

Taking action and making a difference

- Being able to do something about issues that matter to me.
- Being able to do something I'm passionate about.
- To see how we can make a difference and to see how older people take our ideas on.
- It gave me the chance to learn something new and it was a new opportunity.

Knowledge and skill development

- Meeting like- minded people
- Learning new things, especially on how to formulate a good project and build a strong team.
- I liked how I was able to connect to various people and meet many professionals who have interests that I share with them.

Teamwork make an impact.

- I enjoyed working in a team of like-minded people who had similar ideas to me to

Teacher feedback about the program correlates with the students experience and highlights. Teacher interview data suggests that the program is engaging and interesting for students, offers valuable, real world learning experiences and encourages students to take action.

Engaging and interesting for students

- [I was surprised just] how engaged the kids were with it from the beginning.
- They were all completely engaged from start to finish

Offers valuable, real world learning experiences

- It definitely is a valuable experience that provides…real world context to students and makes their learning more authentic
- The benefits of a project such as this is the authenticity of learning and the development of real world skills. It enables young people to engage in real world systems, to understand constraints and structures on real world problems and to engage with experts in the field.
- It definitely is a valuable experience that provides…real world context to students and makes their learning more authentic.
- The benefits of a project such as this is the authenticity of learning and the development of real-world skills. It enables young people to engage in real world systems, to understand constraints and structures on real world problems and to engage with experts in the field.
- There is so much rich learning for the kids. …the best kind of learning happens when kids do something, and they experience something.

Encourage students to take action.

- They're so passionate, they come up with these ideas of how they want to change things and how they want to influence people.
- From each stage of the program students are encouraged to extend themselves and develop their skills. This is supported by their belief in their solutions and their passion to make a difference.

Opportunities for students to improve their engagement.

- Students were asked to reflect on their own engagement in the program and their team project and how they might make improvements for themselves. Key themes that emerged from student responses included time management and planning, team dynamics, public speaking skills, research, support and assistance.

Time management and planning

- A number of students raised issues relating to the need for better time management and planning, for example allocating time more efficiently, refine ideas to reduce stress, taking quicker action on project goals.

Enhanced collaboration and team dynamics

- Some issues raised include improving team management, fostering better communication and coordination among team members, establish a stable foundation rather than rush into starting.

Presentation and public speaking skills

- Some students expressed a desire to improve their pitch skills, to improve their confidence in public speaking, and the importance of practicing and refining the pitch to deliver a more impactful and confident presentation.

Research

- Some students suggested they would focus on more accurate research on the project, and/or researching different issues to develop a better understanding.

Support and assistance

- One student suggested the idea of regular Zoom sessions hosted by Josh and Lynne to provide support to schools that may need help during their projects.

Based on student feedback, the facilitator identified two key areas to enhance workshop content and delivery, (i) providing plenty of examples of potential project ideas at the start, and (ii) providing more guidance on the program management skills earlier in their project so students can effectively set goals and delegate tasks with ease.

Challenges and opportunities for teacher and school engagement

There were some common challenges and opportunities identified by teachers and the project coordinator that affect the program delivery. This included issues around timing, selecting students for involvement in the program, resources required to take part in the program, strategies to engage more schools, and making program resources available earlier to align with lesson planning.

Timing

- Extended the program from a 7-week timeline to 10 week was beneficial, some teachers suggested they may have found it difficult to deliver in 7 weeks.

- Term 1 was not an ideal time to be doing an external program as students and teachers are settling into new classes and routines. Term 3 may be a better option, as systems are established and there is fewer reporting requirements.

- Timetabling of online events is challenging. It is difficult to take children out of core learning to participate. One teacher suggested running Zooms in the afternoon, as the morning session is usually core literacy and numeracy learning. High school timetables are dynamic, and it is difficult to remove students from different subjects. The project coordinator noted that teachers were surveyed at the beginning of the project to determine the best time for online events.

- It would be preferable to run the program over one term, without the Term holiday break.

Involving more students

- Teachers identified they would have liked to be able to extend the program to more students. Selecting four leaders to be involved was challenging. Suggestions for potentially involving a large group, e.g. 6 – 10 students, or making it available across the whole form.

- When discussing how this program was aligned with their Geography course, one high school teacher suggested that the program could be adapted for a Term long program to be taught across the whole of Stage 4 Geography. She suggested 'mapping backwards' with the pitch event as a student assessment.

Staff resources to take part.

- One teacher was able to participate as she was currently not in an 'on class ' role, she felt it would be challenging for a full time class teacher to be involved. Another teacher held meetings during lunchtimes.

- Transporting students to external events may become challenging, with some schools having rules about teachers and parents transporting students, and the program requiring a teacher to be present.

Engaging more schools in the program

- The program was available free to schools in the Hunter and Hawkesbury region. One teacher reflected on the importance of this program being free, recognising that many schools would not want to pass the cost of participating onto a child or family.

- Schools were invited to participate through networks such as Action4Agriculture participants, EPP, RIEP schools, and LLS. These networks provided an important conduit to communicate with schools who had an interest in sustainability and were focused on 21st Century Learning.

Making program resources available earlier

- For high school engagement, it would be useful to have resources, timetable and structure available at the program inception. As teachers are planning learning outcomes at the beginning of term, they need a clearer idea of project criteria and outcomes. It is noted that as this was the first pilot of the program, and it was a process of codesign and there were some changes made to deliver a flexible program. For future program delivery it is envisaged resources and the timetable would be more refined.

Engaging schools

- A number of schools in the Hunter and Hawkesbury area were part of the Action4Agriculture network and had relationships with the Hunter Local Land Services who were strong supporters of the program. Schools that took part in the program were focused on providing 21st Century learning opportunities for their students. These relationships are important to encouraging uptake of the program.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Young Environmental Champions (YEC) program provided an opportunity for student leaders in the Hunter and Hawkesbury region to participate in a dynamic leadership program that encouraged students to be change agents and design projects that addressed sustainability issues in their community.

- Students increased their knowledge about sustainability and were motivated to make change to address sustainability challenges. They developed a deeper understanding of concepts of sustainability through the framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. They could identify sustainability issues of concern and work collaboratively to develop a plan to address them.

- Students appreciated and benefited from real world learning experiences. This program provided opportunities for students to meet like-minded young people and professionals, think strategically about social and environmental issues impacting on them, and develop solutions to problems that were relevant to their lives.

- The program provided opportunities to develop and enhance communication skills, working and leading teams, problem solving and project planning. These skills support students to build connections, confidence and coping strategies which are important in building resilience and wellbeing.

- Students increased 21sct century skills, including their levels of confidence in a range of areas that encourage resilience and wellbeing, being a good team member, problem solving (asking questions and seeking help, coming up with more ways to solve a problem) and taking positive action (doing something to improve the community).

- Delivering a hybrid delivery program that includes in-person and online workshops provided flexible learning opportunities for students and teachers. In-person events do require a time/resource commitment from schools which may impact on their ability to participate. Teachers and students attending the in-person events rated them highly. In-person events provided an opportunity for external stakeholders and community members to engage with student leaders, who were recognised for their efforts and achievements.

- The timing and length of the program is an issue that could be explored. Reflections suggest that Term 1 is not ideal, and Term 2 can be busy due to school reporting requirements and testing.

- 10 weeks is a reasonable length to achieve the program goals of developing a project plan.

- Primary and secondary schools engaged with the program differently, with some high school groups adapting their engagement due to timetabling restrictions. The program was flexible enough to allow this process. Consideration should be given to the mix of primary and high school students participating in a particular event. For high school students, there may be opportunities to embed the program into a specific curriculum area e.g., Stage 4 or 5 Geography as a term long program, if it is aligned with curriculum and learning outcomes. Consideration should be given here to how to incorporate successful aspects of the program, such as the engagement of external stakeholders and quality facilitators, and how teachers would be encouraged to trial and integrate the unit of work into their teacher programs.

- Regional uptake of the program can be supported by existing education networks and educators, such as education officers within Local Land Services, EPP network and Regional Industry Education Program. Consideration should be given to what support these education networks are able to provide and to the regional context for delivery, for example opportunities for cooperation with existing regional providers, programs currently being provided in the region and ensuring multiple strategies for engaging schools. It is noted that the school sector is currently facing considerable challenges related to staffing shortages and teacher workloads, which can impact on teachers' ability to participate in external programs. These considerations are relevant for all environmental education programs being delivered to schools.

EVALUATION OF THE YOUNG ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPIONS PROGRAM AUGUST 2023

APPENDIX LIST

Appendix A: Data comparisons for student entry and exit surveys Students rate level of confidence for 'I can' questions.

Appendix B: Student reflections on 'Sustainability knowledge, actions and environmental leadership'

Appendix C: Student reflections on program delivery, team project processes and outcomes

Appendix D: Teacher feedback on the YEC program

APPENDIX A

YOUNG ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPIONS PROGRAM EVALUATION

Data comparisons for entry and exit surveys Students rate levels of confidence "I can" questions.

Students were asked a set of questions encouraging them to reflect on their <u>confidence to engage in team work, planning and problem solving, and goal setting</u>, and selected their responses from a rating scale of 'not at all confident' to 'extremely confident'. Questions were asked at the start of the program and at the completion of the program, to enable a comparison between students' reflections on their abilities to establish how the program has impacted on their knowledge, skills or abilities.

The question asked, 'How confident are you in your ability to do the following':

- I can come up with more than one way to solve a problem.
- I can develop plans for how to do school projects.
- I can ask questions at school and get help from my teachers.
- I can easily explain my ideas to others.
- I can be a good team member.
- I can be a good team leader.
- I can set my own goals.
- I can do something to improve my community.

30 valid responses were received to the entry survey, 21 responses were received to the completion survey. Survey responses were anonymous. The data does not track changes in individual students, but rather considers the group.

A summary of all responses is shown in Figure 1.1 (Starting & Figure 1.2 (Completing).

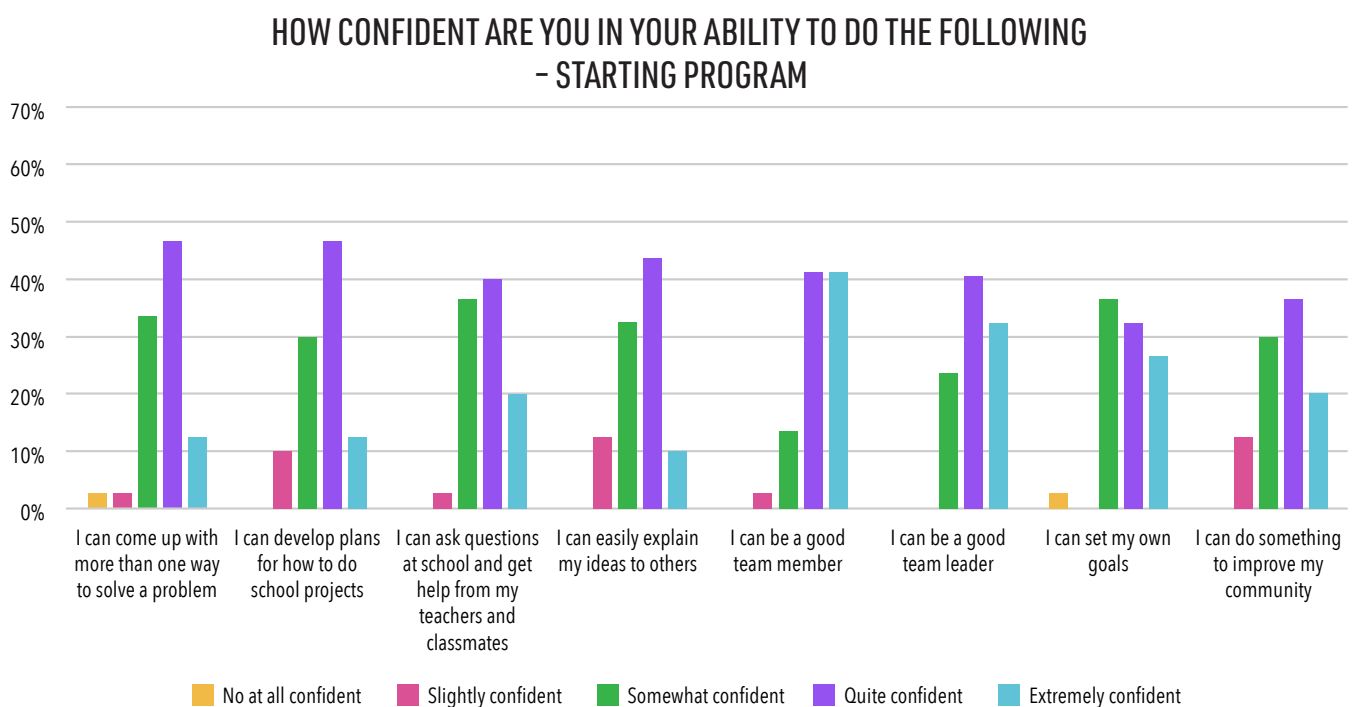### HOW CONFIDENT ARE YOU IN YOUR ABILITY TO DO THE FOLLOWING – STARTING PROGRAM

Figure 1.1 How confident are you in your ability to do the following (Responses at start of program)

Figure 1.2 How confident are you in your ability to do the following (Responses at completion of program)

HOW CONFIDENT ARE YOU IN YOUR ABILITY TO DO THE FOLLOWING – COMPLETING PROGRAM

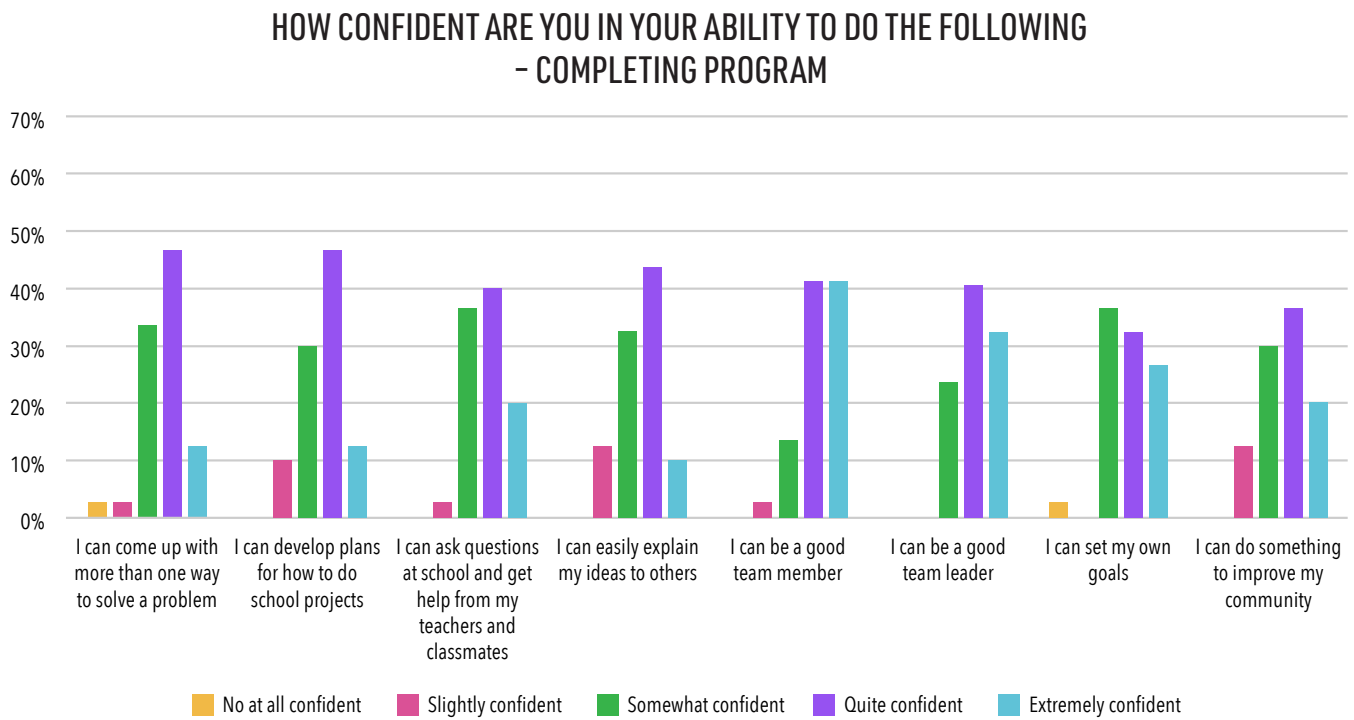Legend: No at all confident | Slightly confident | Somewhat confident | Quite confident | Extremely confident

Figure 1.1 How confident are you in your ability to do the following (Responses at start of program)

At the beginning of the program, the majority of students reported they were 'quite confident' across 6 questions. The exception to this is the following questions:

- I can set my own goals (majority responded 'somewhat confident')
- I can be a good team member (equal percentage responded 'quite' and 'extremely').

At the completion of the program, the majority of students reported they were 'extremely confident' for 6 questions. For the other two questions:

- I can easily explain my ideas to others (majority quit confident)
- I can be a good team leader (equal percentage responded 'quite' and 'extremely' confident.

At the beginning of the program, areas where highest proportion of students reported the highest level of confidence are:

- I can be a good team member – 41.5% 'extremely confident.
- I can be a good team leader – 33% 'extremely confident.

At the completion of the program, questions where highest proportion of students report the highest level of confidence are:

- I can be a good team member – 62% extremely confident.
- I can ask questions at school and get help from my teachers and classmates – 52% extremely confident.
- I can set my own goals – 52% extremely confident.

The proportion of students reporting extremely high levels of confidence increased across all questions, ranging from a 5% -33% increase.

This is shown in Figure 1.3 below.

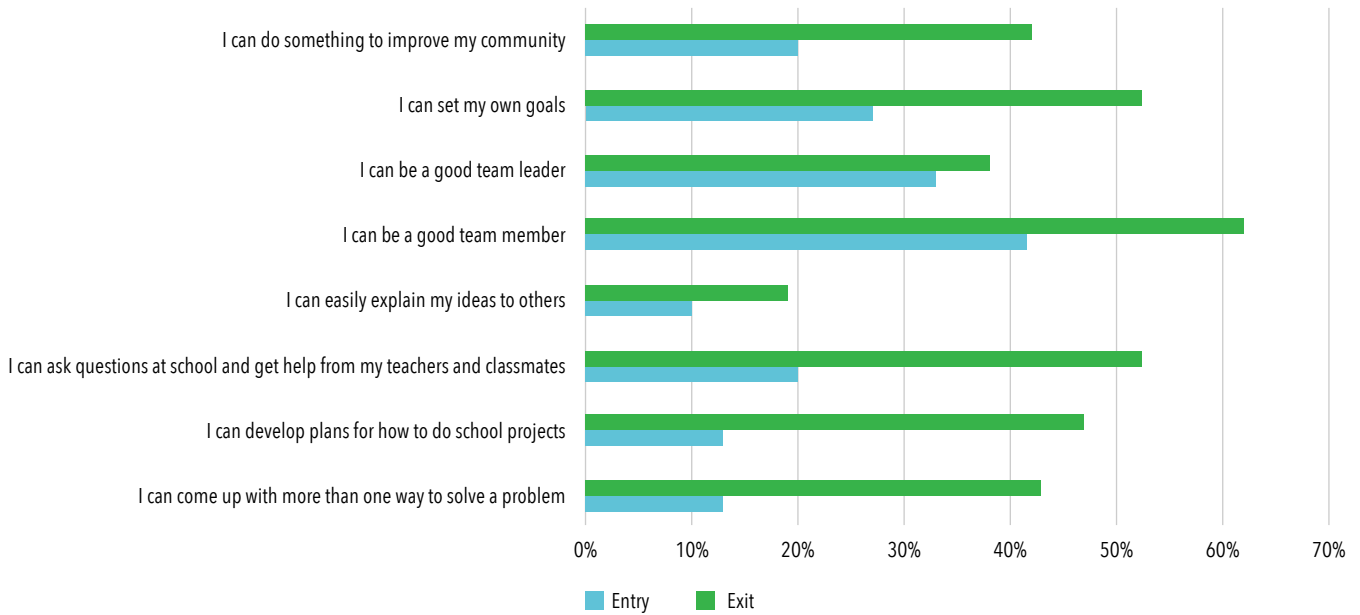## PROPORTION OF STUDENTS REPORTING 'EXTREMELY HIGH' LEVEL OF CONFIDENCE

Figure 1.3 Comparison of proportion of students reporting 'extremely high' levels of confidence.

At the completion of the program, most students reported high levels of confidence* across all measures, ranging from 71% - 90% as shown in Figure 1.4. A high level of confidence is considered to include those students reporting as 'quite confident' and 'extremely confident.'

The proportion of students reporting increased high levels of confidence increased across all questions, ranging from a 2% -30% increase.

The most notable increases in levels of high levels confidence were for the questions.

- I can ask questions at school and get help from my teacher, increase from 60% to 90% reporting high levels of confidence (50% increase)
- I can develop plans for how to do school projects, increase from 60% to 85% reporting high levels of confidence (42% increase)
- I can do something to improve my community, increase from 57% to 80% reporting high levels of confidence (40% increase).

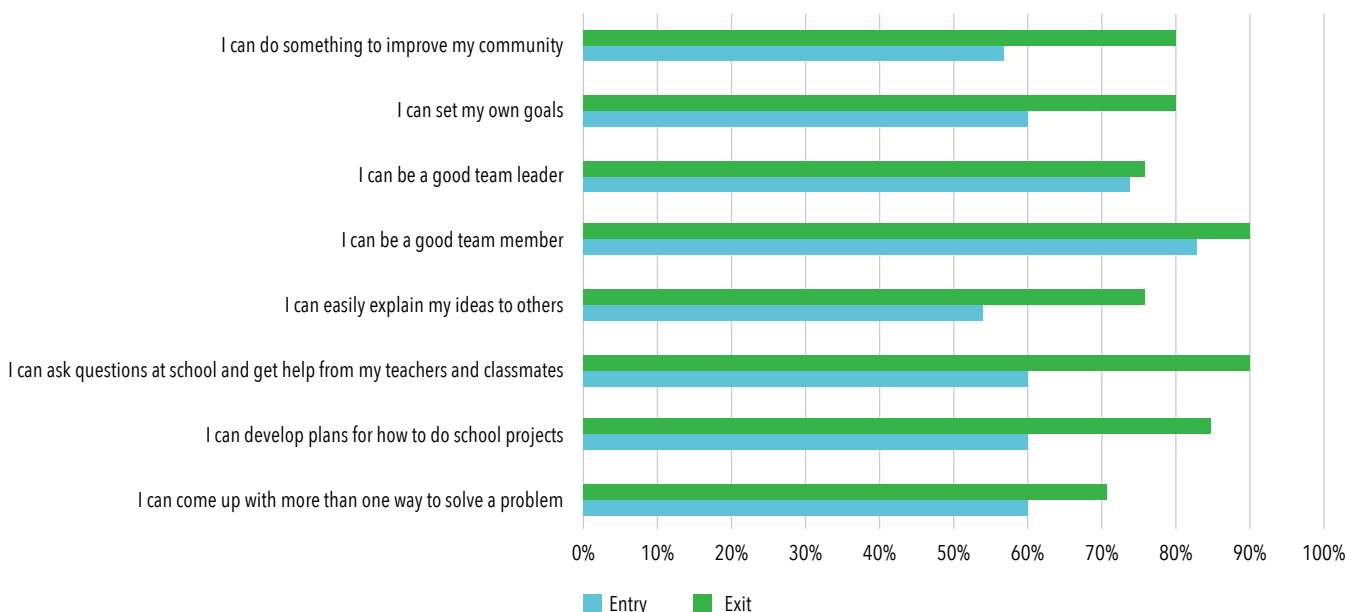## PROPORTION OF STUDENTS REPORTING HIGHER LEVELS* OF CONFIDENCE

Figure 1.4 Comparison of proportion of students reporting high levels of confidence.

At the beginning of the program, a small percentage of students reported they were not at all confident in two areas.

- I can set my own goals – 3% not at all confident
- I can come up with more than one way to solve a problem – 3%

At the completion of the project, 10% of respondents reported lower levels of confidence (none or slightly) across all 8 questions. The most change seen here is an increase in lower levels of confidence for 'I can be a team leader'. Though still reporting lower levels of confidence, the relative proportion of students in this category reduced for 'I can set my own goals' and 'I can easily explain my ideas to others'.

Responses to individual questions are discussed in more detail.

I can come up with more than one way to solve a problem.

Participants level of confidence to come up with more than one way to solve a problem can be seen below, and shown in Figure 1.3

Starting Program:

- Not at all confident: 3%
- Slightly confident: 3%
- Somewhat confident: 34%
- Quite confident: 47%
- Extremely confident: 13%

Completing Program:

- Not at all confident: 5%
- Slightly confident: 5%
- Somewhat confident: 19%
- Quite confident: 29%
- Extremely confident: 43%

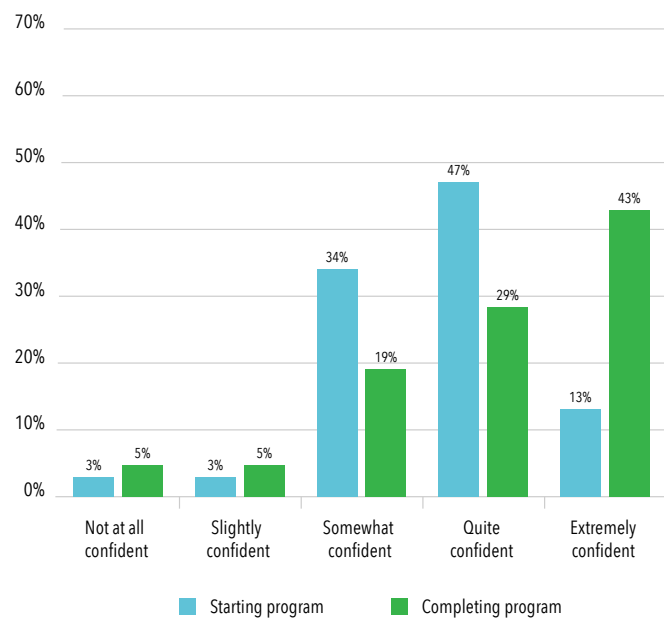## I CAN COME UP WITH MORE THAN ONE WAY TO SOLVE A PROBLEM

Figure 1.5: Comparison of reported level of confidence for problem solving.

A small percentage of participants reported being not at all confident (3% to 5%) or slightly confident (3% to 5%) in their ability to generate multiple solutions to problems at both stages of the program.

A higher percentage of participants felt 'somewhat confident' in their ability to come up with multiple solutions at the start of the program compared to the completion. There was a notable decrease in the percentage of respondents that were 'somewhat confident' in generating multiple solutions among these participants by the end of the program.

Most participants (47%) reported being quite confident in their ability to generate multiple solutions at the beginning of the program. The number of participants feeling 'quite confident' reduced but it remained relatively high (29%).

Initially, a small percentage of participants (13%) felt extremely confident in their ability to come up with multiple solutions. By the end of the program, there was a significant increase in the number of participants who reported being extremely confident (43%).

At the beginning of the program, the majority of participants felt 'quite confident' in their ability to solve problems 47%. At the completion of the project, the majority of participants (43%) felt 'extremely confident'. The percentage of participants reporting high levels of confidence (quite and extremely combined) rose from 60% to 72%. This suggests that the program influenced most participants' perception of their ability to generate multiple solutions, potentially providing them with more tools or strategies to approach problem-solving.

I CAN DEVELOP PLANS FOR HOW TO DO SCHOOL PROJECTS
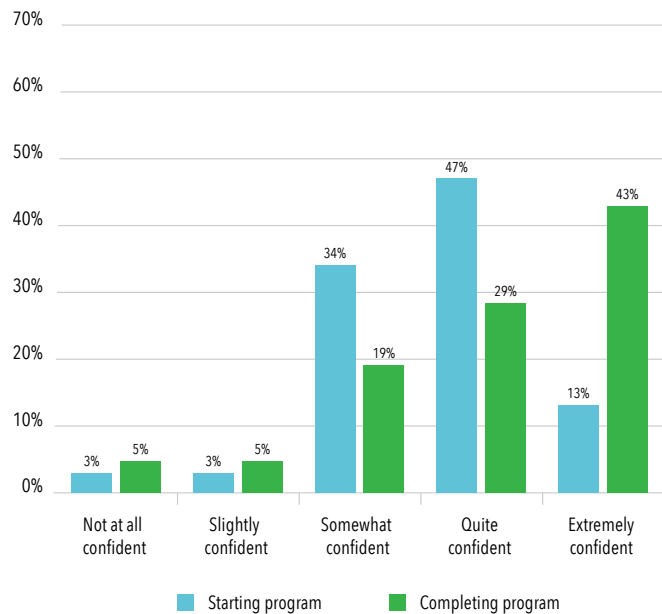
Figure 1.6 Comparison of reported level of confidence for 'developing plans for school projects.'

This data shows that:

- Participants' confidence levels in developing plans for school projects varied throughout the program. The distribution of levels of confidence shifted for each category.

- There was a decrease in confidence for a small number of participants (0% to 10% changing from slightly confident to not at all confident)

- The percentage of students identifying as 'extremely confident' increased from 13% to 48%, an increase of 2.5 times.

- The percentage of participants reporting high levels of confidence ('quite' and 'extremely') rose from 60% to 86%, as shown in comparison between Figure 1.7 and 1.8

I CAN DEVELOP PLANS FOR HOW TO DO SCHOOL PROJECTS
– STARTING PROGRAM
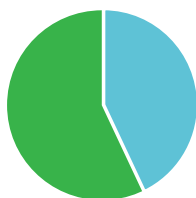
I CAN DEVELOP PLANS FOR HOW TO DO SCHOOL PROJECTS
– COMPLETING PROGRAM

● Low confidence (not at all, slightly, somewhat)
● High confidence (Quite and extremely)

Figure 1.7 and 1.8 Comparison of high and lower confidence levels for question "I can develop plans for how to do school programs.

Initially, no participants reported not being at all confident in their ability to ask questions and seek help. However, after completing the program, 10% of participants felt this way. 3% of participants felt slightly confident in their ability to ask questions and seek help. However, by the completion of the program, this percentage dropped to 0%.

Initially, 37% of participants felt somewhat confident in their ability to ask questions and seek help. Surprisingly, this confidence level dropped to 0% by the end of the program. This substantial decrease suggests that the program might have influenced participants' perception of their ability to seek help effectively.

At the start of the program, the majority of participants (40%) reported feeling quite confident in their ability to ask questions and get help at the start of the program. By the end, this confidence level slightly decreased to 38%.

Initially, 20% of participants reported feeling extremely confident in their ability to ask questions and get help. By the completion of the program, this confidence level significantly increased to 52%.

This notable increase suggests that the program had a positive impact on participants' confidence levels and their ability to seek help effectively.

The notable increase in participants reporting the highest level of confidence (2.6 times), suggests that the program had positive impact on participants' confidence levels and their ability to asking questions and seek help from teachers and classmates.

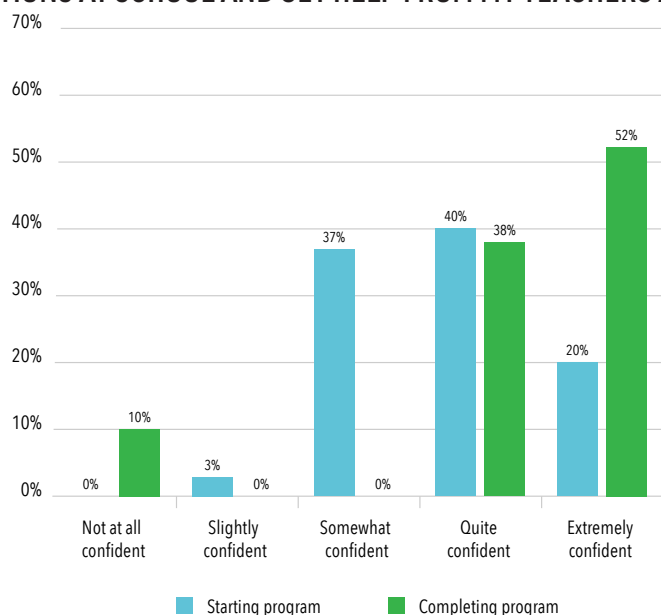## I CAN ASK QUESTIONS AT SCHOOL AND GET HELP FROM MY TEACHERS AND CLASSMATES

Figure 1.9 Comparison of reported level of confidence for 'asking questions at school and get help from my teachers and classmates.'

At the start of the program the majority of students (77%) are either 'somewhat confident' (33%) or 'quite confident' (44%) at easily explaining ideas to others. Only a small percentage (13%) feel slightly confident, and an even smaller percentage (10%) feel extremely confident.

At the completion of the program the majority of students (57%) feel 'quite confident' upon completing the program. 19% feel 'extremely confident', showing a higher level of confidence compared to the entry. The percentages of those feeling slightly confident (10%) and somewhat confident (14%) have decreased.

The proportion of students reporting high levels of confidence ('quite' and 'extremely') rose from 54% to 76%, as shown in comparison between Figure 1.5 and 1.6

Overall, the data suggests the program increased a proportion of students confidence in their ability to easily express ideas to others as they progress through the program.
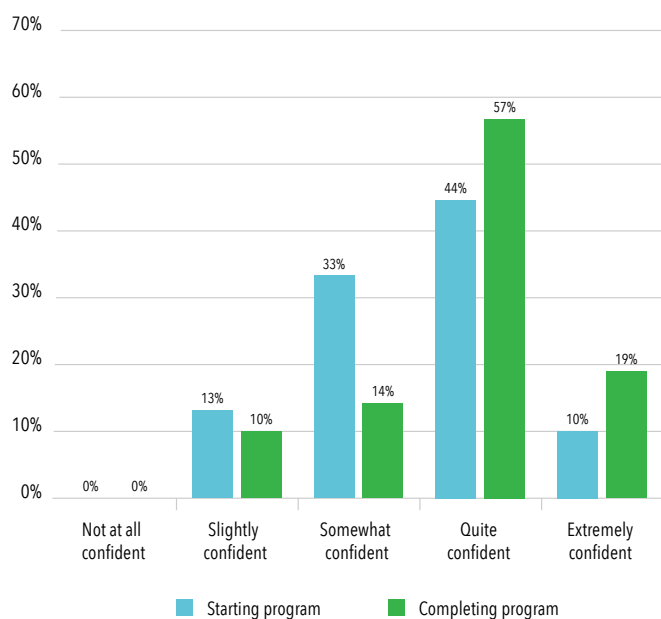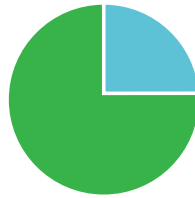
I CAN EASILY EXPLAIN MY IDEAS TO OTHERS

Figure 1.10 Comparison of reported level of confidence for 'explaining my ideas to others.'

I CAN EASILY EXPLAIN MY IDEAS TO OTHERS – STARTING PROGRAM

I CAN EASILY EXPLAIN MY IDEAS TO OTHERS – COMPLETING PROGRAM

● Low confidence (not at all, slightly, somewhat)
● High confidence (Quite and extremely)

Figure 1.11 and 1.12 Comparison of high and lower confidence levels for question 'I can easily explain my ideas to others'.
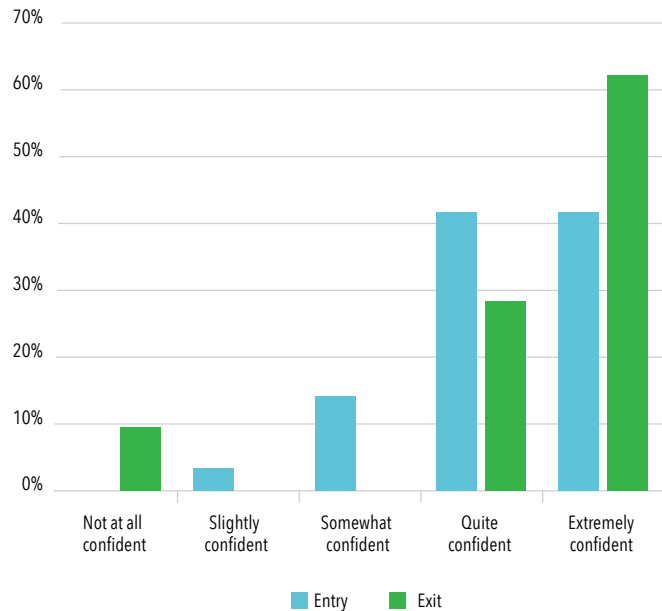
I CAN BE A GOOD TEAM MEMBER

Figure 1.13 Comparison of reported level of confidence for being a good team member.

At the start of the program majority of students (83%) feel either quite confident (41.5%) or extremely confident (41.5%) in their ability to be a good team member.

At the completion of this project, the majority of students (90%) feel either quite confident or extremely confident in their ability to be good team member.

The majority of students feel extremely confident (62%), showing a small increase in the proportion of students expressing the highest level of confidence (7% increase).

It is noted that 10% of students expressed that they are not at all confident, indicating some doubts about their abilities to take part in teamwork.

Overall, the data indicates that the program has had a positive effect on a proportion of students confidence in their ability to be a good team member. This suggests the program has developed the necessary skills, knowledge or experience to enhance their team member capabilities and build confidence in this area.
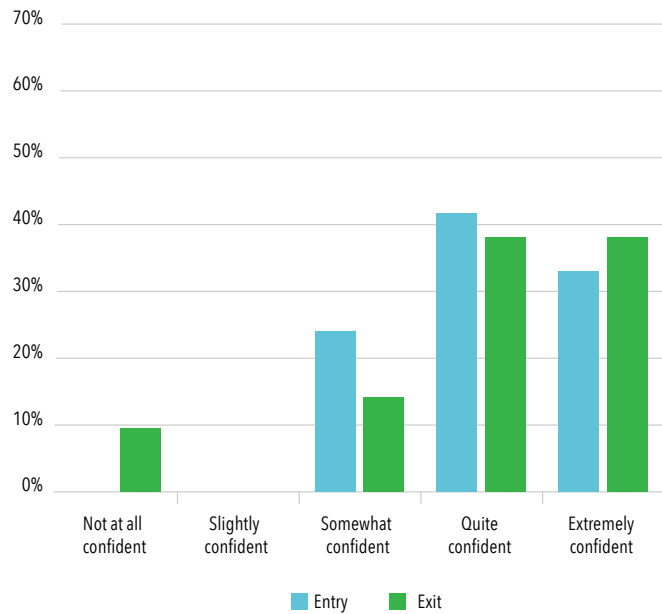
I CAN BE A GOOD TEAM MEMBER

Figure 1.14 Comparison of reported level of confidence for being a good team leader.

A significant proportion of students (74%) already feel either quite confident (41%) or extremely confident (33%) in their ability to be a good team leader at the beginning of the program.

Confidence levels in being a good team leader remain high upon completing the program (76%). An equal percentage (38%) of students feel quite confident and extremely confident.

It is noted that there is a small proportion of students who had reduced levels of confidence in their ability to lead a team, with 10% feeling not at all confident.

Overall, the data suggests that students generally have a positive perception of their ability to be good team leaders, both at the starting and completion stages of the program. The majority of students entered the program with a considerable level of confidence about their leadership abilities, and this confidence is maintained for the majority of students.
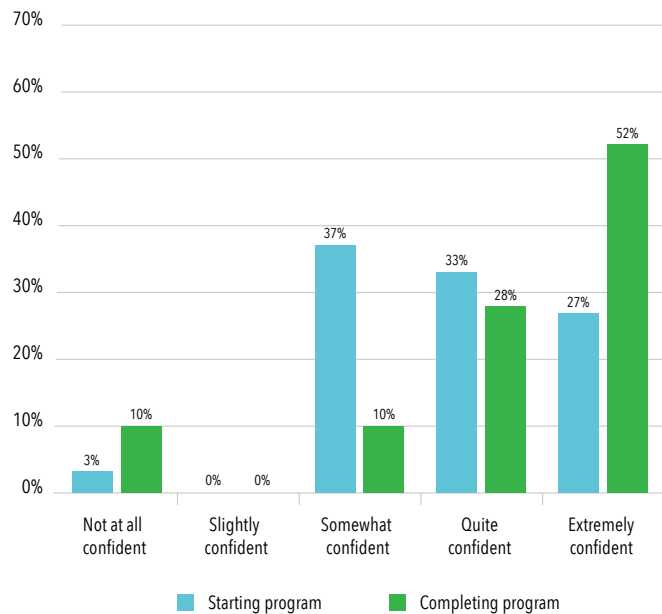
I CAN SET MY OWN GOALS

Figure 1.15 Comparison of reported level of for setting goals.

At the start of the program, the majority of students already feel either somewhat confident (37%) or quite confident (33%) in their ability to set their own goals. 27% feel extremely confident, suggesting a high level of belief in their goal-setting abilities.

At the completion of the project, the majority of students (52%) report they are extremely confident, indicating a notable boost in confidence compared to the starting stage (40% increase).

At the completion of the project a small percentage (10%) of students now report not being at all confident, this was in increase from 3% at the beginning of the program, suggesting a decrease in confidence for some students.

Overall, the data suggests that students generally have a positive perception of their ability to set their own goals, both at the starting and completing stages of the program. There is an overall increase in confidence levels, with the majority of students feeling extremely confident upon program completion.

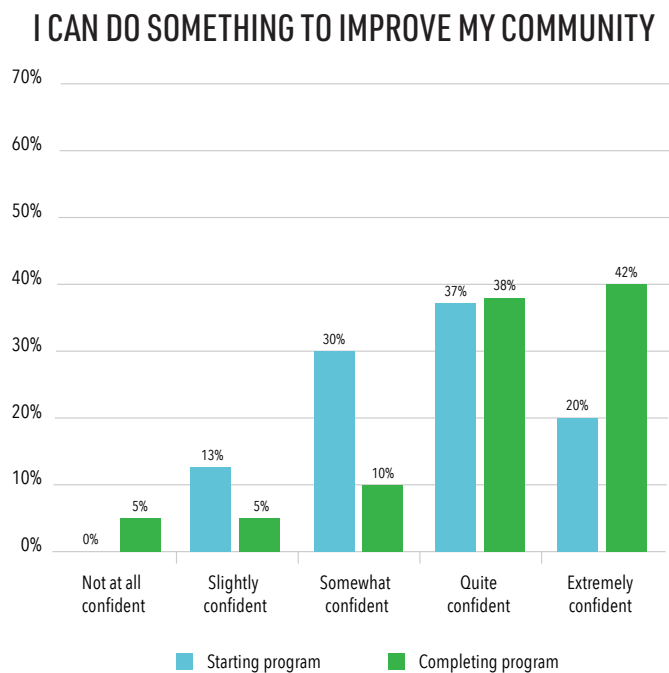## I CAN DO SOMETHING TO IMPROVE MY COMMUNITY

Figure 1.16 Comparison of reported level of for doing something to improve my community.

At the start of the program the majority of students (67%) feel quite (37%) or somewhat (30%) confident. At the start of the program 57% of students report high levels of confidence (quite and extremely).

On completion of the project, 80% of students report high levels of confidence, quite (38%) or extremely (42%). This comparison can be seen in Figure 1.17 and 1.18.

There is a notable increase from 20% to 42% of students who feel extremely confident they can do something to improve their community.

At the beginning a smaller percentage (13%) feel slightly confident, suggesting some reservations or doubts about their potential impact. It is noted that some students' confidence level drops upon completion of the project, with 5% feeling not at all confident.

I CAN DO SOMETHING TO IMPROVE MY COMMUNITY – STARTING PROGRAM
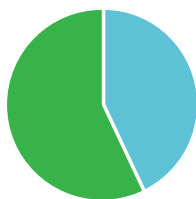
I CAN DO SOMETHING TO IMPROVE MY COMMUNITY – COMPLETING PROGRAM
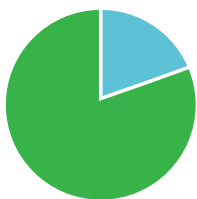
● Low confidence (not at all, slightly, somewhat)
● High confidence (Quite and extremely)

Figure 1.17 and 1.18 Comparison of high and lower confidence levels for "I can easily explain my ideas to others.

Overall, the data suggests that students generally have a positive perception of their ability to contribute to their community, both at the starting and completing stages of the program. There is an overall increase in confidence levels, with a majority of students feeling extremely confident upon program completion. This indicates that the program may have had a positive impact on their belief in their ability to make a difference in their community.

In summary, the evaluation data indicates that the Young Environmental Champion program had a positive impact on a students' confidence levels across a range of key questions about problem solving, planning, teamwork and taking action in the community.

While the majority of students started the program with high levels of confidence across all key issues, the proportion of students with high levels of confidence increased by the completion of the program.

The most notable increases in the proportion of students with <u>high levels</u> of confidence were:

- planning for school projects
- asking questions and seeking help
- doing something to improve my community.

The proportion of students reporting the <u>highest level</u> of confidence (extremely high) increased for all questions.

The most notable changes (increase) in the proportion of students with the highest level of confidence were:

- developing plans for school projects.
- being a good team member.
- asking questions and seeking help.
- coming up with more ways to solve a problem.

It is noted that a small percentage of students had lower confidence levels in certain areas at both the beginning and completion of the program.

APPENDIX B

YEC STUDENT REFLECTIONS ON SUSTAINABILITY KNOWLEDGE, ACTIONS AND ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP

SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES OF CONCERN FOR STUDENTS

Students were asked to list 2 important environmental or social issues in their local community.

Key issues identified by students are listed below, in order of most concern, as indicated by the number of times an issue was mentioned by different students:

- **Littering and Waste:** Students express concerns about littering, including both general littering and specific issues like food waste. They also mention the importance of waste management through practices like composting and recycling, as well as addressing the problem of plastic pollution.
- **Natural Disasters:** Students highlight the impact of natural disasters, specifically flooding and bushfires, and how these had immediately impacted on them.
- **Climate Change:** Climate change is an area of concern for a number of students.
- **Biodiversity and Habitat Conservation:** Students express concerns about invasive species, such as Varroa mites and Carp, and their impact on biodiversity. They also mention the importance of protecting habitats, addressing land degradation, and preserving local reserves.
- **Transport Issues:** Students identified traffic as an environmental issues
- Marine and Waterways: Students express concerns about protecting waterways like the Hawkesbury River, addressing beach erosion, and preserving marine life.
- **Social Issues:** Students raised various social issues, including the impact of war, coping after the COVID- 19 pandemic, bullying, promoting acceptance of different cultures, and raising awareness about sustainability.
- **Resource Use:** The students mention concerns about energy consumption, water usage, and the need to avoid taking too many resources.

Students were also asked an open ended question "If you had a magic wand and could fix something important to you, what would it be".

Students concerned covered a wide range of both social and environmental sustainability. This including gender equality, mindset transformation, poverty, health and wellbeing, climate change, reducing environmental pollution and improving sustainability.

- **Gender Equality:** Students expressed a desire to address gender inequality and ensure equal rights for all individuals, regardless of their gender. They believe that this would lead to improved opportunities, reduced poverty, and a more inclusive society.
- **Mindset and social division:** Students highlight the negative impact of tribal mentalities, which lead to divisions, discrimination, sexism, racism, conflicts, and disagreements. Students emphasize the importance of open-mindedness to achieve equality and address other social issues.
- **Health and Well-being:** Some students express a desire to address health-related issues, including curing cancer and ensuring the happiness and well-being of loved ones.
- **Conflict:** Students express a desire for global unity, cooperation, and conflict resolution. They believe that by resolving human conflicts, society can redirect its collective efforts toward solving other pressing issues.
- **Poverty and Social Issues**: Some students discussed the desire to eliminate poverty, world hunger, homelessness, and the well-being of marginalized communities.
- **Climate Change:** Student discussed that they would like to fix the worlds climate change problem, decrease global warming ate, create a more sustainable earth.
- **Waste and pollution:** Students wanted to remove litter, waste, plastic pollution and invasive species.
- **Pollution and degradation:** Students would like to remove invasive species (Varooa mite and Carp), fix road potholes, prevent companies destroying the environment.

KNOWLEDGE OF UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Students were asked to rate how much they know about the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGS), on a scale from 1 – 5, where 1 is the least and 5 is the most. Their self-reported knowledge was measured at the beginning of the program, after Workshop 1 where SDG's were discussed in some detail, and then again at the end of the program.

At the beginning of the project, 62% of students rated their knowledge at the lower end of the scale (1, 2 and 3). The percentage of students rating their knowledge at the lower end of the scale reduced to 13% after workshop 1, and at the completion of the project this was only 5% of students.

The percentage of students who rated their knowledge '4' grew from 35% to 53% to 62%.

The percentage of students who rated their knowledge highly at level 5 grew from 3% to 35% and ultimately 33%.

STUDENTS' SELF-RATED KNOWLEDGE OF UN SDG
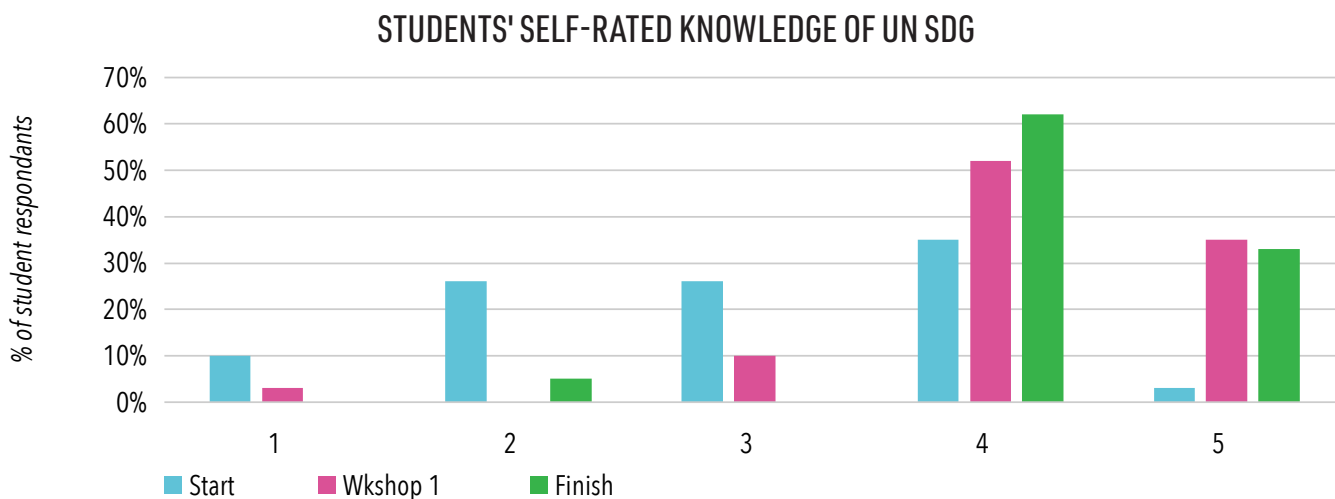
Knowledge rated on scale of 1 = Least to 5 = most

Students' knowledge of UNSDGs increased significantly over the time of the project.

CHANGING ACTIONS AND THOUGHTS TO SUPPORT SUSTAINABILITY.

Students were asked to respond to the question, since doing Young Environmental Champions what are 2 ways that you have changed your actions or thoughts about the environment and sustainability?

Students provided a range of responses suggesting that they

- Have increased knowledge, awareness and understanding of environmental issues,
- Have improved communication and project-based learning skills.
- Are empowered to take individual action to improve environmental sustainability.
- Are empowered to encourage others to take individual and collective action to make positive change.
- Increased awareness and understanding of sustainability: Students have gained more knowledge and a broader perspective on sustainability, moving beyond simplistic ideas like avoiding plastic and considering sustainability as a scale.

One student noted they developed an "understanding that sustainability isn't just a yes or no but is rather a scale. This way, I have tried to go up further on the scale."

- **Environmental consciousness:** Students have developed a greater appreciation for the environment, including plants, animals, bees, butterflies, and life under the sea. They have taken steps to care for the environment, such as planting flowers and improving conditions for plants and animals.
- **Taking individual action to improve environmental sustainability:** Students have made changes in their daily actions, such as recycling, conserving water, reducing plastic usage, and adopting safer food practices, using sustainable modes of transportation like walking and riding. They believe in their ability to make a positive change and help others understand the benefits. "I believe in my ability do make positive change."

- **Interpersonal and communication skills:** Students reporting improving their ability to explain and articulate environmental issues more efficiently, aiming to spread awareness and encourage others to be the change. Students reported improvements in their engagement and participation in projects, for example completing work, participating in things, more thorough, taking more care in team activities and being more open. "I can help others learn more about the benefits."

- **Social awareness and responsibility:** Students identified that there was lack of knowledge and understanding among others regarding responsible decision-making and the environment. I They can help others learn the benefits, spreading the word about environmental concerns. One student emphasized the importance of leading by example rather than simply telling others to change. "you can't just tell people to change you have to be the change".

- **Empowerment and belief in making a difference:** Students believe in their ability to contribute to significant change by taking small actions, and that we can all help the planet. "I think I can make a huge difference by doing little things".

APPENDIX C

## STUDENT REFLECTIONS ON PROGRAM DELIVERY AND TEAM PROJECT PROCESSES AND OUTCOMES
Summary of data from entry, exit, workshop 1 and workshop surveys For Hunter & Hawkesbury based schools. Surveys completed May-June 2023.

REFLECTIONS FROM WORKSHOP 1
Students were asked what they thought about workshop 1, they were given a selection of words to choose from. Note words are presented here in order of ranking, they were randomly listed in survey.

Most students reported that the workshop.

- Gave them new ideas (82%)
- Enjoyable (61%)
- Interesting (48%)
- Fun (30%)

WHAT DID YOU THINK ABOUT WORKSHOP 1?
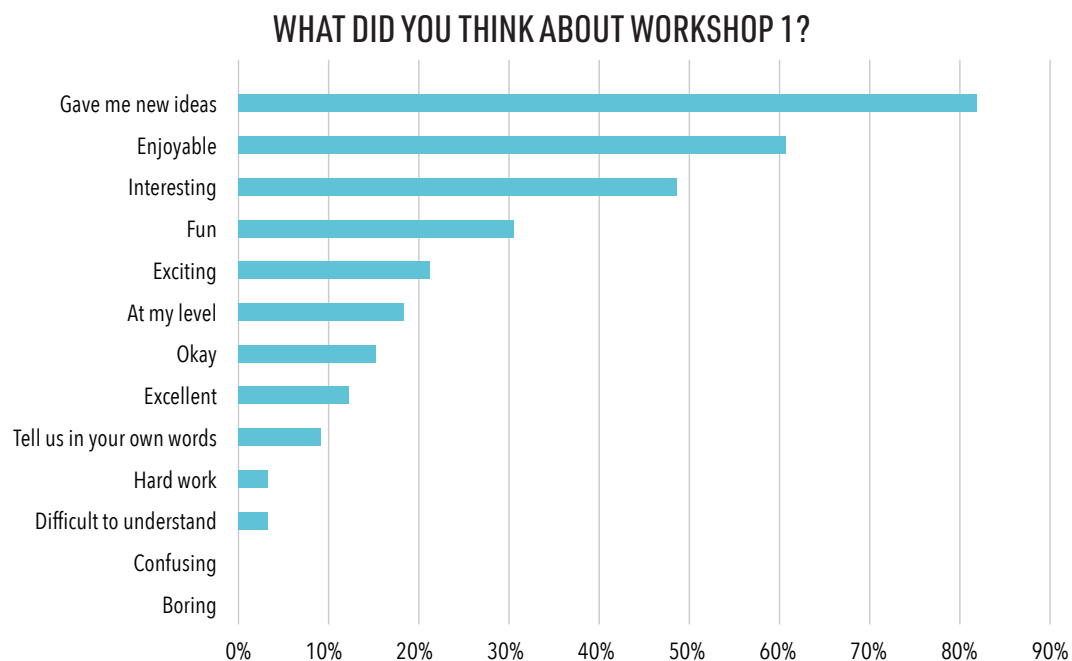
When asked if there was anything else students would like to know more about, responses included:

- SDG projects in general, SDG projects in our area (7)
- Different types of leadership and people in a team (2)
- Connecting with people (2)
- Project planning.
- Why do some things work better than others when coming up with ideas?
- How to effectively achieve goals in the time frame.

Suggestions to improve the workshop included.

- More games and fun
  "I think we could make this workshop better if there were more game-like concepts rather than just sitting down and listening to the whole day. It was fun but could have been better if it more interactive." "There should be more games so we can learn and contribute in a fun way" "Although it was a fun experience, it could have been more interactive and shown more enthusiasm."
- Food, better food, chicken nuggets, spaghetti
- We were there with lots of primary school kids, so it wasn't exactly orientated towards us (high schoolers)

TEAMWORK

How much did you learn today about working in teams and groups?

The majority of students, 61%, reported learning a lot about working in teams and groups, with 27% learning a great deal and 12% a moderate amount.

HOW MUCH DID YOU LEARN TODAY ABOUT WORKING IN TEAMS AND GROUPS?
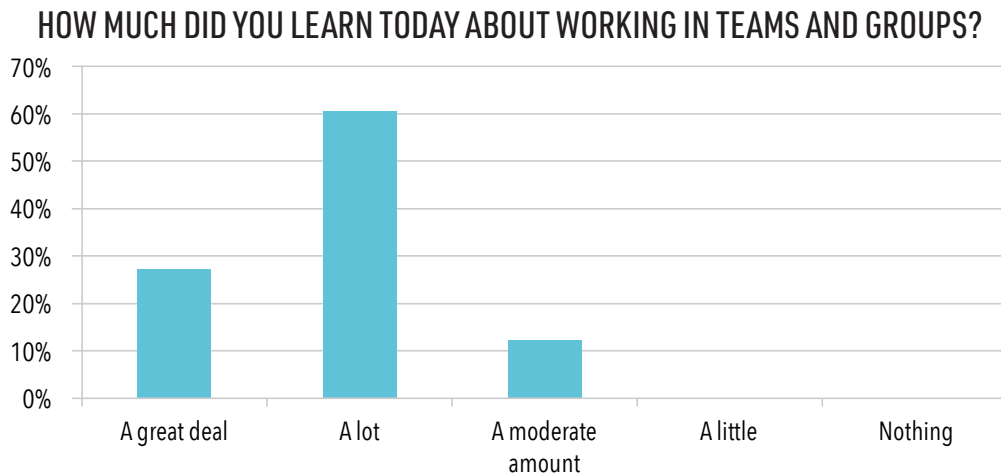
A key learning identified by many students was model of the 4 types of team members/team leaders. Students reflected on how diversity brings different perspectives and ideas to the table, enriching the team's discussions and problem-solving approaches. Recognising and leveraging each team member's unique abilities allows for better task distribution and more efficient project execution.

Students could identify the strength in teamwork. Working together as a team enables them to achieve more than they could individually. Teamwork provides support, enhances creativity, facilitates the pooling of resources and expertise, and can enhance communication.

Generating ideas: A number of students identified that working in teams is an effective way to share and develop different ideas, and to potentially get better quality ideas.

"*I was able to open up ideas, I looked through the lens of my teammates, and by putting our brains together we have come up with an idea that may be difficult but possible to do.*"

DEALING WITH CHALLENGES

Students were asked to identify two learnings that would help them deal with challenges. Common themes in student responses were:

Creative thinking and idea development

- Idea development (3) brainstorming (3) finding different ways or options (5) creative thinking (2) you can just google it (1)

Teamwork and communicating

- Teamwork (4) different types of people and leadership (5) working together, coordination, using each other, communicating (3)

Asking questions and making connections

- Ask questions (3) make connections with other people (3) talk to people and experts (3)

Planning, research and goal setting

- Research (3) evaluating the issue, planning out ideas (3) take your time, take my time, value of post it notes, Smart goals (4) setting goals, structing action that aligns with goals.
  "Today I had learnt that planning is a big part of dealing and facing a problem".

Mindset

- Be a dreamer, keep trying, the mindset to be in when finding motivation.

REFLECTIONS FROM WORKSHOP 2

No responses were received for the workshop 2 evaluation survey. A key Learning from this was the need to offer the survey option directly after the workshop.

REFLECTIONS FROM WORKSHOP 3

Students answered this survey as teams rather than as individuals.

WHAT DID YOU THINK ABOUT THE WORKSHOP?
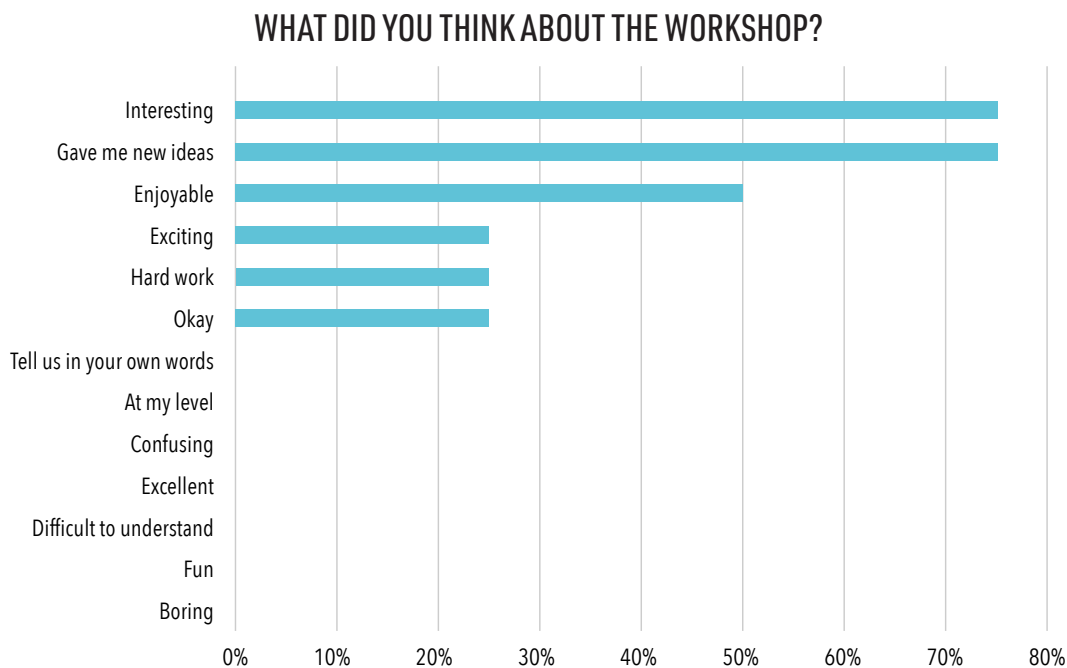
The majority of students reported that the workshop.

- Gave them new ideas (75%)
- Interesting (75%)
- Enjoyable (50%)

Students were asked to reflect on how much they had learnt about managing projects. 75% of students responded they learnt 'a lot' with 25% 'a great deal'.

HOW MUCH DID YOU LEARN TODAY ABOUT MANAGING PROJECTS?
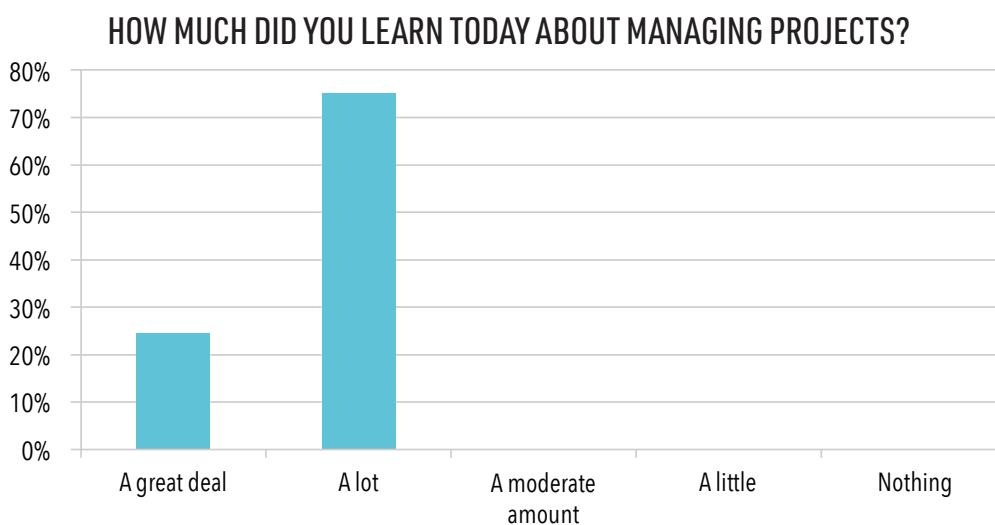
Students identified specific things that could help them deal with challenges, they suggested:

- Identifying issues
- There is always a way to solve them.
- Strategy
- Seven steps of project management
- There are a lot more challenges than you really think.
- How to set time needed to plan and finish a project from start to finish.
- Learning who can help support me and the tasks.
- Seeking advice

REFLECTIONS ON THE PROGRAM OVERALL

At the completion of the program, students were asked to reflect on what they enjoyed most about taking part in the YEC program.

Taking action and making a difference

- Being able to do something about issues that matter to me; Being able to do something I'm passionate about.
- Making a difference to the world and having fun; making a difference in our school getting out of class.
- Working together to make a project that will actually improve something in real life, that will help with the school's sustainability of animals, plants and water.
- To see how we can make a difference and to see how older people take our ideas on (Josh told us that he got a bike starting riding everyday)

Knowledge and skill development

- Designing and creating a prototype for the project.
- Develop my public speaking skills, presenting our idea.
- It gave me the chance to learn something new and it was a new opportunity.
- Learning all about the UNSDGs
- Learning new things, especially on how to formulate a good project and build a strong team

Meeting like-minded people

- I liked how I was able to connect to various people and meet many professionals who have interests that I share with them; Meeting new people, talking to kids from other schools and hearing what they are doing.

Teamwork

- I enjoyed working in a team of like-minded people who had similar ideas to me, so that we could form together and made an impact; the teamwork; the camp and experience
- I liked the first session because we got to make our teams, which consisted of diverse personalities. We also got to meet new people and this session was the starting point of our ideas.

CAN MY PROJECT DRIVE CHANGE?

Students were asked to rate their level of confidence that their project could drive the change they wanted to see.

The majority of students were very confident (62%), with 24% being somewhat confident and 14% being extremely confident.

MY PROJECT CAN DRIVE CHANGE I WANT TO SEE

Confidence Level	Percentage
Extremely confident	14%
Very confident	62%
Somewhat confident	24%
Not very confident	0%
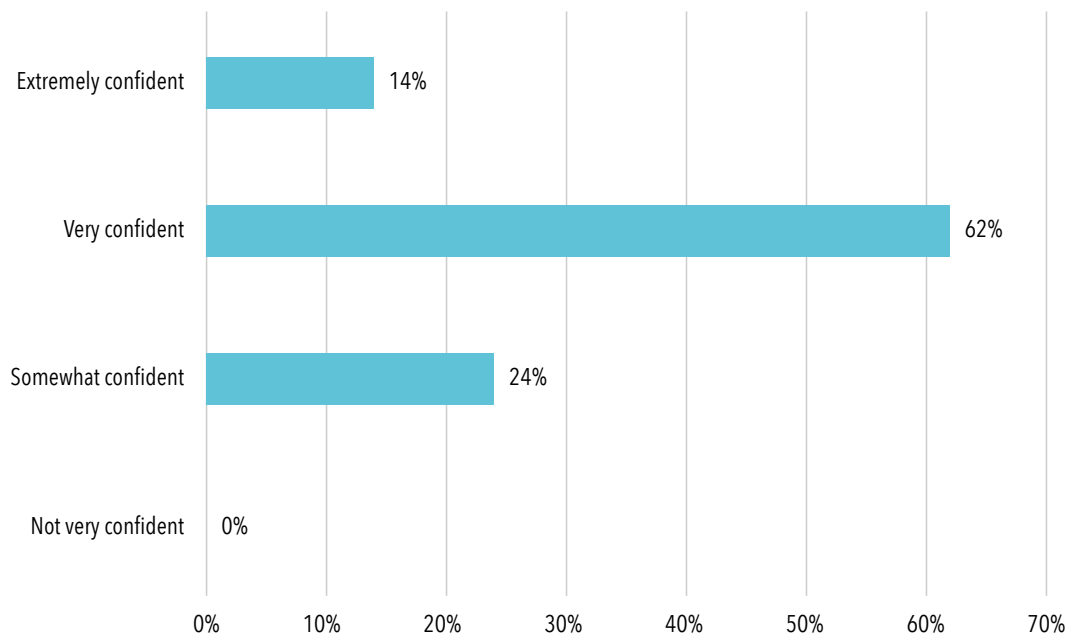
*NB consider this with other change related data (take personal action, take collective action)

REFLECTING ON INDIVIDUAL ENGAGEMENT IN THE PROGRAM AND PROJECTS

Students were asked to reflect on their engagement in the program (selecting your issue, designing your projects, your pitch) and to provide feedback about potential changes they would make. Some key themes emerged from student responses.

- **Time management and planning:** A number of students raised issues relating to the need for better time management and planning, for example allocating time more efficiently, refine ideas to reduce stress, taking quicker action on project goals.

- **Enhanced collaboration and team dynamics:** Some issues raised include improving team management, foster better communication and coordination among team members, establish a stable foundation rather than rush into starting. members.

- **Presentation and public speaking skills:** Some students expressed a desire to improve their pitch skills, to improve their confidence in public speaking, and the importance of practicing and refining the pitch to deliver a more impactful and confident presentation. One student suggested ensuring that all team members can answer questions and address concerns from judges.

- **Research:** Some students suggested they would focus on more accurate research on the project, and/or researching different issues to develop a better understanding.

- **Support and assistance:** One student suggested the idea of regular Zoom sessions hosted by Josh and Lynne to provide support and guidance to schools that may need help or face challenges during their projects.

APPENDIX D

TEACHER FEEDBACK ON THE YEC PROGRAM

Term 1 – 2, 2023.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO TEACHERS LOOKING TO GET INVOLVED IN THE YEC PROGRAM?

Get involved… It hasn't cost us … like the program was free. AND we were fortunate enough to win money off it. I mean, certainly, there was a cost for putting our garden together. But you didn't have to, or you didn't have to do something that was going to cost money. I'm always amazed at the quality programs that are available to us to participate in.

We really enjoyed it.

It definitely is a valuable experience that provides, you know, real, real world context to students and make their learning more authentic

It was definitely worthwhile being involved in there's a great opportunity for our, for our leaders to…be involved

There is so much rich learning for the kids. …the best kind of learning happens when kids do something, and they experience something.

That's what I guess the program, ask the kids to do, like, pick a project that you're that will have a positive impact on your community and do something about it. So, I think that's a Yeah, that's a great model

I think any school that, you know, has the interest of their kids at their core, you know, should jump at it Finding that time, which is not always easy…. It's tricky, but it's definitely worth it.

The program is wonderful. It enables young people to think beyond their syllabus areas and apply content knowledge to real world applications. The agency provided to our young people through projects like this is fabulous.

THE PROGRAM IS ENGAGING AND INTERESTING FOR STUDENTS

[I was surprised just] how engaged the kids were with it from the beginning. It really is such a great program and such a great opportunity for our students The Launch Day was great. The Pitch Day was great.

We targeted students who were identified as gifted, there were so many more students who could have participated.

[Students] had some great ideas. They loved talking with the external stakeholders, and people from the council, finding out, you know, how they could sort of connect with them to solve problems.

The engagement from the students and their desire to work and find answers and, you know, come up with solutions and things is really, really amazing. So, having like a project that the kids work around.

They were all completely engaged from start to finish. They loved the full day workshop, and the Pitch Day was fabulous as they were able to work with other schools.

THE PROGRAM CAN LINK WITH SCHOOL CURRICULUM

It just worked in well with what we were already going to put in place. We were able to tie it in with…curriculum events.

We approached it from the geography course. And we targeted the Yr 8 students, because of what they were learning about at the time, the unit that we were doing was water in the world.

THE PROGRAM OFFERS REAL WORLD LEARNING EXPERIENCES

I think just the connection with the external stakeholders, and the variety of people that were interested and involved in the program, I think was surprisingly good….And the kids commented on that, too. Like, that was not just what from a teacher perspective, …they appreciated, engaging with other people who made it real for them without us telling them that it was real.

I think it's anything like this with that sort of real focus, giving kids exposure to external.

people that actually do live and breathe this stuff is invaluable for them. It's really empowering for the students to, Pome up with an idea and then be acknowledged outside of school. As an assessment this is a real thing that could actually work.

The appeal of this program was that the kids had to do something. And they always learn much more from doing it.

The benefits of a project such as this is the authenticity of learning and the development of real-world skills. It enables young people to engage in real world systems, to understand constraints and structures on real world problems and to engage with experts in the field.

STUDENTS LEARN VALUABLE LIFE SKILLS

Of the four students I took down with me, three of the four of them at the beginning of the program, said to me, I am not getting up to speak (…. And I said to them, well actually you are.)

One of those girls mothers rang me that afternoon to just say that she just she was crying at just how much her daughter has blossomed going through the program. Because it challenged her, she had to address our assembly, she had to run our environment meetings. She had to come to that Pitch and talk in front of all the people. Aside from the sustainability side of it, the opportunities to allow our kids to be involved in programs like that is really valuable.

I saw the program as a leadership program. So, the students that we selected were students that we had identified within the school as leaders. We have what is called the high potential and gifted education policy. I mean, that policy, there's kind of like, different domains of, I guess, excellence. So there's like, obviously, the academic side of things, but there's sporting and leadership is one of the domains of excellence. So it was excellent as we don't get many opportunities to provide that opportunity to do like leadership training.

It is always hard as a teacher, handing over control, try to do it as much as possible, because that's their opportunity to learn. This program allowed them ownership. They are so passionate, they come up with these ideas, of how they want to change things and how they want to influence people. It so inspiring, you really get swept up in their ideas.

I guess, I surprised that how good the kids were at actually generating ideas like solutions, that was a real strong point for them.

Opportunity to build leadership skills in kids. They certainly did that, you know, they certainly learnt important lessons from planning and finding solutions and organizing and communicating with each other

From each stage of the program students are encouraged to extend themselves and develop their skills. This is supported by their belief in their solutions and their passion to make a difference.

THE PROGRAM HAS ENGAGING PRESENTERS AND ORGANISERS

"Josh was so engaging; he was very easy to listen to really easy for the kids to understand his message." He presented [information] in such a way that was really easy for our kids to understand.

The sessions with Josh were amazing. I think there was so much value for the program Lynne is this amazing ideas person

We loved working with every one of the team that lead this project- great role models and so much passion.

RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT TEACHERS AND STUDENTS ENGAGED IN THE PROGRAM

[there was flexibility] …having access to those …Videos and advice resources that we could use at the time that was going be convenient to timetable was beneficial.

I think prerecorded videos were really the only way that we could facilitate that for all of them and play that at the appropriate time when they've got geography.

[we would] dial in and watch those sessions as well.

[webinars] the kids really enjoyed those. Josh…the kids …connected with him really well webinar format… very easy.

I wouldn't want to do the whole thing on a webinar. But yeah, having the launch, and then the two or three webinars along the way. And then the concluding event was great.

The check-ins along the way, were great accountability points …We sort of knew that we've got to have this ready to go… having a couple of touch points along the way. Yeah, it was really helpful.

[I think I] needed, like a summary of exactly what needed to be done and when….[but] I also acknowledged that kind of like part of the program, as well as the kids in the schools need to sort of find their own way. They can't be too prescribed.

Discussing the live zoom pitch event. Parents and classes from x school watched the Zoom event. Parents had been interested in attending the live event but were unable. It was excellent that it was available.

Yes - we valued the ability to connect to presentations online as we couldn't always attend the live version - it also gave us (students and teachers) a chance to review and reflect.

TIMING OF PROGRAM

Comments made while discussing things that could have made it easier for students.

I don't know that we would probably have participated in term one. Next time again. Maybe it was just because we were straight back to school. And I kind of felt like, you know, we'd only just settled into school, and I was pulling these kids out of class to work on these programs.

Definitely the first date was too early…[it was good that] it was pushed back Having the time over 10 weeks to do it is the ideal thing.

10 weeks, I think it's a great launching pad for schools, who want to look at sustainability issues in their schools. Because 10 weeks is a really good time frame to kind of get things in place…. I didn't feel like by the end of it, we had to have completed something.

Josh really pushed the message that it was about planning for him… It could be 10 weeks of planning. [if we had to finish in 7 weeks] we would not have been able to get that done.

Being a high school, it was harder for us to align to those times and the impact that it was having on other subjects and things like that

We then tried to engage in a couple of other zooms that we had the problem with the timetabling, I had to pull them out of like music. And then that impacted on other assessments. So we sort of weren't able to engage with a lot of those programs or those other zooms, although there was other resources that Lynne was providing and recording and things like that.

Because there wasn't really flexibility with when we could start and finish the program meant that we just sort of had to do it now, regardless of sort of what was already in the school calendar. ….[It would be good to be able to get] it into the school calendar, perhaps a little bit earlier

Term 3 is a great time… It's not a reporting term. You've sort of got all your systems and your programs up and going. So yeah, it sort of runs a bit smoother. Yeah.

Timing is tricky at any time in a high school - but we do our best to make it work. You really need 10-12 eeks to give a chance to get a product and follow the full process as all too often schools have interruptions which impact the flow.

IT WOULD BE GOOD TO BE ABLE TO EXTEND THE PROGRAM TO MORE STUDENTS

I suppose that only four of our students could participate in it was probably what we found most difficult about the program.

[My school environment group] they would all love to have been involved in some ways, to just choose four was a little difficult.

I was surprised that there weren't more schools involved.

Instead of having to go and sort of advertise just to a couple of kids and only have a couple of kids involved in it. It would have been nice for us to be able to be able to open it up to all of them.

[Next time we would] look at whether we can make it available across the form and incorporate all students and give them all the opportunity to come up with an idea and then pitch that.

Hard to get that number, right. Like, I guess, like, I mean, the number of kids who participate like four was pretty good. [I would extend it to another two… I wouldn't do more than 10].

WHAT WOULD TEACHERS HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY?

I would do with a little bit more organised.

When discussing the holiday break between Term 1 & Term 2][It was] good in some ways, as it kind of broke it up for them a little bit. But…I suppose the downside to that is it kind of made us feel like we had all of this time. We really found that we didn't have a lot of time, [we were] scrambling at the last minute. But that's on us, that's our organizational issue.

CHALLENGES FOR BEING INVOLVED IN AN EXTERNAL PROGRAM ARE:

- timetabling
- removing children from class learning
- transporting children to events (for future programs, not this one)

I had to keep removing them from class. And that's frowned on a little. It's difficult. I mean, obviously, the whole school, we could all see the importance of what they were doing… [but] the hardest part about the program was having to remove them from class … difficult in that it just meant that I was removing these four students from their learning.

Because they were run between nine and 10. That's our standard literacy block. And our standard rule at school is that our literacy block is not to be interrupted. blocks so it is hard after recess would have been good for us like two o'clock.

When you take on these programs, like, you're always going to take on a bit of pressure… in the end, you've got to deliver something at the end… we didn't get as many things done that we really wanted to get done.

But that was okay

[One teacher interviewed felt she was able to participate as her role was not on class]. "I don't know how class teacher could run that program unless they did it in their lunch break. Or outside of class time with the five or six class students who were involved in the class."

I really think the clinching point is finding the staff members who can run them.

It is very challenging in the current school environment - resourcing the extra elements in the current staffing situation.

Another thing that will make it difficult to do moving forward is our school is very, very, very close to saying that teachers can't transport students in private cars…. So that would then either mean two staff have to go with only three students. Or we have to look at hiring like a minibus and that is just unreasonable… quite a few of teachers have said, we're not allowed to transport students on our own in a car… I think that will become a little bit more prominent in days like these where students need to be transported to events.

SCHOOLS ENGAGED WITH THE PROGRAM DIFFERENTLY

One school used their lunchtime to plan project.

We just assigned the lunchtime, one lunchtime a week…, once they sort of had their goal, right, what are we going to achieve? How are we going to do it, talk to and just started working through those.

For high schools, to link with assessments and planning, it would be useful to have more information available earlier (like a term before)

We weren't able to comply with it in terms of exactly how it was laid out, initially. But we were able to sort of still be involved to the extent that we're our timetable and courses allowed us to do that.

In future if that program is going to be running again that's how we would operate it, is look to design that in earlier that time and basically incorporating into our lessons

We could actually use it as an assessment in that we actually have every student doing it or we put them all in groups, and they all pitch and then we sort of have a little voting competition, and then they get to whoever is voted, then they go to the pitch awards.

[it would be ideal if] those resources to be sort of more readily available earlier. And then we can incorporate those in and know what the end point is. But if the structure is always going to be a pitch at the endpoint, we could certainly work with those terms of working backwards, because we sort of backward map we sort of go where do we need to be at the end of the term, and then we work our way back. So if we sort of don't really have that clear idea of what that criteria is all about from the start, it makes it difficult for us to sort of plan in the steps leading up

We need to have the bare bones set ready to go

[it would link well with the curriculum] for example Yr 9 sustainable biomes, which was where w look at food security and agriculture.

Timing of the program didn't always align with the timing of what we was happening in our school

We used lunchtimes and other free times this year. In previous years we have connected to curriculum

FOR FUNDING BODIES

[projects like these] Keep funding them. …

To have to pass a cost on to a child is just like, you just wouldn't do that, you know. So, anything that's free, that is funded, that allows us to, you know, and we did, you know, they will provide a leadership opportunity for some kids who have been identified as that being an area of strength for them, which is great. So I was able to achieve a real tangible outcome and show our director who is in charge of our regional area, I would say, hey, look, you know, look at all this work, we won this award. So, yeah, those opportunities to continue to do those things that are funded are just awesome, because they do they provide the kids with… there is real tangible curriculum, things that are being achieved. But you know, but that's only one part of it, you know, there's the there's the wellbeing and the welfare side of things as well. And that just that enrichment of the whole kid, or the whole student is so important.