



Flick the 'swich

Event Evaluation

Summary

Flick the 'swich, a livestreamed youth-led engagement series, held on 30th October 2020, formed part of Ipswich City Council's official launch of its *Children, Young People and Families Policy*.

The event was designed and delivered in partnership with the Ipswich Youth Advisory Council comprising Ipswich young people aged 16-24 years. The event's fundamental purpose was to:

- give young people in Ipswich a voice
- engage with young people on issues important to them
- ensure the city's youth perspective is heard.

The event has received interest from neighbouring local governments as a leading practice example of youth engagement. This report provides a snapshot summary of the *Flick the 'swich* event, its key inputs and outputs, as well as overall outcomes.

Planning for *Flick the 'swich* took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, and aimed to be as flexible as possible to changing social restrictions and COVID-safe event arrangements.

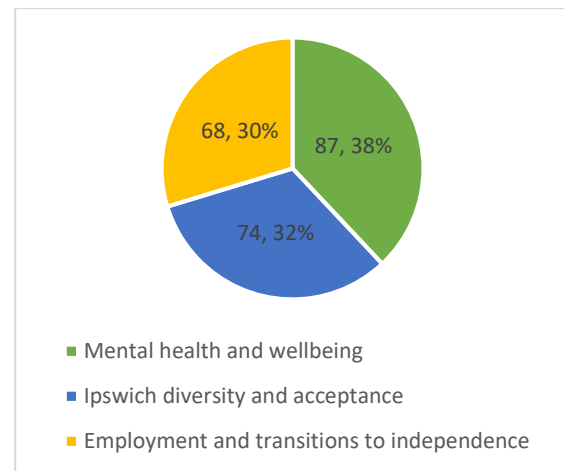
As such, *Flick the 'swich* took the form of a physically-distanced discussion panel hosted at council's North Ipswich Reserve Corporate Centre, and livestreamed using Ipswich City Council's YouTube channel.

Panel topics were set by Ipswich Youth Advisory Council and supported with a wrap up reflections session with IYAC members involving Ipswich City Council's Mayor and a select number of Councillors.

These topics included:

- mental health and wellbeing
- Ipswich diversity and acceptance
- employment and transitions to independence

Approximately 230 questions and comments were submitted by Ipswich young people in advance of *Flick the 'swich*. A breakdown of these submissions by panel topic is below.



Ipswich young people: what they said

Common themes emerging from across all panel conversations for *Flick the 'swich* included accessibility, inclusion and improving social connection, building awareness around what's available for young people, having some form a central hub for information and a range of inclusive spaces for young people in Ipswich, and recognition of the important role education plays in addressing a number of the issues raised in all panel discussions.

Questions on mental health and wellbeing

Two fifths of the questions and comments submitted by young people for *Flick the 'swich* were intended to shape the conversation around youth mental health and wellbeing.

Of these submissions:

- 21% addressed the importance of prioritising youth mental health, whether as individuals, as organisations, or as a community
- 17% talked about access to local services and resources for young people
- 14% talked about needing pro-social spaces for young people to hang out and connect “that they actually like”
- 10% highlighted the link between mental health and having access to physical activity opportunities
- 8% highlighted the impact of COVID-19 has had on young people
- 8% talked about the impact of bullying / cyber bullying on mental health.

The balance of submissions to the mental health and wellbeing panel were either non-specific comments (11%) or related to other issues like affordability, homelessness, ATAR, stress, youth events, and the waste industry.

The conversation

The panel conversation held between young people, industry representatives, service providers and council highlighted the importance of:

- Employment as a positive contributor to youth mental health and wellbeing
- Physical health and fitness and adventure-based learning on positive mental health
- Recognising the signs of poor mental health and strategies to support friends
- Access to reliable information – where to go, what interim resources are available
- Having convenient access to counselling – proximity, cultural safety, affordability, options (phone, internet, face to face)
- Equal access to internet and technology, balanced with access to nearby safe and welcoming places for young people
- The skill of asking for help - the first step is the hardest and empathy is important

- Having someone that young people trust to reach out to for support
- Involving young people in service sector engagement, but also the service sector stepping out more and being more available in community.



Mental health and wellbeing panel

Questions on diversity and acceptance

Just shy of one third of the questions and comments submitted to *Flick the 'swich* by young people were for the panel on Ipswich diversity and acceptance.

Of these submissions:

- 42% talked about how important it is for everyone in Ipswich to be accepted, celebrating and normalising diversity, no judgement
- 12% talked specifically about racism
- 12% talked about the need for inclusive and welcoming spaces for young people
- 5% raised the issue of bullying.

The balance of submissions were either non-specific comments (11%) or related to other specific issues like family connection, creative arts outlets, COVID-19, safety, services.

The conversation

The panel conversation held between young people, industry and service representatives and council highlighted the importance of:

- Recognising, respecting, celebrating the diversity of the Ipswich community



- Feeling part of a team and a community. Feeling included is important to all of us
- Education to address the misconceptions that lead to judgement and exclusion (e.g. deaf awareness / cultural awareness)
- Access to interpreters and resources that support equal participation
- Simple gestures to make spaces visibly inclusive e.g. LGBTQIA+ flags, cultural symbols
- Advocacy and bystander intervention – calling out poor behaviour, taking ownership of policy commitments
- Balancing social media use – online safety strategies, recognise its value in creating connection, empowering young people to escalate issues, avoid victim blaming, encourage bystander intervention online
- Realising young people are the leaders of today (not tomorrow).



Diversity and acceptance panel

Questions on employment and independence

Just under one third of the questions and comments submitted to *Flick the 'switch* by young people addressed the topic of employment and young people's transitions to independence.

Of these submissions:

- 48% directly related to youth employment
- 19% explored key steps in young people's transition to independence, e.g. from

education to employment, access to housing, transport and general guidance

- 16% talked about work experience and mentorship opportunities.

The balance of submissions were either non-specific comments (6%) or related to other issues like the interlinkages between employment with mental health, or considerations youth events and spaces.

The conversation

The panel conversation held between young people, service providers and council highlighted the importance of:

- Young people being heard, taken seriously and supported in their endeavours
- Strong community connection and supports – pathways to independence should not be alone
- Adult supports recognising signs where young people are struggling to navigate independently
- Creating access to reliable information and easy-to-understand guidance
- Local networking to help making access to employment easier for young people
- Improving communication between young people and prospective employers – increasing reach, addressing stereotypes
- Mentorship – empowering young people to reach their goals, trusted contacts to help navigate systems, peer mentoring and youth supporting youth
- A work experience program to meets the outside the school setting
- Incentivising youth employment for local businesses and organisations, but ensuring a genuine commitment from employers
- Encouraging youth entrepreneurship and youth "intrapreneurial" mindsets through the education system and in community
- Advocacy to improve transport connectivity and efficiency across Ipswich
- Feeling safe using public transport.



Reflections & recommendations session

A total of 14 IYAC members aged between 16 and 24 joined with Ipswich City Council Mayor Teresa Harding and Councillors Andrew Fechner and Jacob Madsen to reflect on all conversations held for *Flick the 'swich*.

What were the highlights?

On reflection, the following points were identified as important take-aways:

- Conversations based on the real experiences of young people, inviting community response
- Prioritising inclusion of young people in local activities, events and opportunities, and particularly the inclusion of young people living with disabilities
- Improving access to services and a centralised hub for young people
- Considering the impact of phone and technology addiction on young people and avoiding victim blaming
- Building on suggestions for youth spaces and events:
 - showcasing contemporary and youth art, more street art
 - vintage market pop-ups
 - more music festivals
 - cultural food festivals and opportunities to showcase traditional dance
 - writing workshops
 - camping and FWD events
 - raising awareness of existing program of youth events and spaces, revamping advertising to make these appealing and accessible for young people
 - Improving night life for Ipswich young people, inclusive venues
- Common value among IYAC members placed on the insights shared during the employment and independence conversation including the importance of networking – it's about who you know

- The role of education and capability development in all conversations – in how to encourage positive mental health and wellbeing, foster inclusion, and increase participation in employment and business opportunities
- Valuing the emotional intelligence and generosity of Ipswich young people.

What still needs to be talked about?

- Economic inequality and poverty – some families are just surviving and everybody in the city should be thriving
- Seeing next steps and action come from Flick the 'swich conversations
- Prioritising work experience pathways for young people
- More conversation about **how** to transition to independence
- Unemployment in marginalised communities and in the context of language barriers
- Supporting refugee and migrant young people who are survivors of trauma.

What's possible in making Ipswich a better place for young people?

- Being a city that can work together to create better opportunities for young people and families
- Encouraging innovation across the city
- Youth leadership and peer mentorship - sharing skills and understanding
- Celebrating the diversity and talents of Ipswich young people
- Maximising the potential of Ipswich and improving its broader reputation
- Being fiercely proud of and advocating for the city of Ipswich
- Community starts with the individual – we can all embody local community values and give back.





Measuring event outcomes

Measuring the outcome of the *Flick the 'swich* offers additional benefits and insights for council, beyond measuring the event's investment input and engagement output. Outcome measurement helps evaluate the event's effectiveness and identify opportunities for improvement.

The evaluation process for *Flick the 'swich* is ongoing with individual event participants and watch parties, however the project team has completed an initial evaluation for this council report based on feedback received to date.

For young people, by young people: linking outcomes to objectives

- ✓ Collaborative launch event
- ✓ Demonstrated commitment
- ✓ Giving Ipswich young people a voice
- ✓ Ensuring their perspective is heard
- ✓ Shaping future work

One objective for *Flick the 'swich* was to effectively collaborate and partner with Ipswich Youth Advisory Council to design and deliver this youth engagement series as a pilot, from which to build.

This partnership was forged early in 2020 with a small number of IYAC nominations to the core project team which met weekly, and growing momentum and involvement of IYAC members in the delivery of the event.

The event's broader objective was to demonstrate a shared commitment from Ipswich City Council and the Ipswich community to engaging with Ipswich young people matters important to them.

The event achieved this by:

- IYAC members setting the panel topics and shaping the event format
- Inviting young people to submit their questions to the panel in advance, and

using these questions to shape the panel conversation

- Ensuring youth representation in each panel discussion
- Collaborating with IYAC to shortlist panellists with consideration of youth questions
- Wrapping up the event with a youth-led reflections and recommendations session.

This approach and the panel conversations that took place demonstrate good alignment to Ipswich City Council's new policy principles of participation, best interests, health and wellbeing, inclusion, rights and responsiveness.

Flick the 'swich conversations have also taken place during an important time for Ipswich City Council as it shapes its five-year Corporate Plan, strategic priorities and subsequent annual plans.

With research highlighting the significant impact the COVID-19 has had on young people in particular, this event also provided an opportunity and platform for young people to share their experiences during COVID-19.

Evaluating event elements

Event inputs

An overall budget of \$10,000 was allocated to launch council's new policy for Children Young People and Families. This launch included the Ipswich Children's Voices event on Monday 26th October, and the Flick the 'swich youth engagement series on Friday 30th October.

The council budget for Flick the 'swich covered venue hire, audio visual equipment hire, technical staff and catering.

An independent facilitator was also hired in consultation with IYAC members who wanted to see a continuity in the facilitator from the policy's development to its launch. Ipswich City Council also designed a specific marketing





campaign with input from Ipswich Youth Advisory Council.

Some increased cost was incurred for *Flick the 'swich* in response to COVID-safe event measures for a larger number of participants, requiring individual microphone hire, and variations to room set up for the panel and reflections session.

Event outputs

The *Flick the 'swich* event involved:

- 230 questions and comments submitted by Ipswich young people in advance for Flick the 'swich
- 3 x physically-distanced discussion panels comprising eight panellists involving at least two young people, and representatives from community, council, industry and services
- 1 x reflections session involving 14 IYAC members and four council representatives
- An online audience of six “watch parties” collectively engaging 100+ young people in smaller gatherings across the city.
- Growing livestream views, at the time of reporting:
 - 158 individual views of the mental health and wellbeing conversation
 - 133 individual views of the diversity and acceptance conversation
 - 71 individual views of the employment and independence conversation
 - 114 individual views of IYAC's reflection session with Mayor Harding, Cr Fechner and Cr Madsen.

Event program

Ipswich City Council and IYAC have evaluated the effectiveness of the event program while noting certain limitations on how a youth engagement event could be planned and delivered during COVID-19 restrictions.

This evaluation process with IYAC members has confirmed the event program was generally fit for purpose in this context.

Keeping panel discussions to 45 minutes was agreed as an effective means of maintaining online audience engagement, however this programming left limited time for the physical and technical interchange of panel sessions.

A future programming consideration may be to host a series of online conversations with larger breaks or across many days.

One suggestion received from a participating schools was to link youth participation in *Flick the 'swich* with school leadership programs.

Event format

Ipswich City Council's Studio 188 entertainment venue was originally booked to host *Flick the 'swich* on the basis of having no physical audience, and valuing the venue's synergy with contemporary entertainment events and regular IYAC meetings.

Toward the end of September 2020, the project team made the decision to change venues to North Ipswich Reserve Corporate Centre. This change addressed some of the logistic challenges of rotating panellists under a COVID-19 safe event plan, offered more flexibility for youth panellist families to attend in support, and enabled the event Reflections session to be set up separately to panels to allow a smoother recording transition.

There were some technical and physical audibility issues arising from the venue air conditioning noise. These challenges were overcome by most participants and by switching microphone types before the event went live.

YouTube was selected as the most accessible platform for livestreaming the event, supported by a catered watch party to increase youth engagement.





A future consideration for livestreaming is to explore closed captioning options to improve event accessibility, and to increase interaction with viewers using via YouTube comments.

Another future consideration for livestreamed events is to have a larger A/V screen available to present the livestream outside the recording area (e.g. event foyer). This would reduce visitor traffic in the live recording area.

Livestream watch parties

From an initial 13 watch party registrations, six watch parties made up the final confirmed list. These watch parties were supported with pizza catering provided IYAC.

The watch party model was successful in increasing engagement with young people as smaller gatherings across Ipswich. The final list of watch parties included:

- YMCA Springfield Lakes
- Redbank Plains Community Centre
- Ipswich State High School
- Bremer State High School
- Redbank Plains State High School
- Headspace Ipswich

These watch parties facilitated additional conversation with a collective 100+ young people as they watched the livestreamed discussions. Their feedback was captured with materials from their 'watch party toolkit' and has been positive and constructive to date.

Some future considerations for the watch party model include:

- engaging early with schools and organisations about how panel topics and watch parties could better link with curriculum or service programming
- increased resourcing to coordinate watch party registrations and final arrangements
- increasing online interaction between panel discussions and watch parties through the livestream chat section

- embedding a council representative at each watch party to capture conversations and support activities between panel discussions

Watch party feedback was still being collated at the time of preparing this report to council, but will be used to guide next steps for policy implementation and future iterations of *Flick the 'swich*.

Internal project management

This event involved intensive up-front planning to deliver all physical and virtual components successfully.

Project team feedback on internal project management emphasised the value of the structured approach, regular circulation of the event plan, and weekly interactions.

Remaining flexible to changes in project team resourcing and commitments has underpinned the success of the event.

Digital engagement

Ipswich City Council's digital engagement platform, Shape Your Ipswich was an effective and valued portal for event information.

However increasing youth participation in the panellist nomination process and question submissions did also require face-to-face briefing sessions and hardcopy submission options to be available.

While the login requirements for Shape Your Ipswich are essential for council's management of online participation, this was identified as a potential barrier to participation for some young people.

Visitor statistics since event page creation:

- 3,130 page views made by a total of 1,568 individual visitors
- 324 page views during September, resulting in question submissions and panellist nominations



- During October, visitor traffic increased by 2,650 views with a peak on 30th October (442 views), likely to be associated with viewers accessing livestream links.



Flick the 'swich group photo

Media and marketing

All media and marketing promotions for *Flick the 'swich* were developed in consultation with Ipswich Youth Advisory Council.

This included a social media campaign from September, together with hardcopy promotional material and a number of profile articles on Ipswich First and the Wire.

Marketing content largely reflected local talent, plus some stock imagery. Feedback from Ipswich Youth Advisory Council was for council to continue exploring ways to increase the diversity of youth represented in content.

Audience and participant feedback

Audience and participant feedback was still being collated at the time of this report. Some feedback is captured below.

"Thanks for having me on the panel, I definitely enjoyed being part of the event and I learnt a lot"

"The panel was amazing and really supportive. I didn't expect to feel so comfortable around strangers but everyone made me feel welcome despite our nerves"

"I totally understand how hard it is for young people to get help and with the amount of schools that were watching I hope

even one student who saw the livestream was able to reach out."

"it is a great idea to keep the conversation going and as you emphasised making sure the conversation remains on a level playing field, not us "adults" talking down to the young people"

Some feedback from watch parties:

"We had a really good discussion in our group around how the young people in the room felt about engaging in support and following their interests."

"Thank you so much for having involving us in this amazing initiative. Big shout out to IYAC and ICC for such a successful event and ensuring the voices of young people are heard. I strongly believe that this will have a huge benefit on the Ipswich community."

What's next?

Flick the 'swich represents the start of an ongoing conversation with young people on the issues that are important to them. Ipswich City Council will continue addressing the many questions received for *Flick the 'swich* via the Shape Your Ipswich platform.

An infographic summary of the event will also be made available on Shape Your Ipswich, stored together with post-event recordings, transcripts and related media links.

This event evaluation report will be submitted to Ipswich City Council for noting. Further feedback is expected in the coming weeks to help inform council's next steps.

Findings from *Flick the 'swich* will influence council's implementation of its *Children, Young People and Families Policy*. They will also help to inform council's new Community Development Strategy.

This work will be reported separately following completion of Council's 5-year Corporate Plan in 2021.