

# Youth Conference - 2025

...an evolving narrative

## Objectives

**First**, to learn how to create welcoming spaces where youth from across the region can come together to consult, share their aspirations, discuss the challenges of developing strong moral character, and explore meaningful ways to serve their communities.

**Second**, to explore how to engage and collaborate with organisations to support and help implement these youth-centered spaces.



## Context

The growing understanding and unfolding of the youth movement found renewed focus through the quote '*...All must surge, but the youth must soar.*'

## Engagement of community-based organizations

The ongoing collaboration of the group of families in Gracemere with Councillor Edward Oram facilitated the introduction of the group to the Gracemere Progress Association, an association that was established six months prior. They were quite eager to receive new membership. The opportunity resulted in many engaging conversations and collaboration. The Gracemere Progress Association offered to take the ownership and the public liability coverage for the Ted Price Community Garden. On becoming members, it was noticed that the youth portfolio needed help. Two individuals from the group of families volunteered to



help with the youth portfolio. They introduced the Junior Youth Program and the role of youth in community building. The Gracemere Progress Association provided much support and trust in the group of families in managing the youth portfolio. During this time, there was an opening for a grant to apply for an incorporated body to host a youth activity during Queensland Youth Week from 9 to 17 April 2025. The community prepared a proposal and in conjunction with one member of the Gracemere Progress Association wrote the application. The application was submitted and this was the start of the journey for the CQ Youth Conference-2025.

### **Engagement with Local Spiritual Assembly of Rockhampton Region**

The opportunity to host a conference in collaboration with the Gracemere Progress Association opened a door for the introduction of the Local Spiritual Assembly to the Association. Two representatives of the Local Spiritual Assembly attended this meeting, and what unfolded was a truly heartfelt and engaging conversation. The Gracemere Progress Association expressed genuine interest in learning more about the Bahá'í community—its aims, its contributions to community life, and the nature of the activities it fosters. The representatives shared a thoughtful presentation, offering insight into its experience on community building and discussed the upcoming. As part of the meeting, the booklet *For the Betterment of the World* was presented and graciously received by the Association. Their appreciation for the spirit of the meeting, the perspectives shared, and the potential for partnership was sincerely felt. There was a shared sense of joy and purpose.



The Youth Conference Task Force approached three Assemblies in the Cluster to request financial assistance.

### **Formation of Youth Conference Task Force**

At the outset, it was understood that there was a five-week turnaround from the decision to delivery. Of critical importance was the formation of the Youth Conference Task Force. It was agreed to meet every Tuesday up to the Conference. This was the start of efficient and strong communications resulting in follow-ups on decisions. So a team of about eight youth came together with the accompaniment by adults. The GPA Youth Portfolio holder, Taz Anderson was added to this team. A conference coordinating team was appointed to oversee all the moving parts of the Conference preparation. The coordinating team worked closely, and every Tuesday the Task Force came together to share updates and this continued for the five weeks until the day of the Conference. The Task Force got into action and was sending reminders in between meetings. In some situations there was a need for allocating new tasks or changing roles to ensure that the delivery happened on a continual basis. In between these task force discussions, there were other spaces. One that stands out was the orientation for the Facilitators. Just like the 2013 youth conferences, facilitators were identified, and they were provided with two training sessions, one online and a week later, face-to-face, just three days out of the conference. The task force felt empowered because although they were very young,

there was much support and trust from the adults. The sub-teams met separately to address their particular tasks including the Arts Team, Facilitators and Spiritual Parenting.

### **Information dissemination about the Conference**

The Gracemere Progress Association shared about the Youth Conference on a continual basis on their Facebook. As the Conference drew closer a few youth shared it on the various social media chats. Some individuals approached their organizations whilst an individual shared information about the Youth Conference was sent out to 28 private and public schools.

### **News and social media**

In the lead-up to the conference, the group seized the opportunity to engage with various media



outlets, including television and radio. ABC Capricornia responded enthusiastically, and two youths were selected to take part in a live on-air interview. They were accompanied by their parents and a few older youth for support. Despite their age, the youth left a powerful impression through their poise, thoughtful word choices, and articulate responses. Their presence not only sparked public interest in the conference but also demonstrated the capacity of young people to represent themselves with confidence and clarity. The experience was empowering—it

helped the youth feel in charge while also visibly receiving encouragement and support from the adults around them.

#### **1. VIPs**

- a. Mr. Collin Boyce, Federal Member for Flynn
- b. Mrs. Donna Kirkland, State Member for Rockhampton
- c. Edward Oram, Counsellor Division 4, Rockhampton Regional Council
- d. Mrs. Helen Medell, Candidate for Federal Elections for Flynn

#### **2. Participating Organisations**

The following organizations were contacted to solicit involvement with the Conference either in the programme, arts or support.

1. Booyah - Jo Ramsy Facilitator, Arts exhibitors
2. Rockhampton Grammar School - Cindy Murray
3. Carinity - Bridgett and Daniel
4. Wellways - Rebekah TRIST Peer Support
5. Murrup (Woorabinda) - Khanita Sukaserm
6. Narcotics Anonymous - Joy Maree
7. Mental Health - Rebeca
8. Priscilla - Disengaged Youth
9. Claire (Red Cross) - [cmcater@redcross.org.au](mailto:cmcater@redcross.org.au)

10. Sophie George - The Capricorn Conservation Council Inc.
11. Rockhampton South Rotary
12. One Another Church - Julian (contacted but he was very busy and wished us well)
13. Livingstone Shire Youth Worker-Lauren Beecroft
14. Gladstone Regional Youth Council
15. Graffiti guy

## Conference delivery



The flyers and other efforts to inform the public about the youth conferences generated significant interest among organizations and parents. We soon realized that drawing a sharp distinction between junior youth and youth would be challenging if the event was open to the public. As a result, we decided to set the age range for participants from 12 to 25. This allowed us to form two distinct groups: 12–15 (junior youth) and 16–25 (youth).

We also anticipated that parents would accompany their children and couldn't simply be asked to wait around. Therefore, we tailored the conference to include three focus groups: junior youth, youth, and adults. This approach shaped the overall structure and tone of the event, and facilitators were trained accordingly to engage each group meaningfully.



The atmosphere at the conference was electric. The layout was designed so that junior youth and youth sat at designated tables in the center of the hall, while adults were seated in two rows at the back. This arrangement subtly conveyed the message that adults were there as observers, allowing the youth space to lead and participate freely.

Surrounding the central seating was a “gallery walk” — one of the key artistic elements of the conference. This provided a platform for young people to express themselves through various art forms, fostering opportunities for conversation among youth, adults, and participating organizations.

Some groups, such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, expressed interest in attending, initially with the intention of distributing informational flyers. However, we made a conscious decision to avoid turning the event into an expo filled with leaflets. Instead, our focus

was on building genuine connections with each individual attendee. This approach also helped organizations better understand our model of engaging with young people. Through this process, we began working more closely with individual youth, nurturing relationships that extended beyond the conference itself.

### **The Role of the Arts in the Youth Conference**

The arts were a key element of the youth conference, serving as a powerful tool to help young people express their thoughts and ideas. This component was divided into two parts: a gallery walk, inspired by the format of an arts conference, and a concert.

While we had hoped for greater participation from young artists, we ultimately featured a smaller group. One youth shared his passion for chess, while another used fashion and repurposed clothing to critique throwaway culture. A third participant showcased Indigenous art through their own paintings, offering a meaningful cultural perspective.



The concert was lively and engaging, featuring a short drama, a musical performance by two sisters, and a band. The audience responded enthusiastically, reaffirming the strong connection between the arts and youth expression.

From our previous experiences, we've observed how naturally youth are drawn to the arts. It allows them to communicate their insights, share personal reflections, and sometimes even find a safe space to express themselves—particularly for those who may find direct, one-on-one conversations challenging.

The gallery walk, in particular, proved to be an effective platform for sparking conversations—both among the youth and between youth and adults. As we continue to learn and grow in hosting these conferences, we will become better equipped to explore the many forms of artistic expression that resonate with young people and encourage deeper engagement.

## Managing VIPs

We also anticipated the attendance of VIPs, including the State and Federal Members of Parliament, as well as other key figures who came not only to capture the attention of the youth but also to genuinely listen to them. This raised an important question: how could we manage their involvement without the event drifting into political territory?

To address this, we reached out to the secretaries of all three VIPs, clearly explaining the purpose and objectives of the youth conference while warmly encouraging their attendance. We allocated time for one of the VIPs to speak, guiding them to focus on key themes relevant to the critical stage of life the youth are in.

The program was carefully structured so that a keynote speaker would deliver a plenary session just before the VIP's address. This approach was intentional — it helped frame the context and align the tone of the VIP's remarks with the spirit and goals of the conference.

The outcome was excellent. The VIP's message stayed focused on the youth, and their words empowered everyone in the room, setting a strong and unified tone for the rest of the conference.

## Reflections

### *Facilitator's reflections*

To ensure we did not lose momentum or forget key points about the conference, it was agreed to meet the next day. The Facilitators met earlier in the day followed by the Task Force. Following is a capture of the discussions.



## Handouts

1. More time and space could have been given to draw out the richness of the material. Instead of rushing through, focusing on fewer ideas but exploring them more deeply would lead to stronger insights and transformation.
2. Crafting thoughtful, refining questions can unlock deeper reflection hence guide participants beyond surface responses and invite personal connection and meaning-making.



3. The Junior Youth materials used short, simple quotes. This allowed participants to reflect more deeply, relate them to personal experience, and draw out spiritual and moral concepts in a meaningful way.
4. The paper handouts helped engage even quiet participants. Writing, underlining, and highlighting created personal investment and allowed people to process ideas at their own pace.

### **Facilitator Preparation and Delivery**

1. When facilitators are involved in creating or adapting the content, they carry a deeper connection to the purpose and are better equipped to convey it clearly and authentically. Clear, unified objectives help facilitators focus sessions and guide participants meaningfully.
2. Time to plan as a team ensures smoother flow, stronger collaboration, and more intentional delivery.
3. Groups who already knew each other came into the conference with trust and ease, allowing them to engage more openly. Building connections beforehand enhances the overall depth of participation and community spirit.

### **Conference session duration**

1. The 90-minute timeframe for engagement with the material didn't allow participants to fully relax or build genuine comfort with one another. Meaningful conversation and trust take time to develop, especially in diverse groups or individuals that one has not met prior.
2. With such a short session, interactions often stayed on the surface. Deeper sharing, vulnerability, and personal insights require both time and a sense of emotional safety, which couldn't fully form in a brief setting.
3. Participants had little time to sit with and reflect on key concepts. Ideas were introduced but not deeply unpacked, which limited their impact and potential for personal application.
4. Creating opportunities for continued engagement—either through longer sessions, follow-up gatherings, or preparatory meet-ups—could foster deeper learning and stronger bonds among participants.



### **Encouraging Participation and Engagement**

1. Many participants were ready and eager to contribute. The atmosphere of the gathering created a space where people felt moved to share personal insights and experiences.
2. It was important to find ways to invite participation from the very beginning. Simple icebreakers, reflective prompts, or gentle invitations to speak helped set the tone for open sharing.
3. Not everyone will share aloud, but that doesn't mean they're disengaged. People may be listening deeply, reflecting internally, or participating through writing, note-taking, or small group discussions.
4. Talking in pairs or trios before opening up to the larger group helped break the ice. These small group moments built confidence and made it easier for participants to contribute later on.
5. For many attendees, this was their first time engaging in this kind of elevated, purposeful dialogue. Recognizing this helped us approach facilitation with patience, encouragement, and care.

### **Next steps**

1. Sending a follow-up email or short report will help participants reflect, revisit key ideas, and share insights with others. It also shows that their participation continues to matter.
2. The Task Force have been assisted in breaking down the participant list by suburb or area to help attendees connect locally. This will enable small gatherings or neighborhood initiatives to take root where people live.
3. Facilitators could play a key role in keeping the energy going by reaching out personally—offering encouragement, inviting reflection, and exploring ways to build on the conversations started at the conference.

### **Youth Conference Task Force Reflections:**

1. Adopt a learning-focused, systematic mindset. The CARS (Consultation, Action, Reflection, Study) framework was adopted for effective reflection.
2. A 5-week turnaround created urgency, but also fostered a sense of unity and a shared vision. Weekly Zoom meetings helped maintain momentum.
3. Partnering with GPA pushed the setup to think big. A year-long planning process might be better for making more thoughtful decisions.
4. It is being considered to hold the conference during the school term for better school attendance.
5. Through this Conference, the participants are being invited to the Youth and Family Institute Camp.

### **Communication:**

1. The GPA helped move things forward by regularly requesting updates. Another member reached out to schools in Rockhampton, Yeppoon, and Gladstone, but Livingstone had scheduling conflicts.
2. The Child Youth Mental Health was approached and they sent two representatives. School assemblies and extra-curricular activities are opportunities for outreach for next year.
3. There is a need to use platforms like WhatsApp wisely to ensure messages don't get lost. Designate teams for information sharing could be identified for smooth communication.

### **Impact & Personal Stories:**

Positive changes were seen in youth, particularly in their ability to articulate thoughts and express themselves.

Many youth demonstrated their ability to engage and participate even in awkward situations. One youth who had accompanied her mother, did not want to be present and expressed her lack of interest to join. Tactfully, an adult helped her calm down and take her to the Junior Youth table. Later, we were informed that when her mother went to collect her she asked if they had to leave implying that she was having a good time.

Another First Nations participant was very tentative in attending the conference. During and a few days later, when enquired about her feelings of the Conference, she expressed her complete satisfaction and was keen to invite two more of her friends for the Youth and Family Institute Camp.

Several participants expressed interest in continuing their involvement. They contacted key individuals and have requested a representation from the youth to attend their Youth Council.

The process helped individuals grow and engage with the wider community.

### **Post-Conference:**

1. Consider hosting separate conferences for different age groups, or even one for all three age groups, ensuring that youth have their own dedicated space.
2. Youth Movement Coordination team

The enormity of the follow up task has created discussion about a Youth Coordinating Team to manage the following aspects:-

- 1) Engagement with Local Spiritual Assemblies
- 2) Engagement with organizations/Councils
- 3) Individual wellbeing of youth
- 4) Spiritual strengthening of the youth and their understanding on the Covenant
- 5) A 6-monthly space in between the Youth Conferences
- 6) Youth Conference 2026 preparation

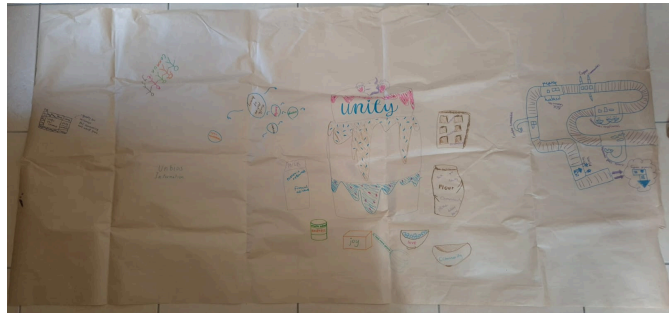
## Reflections of Youth Group 1

- 1) Fostering friendships #BFF
- 2) Helping community #Helping neighbour
- 3) Reduce, recycle, reuse #RRR
- 4) Solar and wind power
- 5) Free financial advice - understanding tax benefits, and easier cost of living
- 6) Community garden #free veges
- 7) Social work and its importance to society #teacher, doctor, tradies
- 8) Reducing litter
- 9) Conserve water for the environment
- 10) Community spaces

## Reflections of Youth Group 2

### A RECIPE FOR UNITY

- 1) Using unbiased information and open mindedness the cake of unity is created, embellished, made tastier and more nutritious with the ingredients of happiness, joy, love, community, economic resources, financial assistance and kindness; folded together with moral purpose; sprinkled generously in a humble posture of learning with knowledge, courage and compassion to reveal Baha'u'llah's vision for a new world of unity.



- 2) A GAME OF CHANGE

Using humility, courage and community we can change the community.

- 3) ON THE PATHWAY TO A UNIFIED WORLD

This pathway is first developed by creating small communities looking to become a stronger community, expanding this community, polishing it and connecting and combining communities to bring about world unity.

## Reflections of Youth Group 3

### Meaning

The art project was split into two sides representing what can be referred to as the Two-Fold Moral Purpose. By contributing to society you are also growing spiritually and intellectually, and vice versa, in the effort to grow spiritually by practicing morals and virtues, you contribute to society.

### Contributing to the Transformation of Society

- Courage
- Uplifting and meaningful conversations, connecting with people
- Finding opportunities
- Use your strengths to make a difference
- Starting a community garden
- Serving people
- Being open-minded
- Donating to charity
- Use your strengths to make a difference
- Visiting people in hospitals
- Donating to charity
- Signing petitions
- Volunteering
- Be a teacher (in all regards), pass on knowledge
- Identifying problems in the community
- Diving in the deep end
- Animating a junior youth group
- Starting a children's class
- Instil & inspire, kindness & empathy in others

### Pursuing Our Own Spiritual & Intellectual Growth

- Studying at university
- Praying
- Understanding yourself
- Engaging in arts
- Developing communication skills
- Engaging with the community
- Knowing your values & priorities
- Throwing yourself in the deep end
- Every small action is a vote for the person you want to be.
- Journalling
- Thinking about your purpose
- It starts with YOU

- Learning more about current world events
- Listening & reflecting
- Touching grass (going outside)
- Peaceful, meditating
- Learning a skill
- Working together
- Any contribution no matter how small helps
- Reading spiritual writings
- Stepping outside your comfort zone
- Constantly work towards something in life (don't stay stagnant in life)
- Getting outside your comfort zone and learning about new opportunities
- Practicing the virtues