

9.4.2 BATHURST VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE - 2024 TOYO HIGH SCHOOL VISIT

File No: 23.00025

RECOMMENDATION:

That the information be noted.

REPORT:

Students from Toyo High School in Tokyo, Japan, visited Bathurst from 1-4 March 2024 on a cultural exchange visit as a part of their ongoing sister school relationship with Denison College.

This was the 22nd visit to Bathurst of Toyo High School, with 85 students visiting and requiring billeting amongst host families in 2024. 40 Families took part in home hosting of students for this visit. This was the first visit of Toyo High School since 2019, with the COVID-19 pandemic disrupting what had been an annual event previously.

Whilst in Bathurst the students enjoyed a weekend of free time with their host families, many of whom took the opportunity to show off local attractions and activities to the students. The weekend concluded with a celebration and concert on the evening of Sunday 3 March at Bathurst High attended by an audience of over 150 made up of host families and of the local community. Students, teachers, host families and delegates from both Bathurst Regional Council and Toyo High School attended and participated in the event, which included an address from Mayor Jess Jennings and an exchange of gifts.

Feedback from students, teaching staff of Toyo High and Denison College and from host families was overwhelmingly positive and emphasised the importance of this ongoing cultural exchange program.

On Monday morning students, host families, teachers gathered for the official group photo at the Bathurst Visitor Information Centre and were farewelled by the Mayor. Toyo students completed a half day of activities organised with the Bathurst High and Kelso High campuses of Denison College and with Charles Sturt University.

Activities and home hosting arrangements were coordinated by staff of the Bathurst Visitor Information Centre (BVIC). It is the role of BVIC staff to liaise with the Japanese Tour Agency and to source and confirm all host families, including provision of specialised information relating to each student and arrangement of all payments. BVIC also organises and books all student activities and travel arrangements during their Bathurst stay and prepares the welcome packs and information for host families as well as for visiting teachers and tour leaders.

The visit injected over \$45,000 directly into the local economy, including payments made to participating host families.

BVIC staff are preparing for the upcoming 'Wings of Hope' visit from our Sister City of

Ohkuma, Japan, which will take place from 23-29 March 2024 with approximately 15 students and 6 adults including teachers, and city officials expected to visit Bathurst. This will be the first official delegation from Ohkuma to visit Bathurst since 2018.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

There are no financial implications resulting from this report.

BATHURST COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN – OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES:

Objective 1: Our sense of place and identity.

Strategy 1.3 Enhance the cultural vitality of the region.

Objective 2: A smart and vibrant economy.

Strategy 2.1 Support local business and industry.

Strategy 2.6 Promote our City and Villages as a tourist destination.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

01 **Inform** - to provide the public with balanced and objective information to help them understand the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.

ATTACHMENTS:

Nil