

BundabergToday Newspaper article

Lions Youth of the Year off to a roaring start

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Nicole Gillard with Bundaberg State High School students Aden Hall, Erin Simpson, Jasmine Kaur, Ava Kaluzyn with judges Stacey Tindel and Phil Michael.



Bundaberg State High School students Jasmine Kaur representing Bargara Lions Club and Ava Kaluzyn representing Bundaberg Lions Club.

With March being Lions Awareness Month, it is only fitting the local Lions Youth of the Year competition has begun.

The first round was held by the Bundaberg Lions Club and Bargara Lions Club with representatives from Bundaberg State High School.

Bundaberg Lions Club secretary Alan Williams said the Lions Youth of the Year was a national program that started in Queensland in 1964 and was soon adopted by Lions Australia.

“The Lions Youth of the Year Program is designed to foster, encourage and develop leadership and citizenship qualities in our youth at an age when they are about to enter the fields of higher education or employment,” he said.

“The entrants are judged on personality, sportsmanship, public speaking, and good citizenship.

“The importance of public speaking is recognised with a candidate being judged the best speaker of the day.

“The Lions Clubs recruit judges from the community and the contestants from local high schools as the schools recognise the value of the program and are very supportive.”

Bundaberg and Bargara Lions Clubs were pleased to work together running Club level Youth Of The Year at Bundaberg State High School, remembering Bundaberg State High School student Cadence Taylor who made her region proud in 2024 as the national winner of the Lions Youth of the Year competition as well as taking out the public speaking trophy.

The volunteer judges this year were Stacey Tindel, Nicole Gillard and Phil Micheal, while the contestants were Aden Hall, Jasmine Kaur, Ava Kaluzyn and Erin Simpson.

Ava Kaluzyn representing Bundaberg Lions Club and Jasmine Kaur representing Bargara Lions Club were selected to go on to the regional level, while Erin Simpson was selected as the best public speaker for the day.

The judges had a difficult job as the standard set by these students is very high.

Bundaberg State High School student Jasmine Kaur said being a part of the Youth of the Year (YOTY) competition was an incredible honour and a challenging yet rewarding experience.

“It is an opportunity to push myself beyond my comfort zone, develop essential life skills, and represent both my school and community with pride,” Jasmine said.

“This competition has allowed me to grow as a leader, communicator, and critical thinker, all of which are crucial for my future aspirations in medicine.

“I enjoyed the most about the YOTY was the challenge itself—from preparing speeches to answering impromptu questions under pressure.

“The competition demands a high level of confidence, quick thinking, and eloquence, and I have found it exciting to test my abilities in these areas.

“It is truly wonderful to continue Bundaberg State High School’s strong tradition of participation and success in this competition.

“Knowing that I am following in the footsteps of past students who have represented our school so well motivates me to give my best performance and make my school community proud.

“Representing the Bargara Lions Clubs and moving on to the next round is an incredible privilege.

“It signifies that my hard work, dedication, and passion have been recognised, and it gives me the chance to further refine my skills on a bigger stage.”

For Aden Hall, being part of the Lions Youth of the Year allowed him to get out of his comfort zone and create a significant year 12 memory.

“I think what I enjoyed most about the competition was giving my prepared speech on lowering the voting age,” he said.

“I got off to a rocky start with the impromptu speeches where I admittedly was the worst in that and did so badly.

“However, after all the impromptu speeches was done and I had to get up to do my prepared speech, I delivered a better and greater comeback by using a lot of hand gestures, passion and tone in my voice when executing my speech, which a lot of lions club members came up to me after the speech saying how amazing it was, and how it was moving and very impactful on them.

“It feels so wonderful and amazing to participate and continue the winning tradition of Bundaberg State High School in this competition.

“Before I was a school captain, I saw on social media, the previous school captains and other candidates participating in Lions youth of the year, and saw how big the competition was, and I thought I would never be able to do something so significant like that in my time at school, but here I am, having participated and experienced the competition myself.

“So in that sense, seeing me become a nervous, quiet and not outgoing person to do something huge like this makes me feel amazing to have participated in lions youth of the year and representing Bundaberg State High School at it.”

All five local Lions Clubs Bundaberg, Bundaberg North, Bundaberg Hinkler, Bargara and Moore Park all have contestants at Club level.

The winners from all the Bundaberg Clubs and Fraser Coast join for the regional final.

Lions Awareness Month was launched on Saturday 1 March and the clubs have hundreds of projects on the go.

The projects range from youth projects to environmental and nearly anything you can think of.

Clubs activities can be seen on their Facebook and web pages and this fantastic local paper as Lions are always looking for like-minded volunteers to join.