

9.4.1

BATHURST VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE - TOYO HIGH SCHOOL CULTURAL TOUR 2025

File No: **23.00025**

RECOMMENDATION:

That the information be noted.

REPORT:

Students from Toyo High School in Tokyo, Japan, visited Bathurst from 28 February 2025 to 3 March 2025 on a cultural exchange visit as a part of their ongoing sister-school relationship with Denison College.

113 Japanese students from Toyo High School participated in this year's visit. The students were accommodated during their stay by 48 Bathurst Host Families, with 39 being returning previous host families and nine being new families opening their homes to the Japanese students. This tour continued a long line of cultural visits from Toyo High School, being the 23rd visit of the school to Bathurst and was the largest Japanese student group to visit Bathurst since before the COVID-19 global pandemic.

The students arrived at the Bathurst High campus of Denison College on the afternoon of Friday 28 February where they were greeted by Bathurst Visitor Information Centre (BVIC) staff, Bathurst High School staff and the local host families. A brief welcome was conducted with speeches from Mayor Robert Taylor, Vice-Principal of Toyo High School Mt Yoshiyuki Ishikawa and Mr Ken Barwick, Bathurst High Principal. Students were then allocated to their host families.

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 2 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 Council and Toyo High School attended and participated in the event, which included an address from Mayor Robert Taylor 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.

Students engaged in a half day of school activities at either Bathurst High or Charles Sturt University the morning of Monday 3 March prior to their departure. Following the completion of School activities students departed Bathurst for their return trip to Japan via Sydney.

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 \$50,000 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 23-28 March 2025 with approximately six students and six adults including teachers, and city officials expected to visit Bathurst.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Organisation of homestay and tour arrangements by BVIC incurred a GST inclusive commission fee which resulted in a positive contribution of \$12,779.80 to the 2024/2025 budget.

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