

CREATE

MACEDON RANGES
SHIRE COUNCIL
MUNICIPAL EARLY YEARS PLAN
2021-2025



**Macedon
Ranges**
Shire Council

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Macedon Ranges Shire Council acknowledges the Dja Dja Wurrung, Taungurung and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of this land and waterways. Council recognises their living cultures and ongoing connection to Country and pays respect to their Elders past, present and emerging.

Council also acknowledges local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander residents of Macedon Ranges for their ongoing contribution to the diverse culture of our community.

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MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR

The start of a child's life has a profound and lasting impact on their future health, learning and development and, as a result, the wellbeing of the whole community.

As at the 2016 Census, we had 6,168 children aged 0-9 years in the Macedon Ranges. Unlike many other regional communities, our population of young people and young families is growing, with around 500 babies born every year.

Macedon Ranges Shire Council provides, supports, promotes and values varying levels of early years services throughout the municipality. Additionally, we play a critical and increasingly strong part in advocating for families and children.

We support children's access to services and infrastructure including kindergartens, Maternal and Child Health, playgroup/toy library, parks, playgrounds, pools and recreation reserves. The 2021-2025 Municipal Early Years Plan provides a framework for the provision of early years services, corresponding with the municipal population and the needs of the communities themselves.

There are a number of different areas we will focus on, including advocacy, planning for and/or funding of high-quality services and infrastructure, and facilitating partnerships. These issues were identified through community consultation and have guided the development of themes and priority areas for the next few years.

We know that positive early childhood development has a direct impact on a child's long-term health outcomes and future opportunities. With this in mind, we are committed to achieving the best outcomes for children, young people and their families. Supporting, continuing and creating new services that are integrated, prevention-focused and evidence based, and tailored to best reflect our region and unique communities, will not only assist early childhood development now, but well into the future.

Jennifer Anderson
Mayor



CREATE - An introduction

CREATE is a five year plan that responds to the needs, priorities and aspirations of children, as identified by the community. The plan now replaces the previous Early Years Plan 2016-2020.

CREATE recognises that 'children' (for the purposes of this plan those aged under nine years) are citizens and contributors to the communities that they live in, and acknowledges that the participation of children in community life is largely influenced by the beliefs, practices and decisions of adults.

As such, Council was keen to hear from children and adults about what would support a child-friendly Macedon Ranges. A child-friendly community is a place where children's rights and needs are at the centre of good community planning and design. It is place where adults listen to children and young people and take what they say seriously.

CREATE is informed by community and sector consultation undertaken in late 2019 and early 2021, and includes children's voices. It includes priority areas for action and responsibilities across Council departments and, in some instances, shared with the community.



Riddells Creek Kindergarten

Highlights from the previous plan

Below is a list of significant initiatives achieved from the Early Years Plan 2016-2020:

- Introduction of Maternal and Child Health parent survey in 2018, with findings used to improve service functions.
- Introduction of annual kindergarten parent survey, with findings used to improve service functions.
- Upgrade of Riddells Creek Kindergarten, Maternal and Child Health and Toy Library.
- Upgrade of Romsey Kindergarten and Maternal and Child Health.
- Upgrade of Swinburne Avenue, Romsey and Woodend kindergarten outdoor areas.
- Implementation of Young Parent Connect program.
- Implementation of Central Enrolment project, focussing on identifying barriers to participation in kindergarten.
- Introduction of Wi-Fi in early years facilities.
- Successful application for a number of funding opportunities: IT grants; inclusive equipment grants; Children's Facilities Capital Program grant.
- Review of Occasional Care program across the shire and cessation of program due to poor utilisation.
- Advocacy to State and Federal Government for a long term commitment to fund 15 hours of kindergarten for eligible four year olds.
- Implementation of Smiles for Miles program.
- Establishment of a breastfeeding clinic in Woodend.
- Establishment of a *smalltalk* Supported Playgroup program.
- Implementation of a Family Support Worker position.
- Expansion of the Enhanced Maternal and Child Health program.
- Coordination of training across Council for assisting vulnerable families and children.
- Coordination of a wheelies forum to advocate for improved infrastructure and footpaths.
- Participation in strategic planning forums to advocate for improved public transport.
- Seeking of funding opportunities to support necessary facility upgrades.
- Introduction of iPad technology and IT equipment (computers/laptops) to kindergartens.
- Moving kindergarten registration process online in 2019, creating administrative efficiencies.
- Child Development Information System (CDIS) fully operational.
- Participation in a Council-wide Place Making Forum to ensure that children's and families' needs are considered at a municipal level.
- Continued evaluation of Maternal and Child Health service data, with services planned according to the number of births and child enrolments in specific townships.
- Introduction of a State Government initiative that funds one additional family violence visit for families identified through the Enhanced Maternal and Child Health program.
- Staff attendance at Multiagency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM) training.
- Staff attendance at My Early Relational Trauma Informed Learning (MERTIL) training.

CREATE - What we did

Council is committed to meaningful consultation with all members of the community and recognises a strong community plan should reflect the community's needs, concerns, priorities and aspirations.

We sought the views of a range of stakeholders, including children, but also community groups, service providers and other community members in the shire. Some of these activities included creative 'Big Ideas' workshops with kindergarten and primary school children, meetings with stakeholders and community groups, place-based community pop-ups and a survey available online via Council's website and in hard copy.

These activities attempted to capture people's views on **four main questions**:

1. What three things are the most important to improve in Macedon Ranges to ensure children can live a safe, healthy, connected and happy life?
2. What challenges do you think children have living in the Macedon Ranges?
3. What are your ideas for making the Macedon Ranges a child-friendly shire?
4. What do you like about being a child in the Macedon Ranges?

We also looked at the issues that we know will shape the funding and supply of services for children. There are many changes that Council and others will need to consider in the period 2021-2025.

CREATE - Why we did it

It is well researched and understood that children develop in the context of family, community and society, and the experience of childhood has a profound impact on adulthood. Investment in the early years is more cost effective than intervention at a later stage of life. For these reasons, investing in early years matters.

Our work in the development of this plan has been guided by the vision, themes and priority areas outlined in the current Council Plan (2017-2027). A brief summary of some of the many ways that the Council Plan Priority Areas relate to childhood is provided below.

Council Plan Priority Area	Childhood context
Promote health and wellbeing	<p>Positive early experiences support optimal brain development, providing the foundation for skills and abilities needed for success at school and throughout a child's life. If a child is exposed to negative or stressful experiences, such as those associated with neglect, family violence, poverty or lack of adequate housing, this can lead to lifelong problems related to learning, behaviour and physical and mental health¹. Cumulative or sustained exposure to family violence can result in the experience of trauma symptoms, including post-traumatic stress disorder, which if left untreated can have long-lasting impacts on children's development, behaviour and wellbeing².</p> <p>Almost 40% of residents are experiencing mortgage or rental stress (mortgage 8.4% and rental 29%), with a further 7.6% of households</p>

¹ Australian Early Development Census Brain Development in Children <https://www.aedc.gov.au/resources/detail/brain-development-in-children>

² Child Family Community Australia & Australian Institute of Family Studies. 2015, *Children's exposure to domestic and family violence : key issues and responses*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne, Vic <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/childrens-exposure-domestic-and-family-violence>

	<p>experiencing housing stress³. It is still unknown what the long-term impact of COVID-19 will have on housing affordability and availability in the Macedon Ranges, as greater numbers of people relocate from Melbourne⁴.</p> <p>Government plays a role in ensuring that children are not disadvantaged by virtue of the place that they live. Services, supports and connected communities can help to reduce the impact of negative and stressful experiences on children’s health and wellbeing, both now and into adulthood.</p> <p>Over the life of this plan, the Victorian Government will work with local government and other service providers to roll out initiatives to support children’s health and wellbeing, including but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • funded three year old kindergarten providing an extra year of teacher-led learning prior to beginning school⁵ • school readiness funding to better support children’s communication (language development), wellbeing (social and emotional) and access and inclusion⁶ • resources to strengthen support for children starting school and children with additional needs including Kindergarten Inclusion Support funding⁷ • resources to promote cultural competency in services and education (including Indigenous culture) • integrated services and supports to ensure women and children are free from violence and harm as a result of family violence.
<p>Promote the natural environment</p>	<p>Infants and young children are among the most vulnerable members of our community to the impact of climate change⁸. This fact, along with an understanding that children will inherit custodianship of the natural environment, can harness the commitment of children and adults to promote and protect the natural environment.</p> <p>Early childhood provides a window of opportunity to facilitate the connections with the natural environment that will last a lifetime.</p> <p>In formal early learning settings, the importance of caring for the environment and supporting children to become environmentally responsible is a requirement of the National Quality Standards⁹. In school settings, the Australian Curriculum requires schools to teach ‘sustainability’ across multiple learning areas¹⁰.</p> <p>Ensuring children experience connections with the natural environment in meaningful ways will assist their understanding of connectedness both with and in the natural environment and ultimately promote action for sustainability¹¹.</p>

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, 2016 (Enumerated data). Compiled and presented in atlas.id by .id (informed decisions) <https://atlas.id.com.au/macedon-ranges>

⁴ Macedon Ranges Shire Impact of COVID-19 on population growth <https://forecast.id.com.au/macedon-ranges/forecast-covid19-impact>

⁵ Victorian Government Department of Education and Training (DET) three year old kindergarten funding information <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/Pages/funding-three-year-old-kinder.aspx>

⁶ Victorian Government DET School readiness funding information <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/srf.aspx>

⁷ Victorian Government DET Kindergarten Inclusion Support program information <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/professionals/needs/Pages/kinderinclusion.aspx>

⁸ UNICEF, 2015, *Unless we act now: The impact of climate change on children* available online at <https://www.unicef.org/media/60111/file>

⁹ National Quality Standards Area 3 <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-quality-standard/quality-area-3-physical-environment>

¹⁰ Australian Curriculum Priorities: Sustainability <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/cross-curriculum-priorities/sustainability/>

¹¹ Davis, J and Elliott, S 2004, ‘Mud pies and daisy chains: Connecting young children and nature’, *Every Child*, 10(4) pages pp. 4-5

<p>Improve the built environment</p>	<p>Universal design principles guide the design of built environments to be usable by all people of different ages and abilities over time, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialised design¹².</p> <p>Universal design, including walking and cycling paths, safe crossings, accessible facilities and public spaces, creates vibrant, healthy and equitable environments that benefit people of all ages.</p> <p>Play stimulates a child’s intellectual, physical, social and creative abilities¹³. The presence of physical environments and materials that encourage physical activity, encourage children to explore, solve problems, communicate, think, create and construct and are therefore essential to facilitate healthy development¹⁴.</p> <p>Safe and stimulating play spaces are needed for children at home, in education and care settings and in community places. Through good design, play spaces can be gathering places for people of all ages and abilities.</p> <p>Ensuring adequate supply of infrastructure to meet demand for early childhood services and schools will be a focus in coming years.</p>
<p>Enhance the social and economic environment</p>	<p>Giving children the best possible start in life is the best investment we can make as a society to ensure its future success¹⁵.</p> <p>The labour force participation rate of the population in the Macedon Ranges Shire in 2016 shows that there was a higher proportion in the labour force (62.0 per cent) compared with Regional VIC (56.1 per cent)¹⁶.</p> <p>Parents and carers contribute economically as workers, business owners, consumers and volunteers. Around 51.9 per cent of the shire’s working residents travel outside of the area to work¹⁷.</p> <p>Whilst many policy interventions or solutions to support parents and carers to balance family and work responsibilities, such as subsidised childcare, rest with both employers and other tiers of government, Council plays a role in stimulating local jobs and ensuring where possible that services meet the varied community need.</p> <p>Flexible employment arrangements and opportunities for local employment can help parents and carers to balance family and work responsibilities¹⁸.</p>
<p>Deliver strong and reliable government</p>	<p>The early years’ sector is experiencing major reform with change driven from the Australian and Victorian Governments¹⁹.</p> <p>CREATE has been developed after consultation with children and those who support them. The issues, priorities and values expressed through consultation have been taken into account in developing CREATE.</p> <p>Council’s Community Consultation Framework was used to complete the consultation for the development of this plan adhering to best practice guidelines.</p>

¹² Principles of Universal Design https://projects.ncsu.edu/ncsu/design/cud/about_ud/udprinciplestext.htm

¹³ Department of Education and Training, 2016, *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework*

¹⁴ The importance of play in children’s learning and development <https://www.startingblocks.gov.au/other-resources/factsheets/the-importance-of-play-in-children-s-learning-and-development/>

¹⁵ Importance of early childhood development <https://www.child-encyclopedia.com/importance-early-childhood-development/introduction>

¹⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2011 and 2016. Compiled and presented by .id (informed decisions) <https://profile.id.com.au/macedon-ranges/employment-status>

¹⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, 2016 (Usual residents data). Compiled and presented by .id (informed decisions) <https://profile.id.com.au/macedon-ranges/residents>

¹⁸ Flexible work arrangements <https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/for-individuals/flexible-work/>

¹⁹ Education State Early Childhood Reform Plan <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/educationstate/Pages/earlychildhood.aspx>

	<p>CREATE will inform Council in relation to the implications of decisions and resource allocation for children.</p> <p>CREATE will be supported by the development of annual action plans that will report to Executive on a quarterly basis and to Council annually.</p>
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The current situation

The actions identified in CREATE require Council departments to work together and as such are linked to several Macedon Ranges Shire Council plans and strategies including:

- Macedon Ranges Shire Council Plan 2017–2027
- Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan (in Council Plan)
- Disability Action Plan (in Council Plan)
- Arts and Culture Strategy 2018-2028
- Municipal Emergency Management Plan 2017
- Sport and Active Recreation Strategy 2018-2028
- Elevate Youth Strategy 2018-2028
- Walking and Cycling Strategy 2014
- Shire-wide Footpath Plan 2018
- Asset Management Plan – Footpaths 2019
- Asset Management Plan – Open Spaces 2013
- Climate Change Action Plan 2017
- Draft Reconciliation Action Plan 2021-2023
- Macedon Ranges Shared Trail Project 2020-21
- Environment Strategy 2016
- Visitor Economy Strategy 2019-2029
- Open Space Strategy 2013

Children and Council

Council currently delivers a variety of functions aligned with the themes outlined in CREATE. These include:

- Service delivery in community and home settings, including maternal and child health services, immunisation, kindergartens, playgroups, prevention of family violence activities, library services, recreation and leisure activities, community planning and safety.
- Implementing the Child Safe Standards to promote the safety of children, prevent child abuse and ensure processes are in place to respond to and report all allegations of child abuse.
- Advocacy on behalf of children and their families to influence other levels of government and other organisations or agencies.
- Managing open spaces, parks and playgrounds.
- Planning, building and maintaining community service infrastructure.
- Planning public spaces, including town and precinct plans to revitalise or create communities.



Swinburne Avenue Children’s Centre

- Providing varying levels of support to community based childcare centres, commercial childcare services, occasional care services and a network of registered playgroups and Toy Libraries.
- Promoting community connection and community engagement, for example, working with parent management committees at kindergarten services, providing opportunities for volunteering, community events and supporting community groups.

Australian and Victorian Governments

Over the past decade, all levels of government have increasingly demonstrated that they understand the importance of investing in children in the early years, to build resilience and provide the best opportunity for children to thrive.

Local government works with the Victorian and Australian Governments to plan communities, deliver services, build infrastructure and promote community wellbeing. As a planner, advocate and provider of children's services, Council must continue to consider direction and policy frameworks supporting children including:

- keeping children safe from harm and abuse
- promoting children's rights, including their right to have a say in the decisions that directly impact them
- focussing on child and family health, including access to pre-natal and maternity services
- supporting vulnerable children, including children known to Child Protection
- providing early intervention and support for children with additional needs
- improving access to, and affordability of, child care
- improving access to quality education, with national standards in place for kindergartens and schools
- providing meaningful education and culturally safe services for Indigenous children, students and families
- promoting healthy eating and exercise for child and family health
- providing opportunities to build connected and resilient communities.



Manna Gum Family & Children's Centre

Rights of the Child

Relevant to the focus of CREATE, the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), sets out the basic human rights of a child no matter where they live, setting standards in health care, education, legal, civil and social services.

The *Victorian Charter for Child-friendly Cities and Communities* has been developed for local governments, organisations and individuals in Victoria. The Victorian Charter is consistent with state, national and international protocols and embraces rights that are embedded in the *Convention of the Rights on the Child* (1990), the *Chiba Declaration for a Child-Friendly Asia Pacific* (2004) and the *Victorian Human Rights and Responsibilities Charter* (2006).

The State Government has various policies and frameworks in place to uphold the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the *Victorian Charter for Child-friendly Cities and Communities*. Some councils across Australia have committed to formal membership of UNICEF's Child-friendly Cities initiative.

Developing a Child-friendly Cities Initiative under the UNICEF banner requires establishing a partnership with UNICEF and obtaining UNICEF recognition if recognition criteria are met. Council has not committed to formal membership at the time of preparing this Municipal Early Years Plan.

Demographic profile

Data from the 2016 Census of Australian Households²⁰

- Macedon Ranges Shire was home to 6,168 children aged below nine years. Approximately 85 per cent of children aged 0-8 lived in one of the shire's urban settlements. This is a higher percentage of children living in urban settlements than in 2011.
- 862 children attended preschool and 4,351 children attended primary school. 2,921 primary aged students attended a Government school, and 1,079 children attended a Catholic Primary School. Independent schools accounted for 351 primary aged students. Of note, there were over 1,000 more students in primary school than secondary school across the shire.
- Macedon Ranges Shire was home to 7,482 households with children, with an average of 1.9 children per household. 5.1 per cent of couple families with children were step families, 3.4 per cent were blended families and 3.7 per cent were single parent families with children aged under 15 years.
- 54 children aged 0-9 identified as Indigenous in the 2016 Census, which accounts for 26.7 per cent of the total Indigenous population in the Macedon Ranges Shire.
- 4.5 per cent of children aged between 0 and 9 years required assistance with core activities due to severe or profound disability. This is greater than the level of need identified in the 2011 Census, with an increase of 42 children in the 5-9 age group requiring assistance.
- The role of unpaid childcare is determined by many different factors. For example, areas with high levels of unpaid childcare may have a dominance of single income families with one significant earner, or there could be a lack of provision of paid childcare in the area. The level to which people care for others children can also indicate the role of extended family (e.g. grandparents caring for grandchildren, family day care).
- The number of people who provided unpaid childcare for their own and/or other people's children increased by 1,003 between 2011 and 2016. Compared to Regional Victoria (27.2 per cent) the Macedon Ranges Shire (31.6 per cent) had a higher proportion of people who provided unpaid childcare either to their own or to other children.
- Overall, more households were paying high mortgage repayments (20.8 per cent) compared with 9.0 per cent in Regional Victoria. Overall, more households (11.5 per cent) were paying high rental payments compared with 2.9 per cent in Regional Victoria.
- Overall, 11,275, or 51.9 per cent of the Macedon Ranges Shire's working residents travel outside of the area to work.

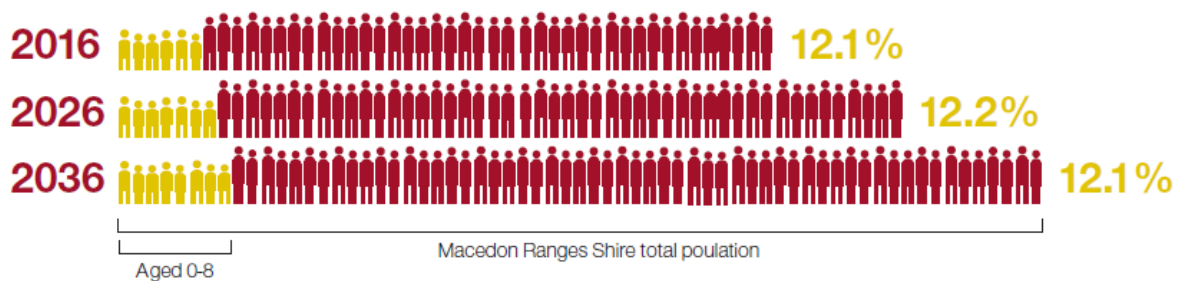


Lancefield Kindergarten

²⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics, , multiple years. Compiled and presented by .id (informed decisions) <https://profile.id.com.au/macedon-ranges>

Forecast data²²

- The Macedon Ranges Shire population forecast for 2021 is 51,020, and is forecast to grow to 65,405 by 2036
- Between 2016 and 2036 there will be a projected 35 per cent increase in the population of children under 9 years.
- Almost 50 per cent of all growth in the 0-9 age group is projected to occur in the Gisborne District. Strong growth in percentage terms is also projected for the Riddells Creek and Romsey Districts, resulting in large proportional increases in the younger population in these areas (80 per cent and 49 per cent to 2036 respectively).
- In Macedon Ranges, the largest five-year age group projected in both 2026 and 2036 is children 5 to 9 years, with a total of 4,005 persons and 4,712 persons respectively. Five year age groups are used by social planners to project the level and type of services a community will need.



²² Population and household forecasts, 2016 to 2036, prepared by .id (informed decisions), November 2017
<https://forecast.id.com.au/macedon-ranges>

CREATE - How we did it

In late 2019, Council engaged consultation experts to plan an extensive community engagement program using Council's Community Consultation Framework²⁴. The framework aligns with IAP2 methodology and ensures a strategic approach to identifying and reaching key stakeholders, selecting engagement methods and tools, and identifying the information needed from people to inform planning.

Consultation for CREATE engaged nearly 1,000 people, with responses from across the shire, including:

- seven 'Big Ideas' workshops with kindergarten and primary school children
- a range of meetings and workshops with early years service providers, health service providers and seniors groups across the municipality
- drop-in sessions at community lunches and with key groups
- five place-based community pop-ups.

With an aim of reaching 10 per cent of households with children (approximately 370 households), a focus of the consultation was to ensure we used appropriate engagement strategies and consultation methods that were accessible to children and families.

Below is a breakdown of the consultation activities process that led to CREATE.

Municipal Early Years Plan specific engagement activities	Participants*
Municipal Early Years Plan surveys (hard copy and online)	424
Municipal Early Years Plan meeting participants	42
Municipal Early Years Plan social media engagements (Twitter/Facebook)	119
Children's Big Ideas workshop participants	183
Children's Big Ideas drawing participants at pop-up events	31
Pop-Up engagement participants (99 under 18 years old)	156
Total participation	955

*Some individuals may have participated in more than one engagement activity.

**Not all engagement activities and participants produced useable community feedback for this report.

*** Participants may have written one or more comments.



Woodend Kindergarten

²⁴ Superseded by the Community Engagement Policy 2021

CREATE - What we found

Most people we heard from were aged between 35-49 years (61.79 per cent), followed by 24-34 years (24.67 per cent). At least 214 respondents were under nine years of age, and 99 respondents at pop ups were under 18 years of age.

We received input from people across all towns in the Macedon Ranges. Of the 424 respondents who indicated where they live, 29.25 percent lived in Gisborne, 16.98 per cent in Kyneton, and 10.38 per cent in Woodend.

More women than men participated in our consultation and most identified as a parent or carer of a child under nine years (76.25 per cent). 1.66 per cent identified as LGBTIQA+, and 0.4 percent identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. 1.19 per cent were people living with disability.

Just over 63 per cent of survey respondents indicated that they currently use Council's early years' services (kindergarten or Maternal and Child Health).

There were four areas of focus that we gathered data and information on. This included:

- improvements needed to ensure that children can live safe, healthy, connected and happy lives
- challenges that children have living in the Macedon Ranges
- ideas for making municipality a child-friendly shire
- what is liked about being a child in the Macedon Ranges.

We received a large amount of feedback through the consultation process. CREATE includes the 'top four' most frequent responses to each focus area, although input with lower frequency has also informed our action table.

Children's feedback and big Ideas

Seven big ideas workshops were held with children at local primary schools and kindergartens around the shire. 183 children participated in these workshops.

School/Kindergarten	Number of participants
Romsey Kindergarten	52
Macedon Kindergarten	28
Lancefield Kindergarten	16
Kyneton Primary School	24
Gisborne Primary School	22
St Mary's Primary School (Lancefield)	25
Woodened Kindergarten	16
Total	183

The workshops included some brainstorming sessions, drawing activities and presentations by the children wearing the Big Ideas hat. All of these activities were designed to seek feedback on how to make the shire more child-friendly.

Children were also encouraged to provide their ideas at place-based pop-up events by drawing their ideas on the Big Ideas drawing sheet (31 participants) and adding their ideas to the chat boards (99 respondents under 18 years).

During the workshops children came up with a list of 124 things they love about their towns now, 113 things they would like to see in the future to make their town more child-friendly and 183 Big Idea drawings.

Brainstorming Sessions

What children love about their town

Children told us that they love the parks and playgrounds including the swings, slides and monkey bars, they love the trees and climbing them, the libraries and the schools, visiting friends and family, skate parks, dance lessons and the local pools. They love having their friends living in the same town and they definitely love shops like the bakery, ice cream shop, and pizza and fish n chip shop.



Children's ideas for making the Macedon Ranges more child-friendly

Children told us that they'd like to see more parks and playgrounds with more swings, slides, monkey bars and flying foxes, safer roads with more crossings, more trees and green grass, outdoor basketball hoops and lots more large retail outlets including ice cream and lolly shops. They would also like to see more bike and walking paths so they can ride their bikes and scooters, more pools in their own town and a movie cinema and bowling alley.

Lancefield Children

The children in Lancefield love the park and footy oval, the trees and cricket pitch, the library and post office, the cemetery and skate park, lots of shops like the bookshop and fruit shop, the pool and the Op Shop, ducks crossing the road, nan and pop's house, local shops and ice creams. They love that they know how to get home from anywhere in town and that their house is close to kinder. They love climbing trees, running and rolling on the grass, going on the slide as many times as they want, riding bikes, the kinder library, playing with parents and helping nanna in the garden.

They also like things out of town such as the netball centre in Gisborne, the Kyneton Sports & Aquatic Centre, the Riddells Creek Dance School, shops in Romsey and Sunbury and the ice cream van in Romsey.

To make the Macedon Ranges more child-friendly, they would like to see an ice cream shop, bike racks, bike path to school, a zoo, kids soccer club, basketball hoop, a hotel for visitors, footpaths and safer road crossings. They would also like to see a closer library, a cubby house, more gardens, a trampoline, a pool at every house and a festival nearby so they don't have to drive too far.

They would like to see a water park, hospital, dance school, more trees and swings, a flying fox and jumping pillow and a park with rock climbing in Romsey. They would also like to see a Bounce Centre and pool.

Macedon Children

The children in Macedon love the rope swings at home, kangaroos hopping around and park visits where they get to play on the monkey bars, swings and slides and to climb trees. They love to ride their bikes, scooters and skateboards to the park and visit friends and neighbours. They also love the Mt Macedon Memorial Cross, the river walk near the waterfall, the pinecones, the turtles, trees for shade for families and the library.

To make the Macedon Ranges more child-friendly, they would like to see more turtles, kangaroos, echidnas, people, forests, flowers, trees and snow. They would also like to see more roads and paths for walking and bike riding, taller trees to climb, more playgrounds with flying foxes, swimming pools, a closer library, safer road crossings, a footy oval, a basketball hoop, more parks and places for animals to live. Toy trains, transformers, unicorns and tooth fairies also featured for Macedon children.



Maternal & Child Health

Gisborne Children

The children in Gisborne love the fountain and arcade games, the pool and skate park, big houses and the community, green grass, parks, footpaths and safe walking routes.

To make the Macedon Ranges more child-friendly they would like to see an outdoor basketball hoop at the park, gymnastics and dance schools, more large retail chain stores, a water park, an outdoor pool with slide, more trains, a bowling alley and a cinema. They would also like to see more playground equipment like swings, slides, rock-climbing wall, a fireman's pole, monkey bars, a spider swing, a trampoline and a bouncy castle.

Romsey Children

The children in Romsey love the skate park and school, visiting their friends' and cousins' houses and swimming. They also love the parks, bees and bugs, the creek, the grass, the playground (and all its equipment), the big buildings, the trees and visiting the library, the bakery, cafes and the sports field.

To make the Macedon Ranges more child-friendly, they would like to see more parks, a pool, more running paths (so they can run with their parents), more ice cream, cafes, nail salons and a fairyland. They would also like to play more, have more sleepovers, and see more unicorns, diggers, frogs and dinosaurs.

Kyneton Children

The children in Kyneton love the feel of their town including that it is small (so they don't get lost), quiet (with no city traffic) and has old buildings. They love the quick train to Melbourne, the opportunities for sport such as soccer, tennis, football, cricket, netball and basketball, the

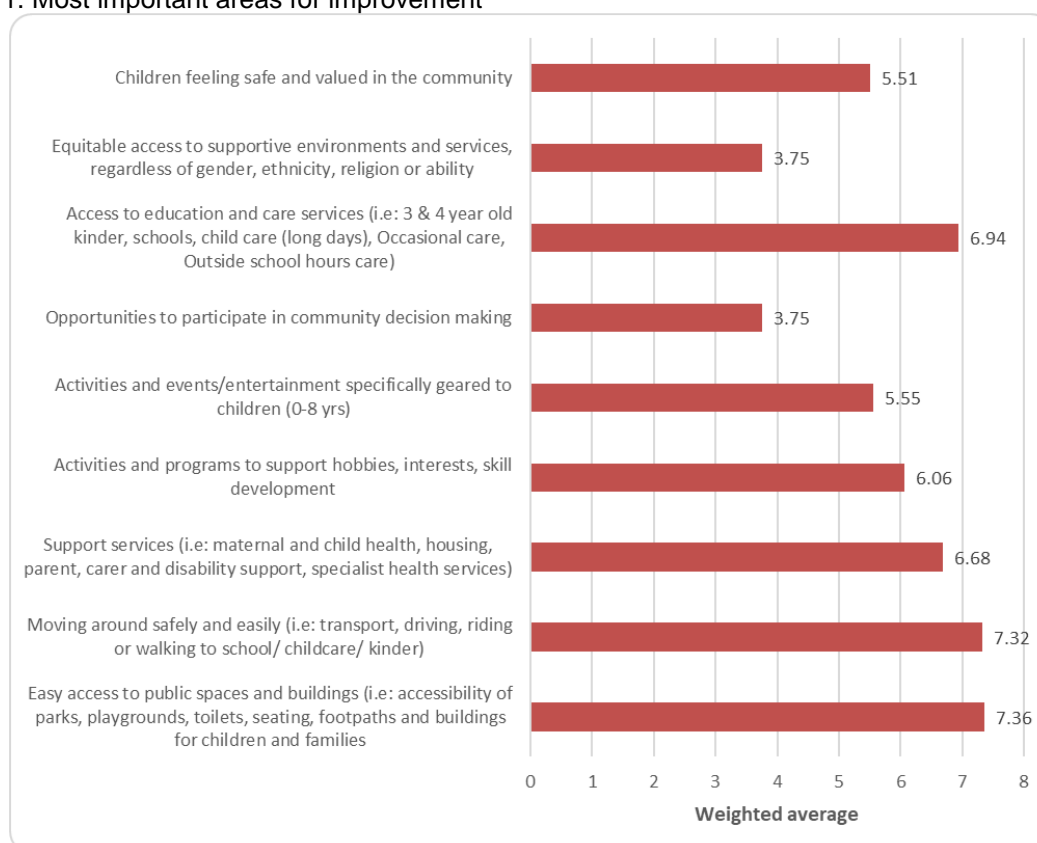
Through consulting and engaging directly with children, we're able to see how positive many of their experiences are in the Macedon Ranges, and how creative and expansive their dreams of a more child-friendly community are. While some of the suggestions are not practical for Council to implement, or are outside the scope of local government planning, it highlights the importance of including children's voices in the development of infrastructure and other strategic planning that will directly impact them.

Community Feedback

Things that are the most important to improve in the Macedon Ranges to ensure children can live safe, healthy, connected and happy lives

Respondents were asked to indicate the things that are the most important to improve in the Macedon Ranges to ensure children live safe, healthy, connected and happy lives. Respondents were able to select from a list of nine predetermined options.

Chart 1. Most important areas for improvement



The top-rated priority areas across 371 responses are:

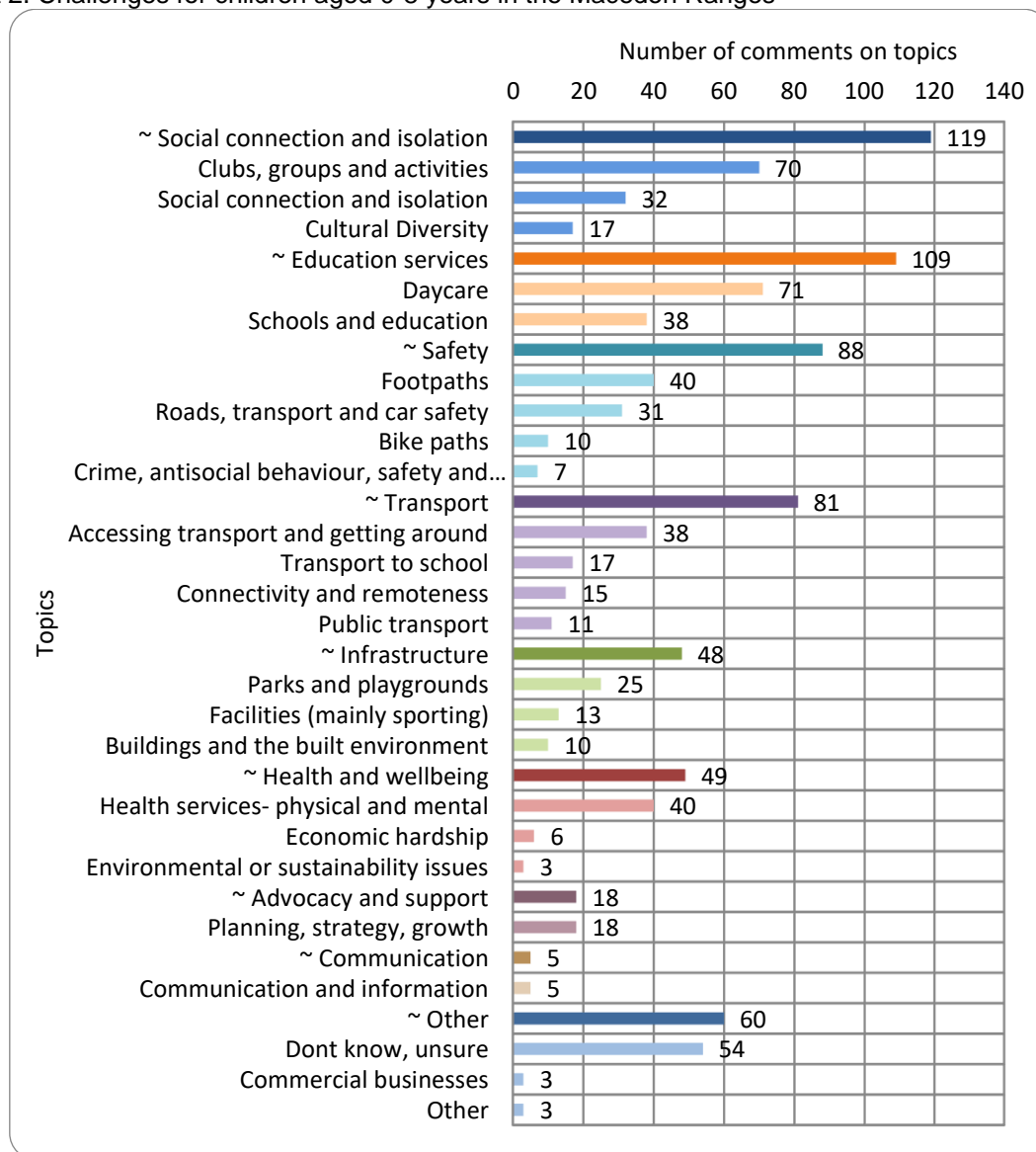
1. easy access to public spaces and buildings (including accessibility of parks, playgrounds and footpaths)
2. children being able to move around easily and safely (including transport options and safety on paths and roads)
3. better access to, and increased, early childhood and educational services

These themes are consistently repeated throughout the consultation data, from parents, other adults and importantly from children too.

What challenges do you think children aged eight years and younger have living in Macedon Ranges?

Three hundred and eleven respondents listed 571 challenges that children under eight years have living in Macedon Ranges. No single item was listed by more than 100 people, with responses scattered from 3 – 71 respondents. Given the broad range of issues raised we have chosen to include the top four challenges for children – given equal response rates, the top four is actually a top six.

Chart 2. Challenges for children aged 0-8 years in the Macedon Ranges



Given the broad range of issues raised we have chosen to include the six most commonly identified topics, highlighting what challenges exist for children aged 0-8 in the Macedon Ranges.

Day care services (71 comments)

Daycare, childcare, kindergarten and afterschool programs are an issue facing families in the area. The availability of childcare and limited spaces in kinder and daycare was commented on frequently.

“Programs are too full (e.g. 100 kids at rhyme time at the library)”

“Lack of Kinder programs that run 5 days a week”

“Hard to find childcare for children/long waiting lists”

Afterschool/holiday programs were also highlighted, as well as the costs of daycare services, which respondents commented needs to be more affordable.

Clubs, groups and activities (70 comments)

Access to clubs, groups and activities is a challenge that children face in the shire. Primarily these are things to do in winter, lack of sporting/hobby options, there not being enough entertainment and a lack of community events.

“A lack of social opportunities and activities/groups to join”.

Respondents highlighted that the timing of activities was a challenge, with many stating activities should be on weekends or outside work hours. The lack of variety and range of activities was also commented on by respondents, as well as the difficult in accessing activities, including travel and availability/space for activities.

Participation costs and the availability of age-appropriate activities for children are also identified challenges.

Footpaths (40 comments)

Footpaths are a significant challenge for children in several contexts. Respondents commented on a general lack of footpaths, particularly an absence of complete footpath networks, which make it difficult to scooter safely, push prams, or safely get to school and community spaces.

Health services (40 comments)

Accessing health services is a challenge for children in the Macedon Ranges. Respondents are concerned that health facilities are difficult to access and there is limited availability of health services, resulting in long wait times. A lack of locally available specialist services creates a need to travel out of the shire for health services.

“Need better access to specialist services e.g. Paediatrician”

“Support services like nurses are sometimes not available”

Having access to a full range of health services suitable to their children’s needs is important to people in the area. Respondents identified a lack of the following medical services: mental health services including child psychology; occupational therapy; special needs support; and emergency dental.

Accessing transport and getting around (38 comments)

Respondents identified transport and the ability to get around town as a challenge facing children in the area. The need to travel by car, as well as the distance required to travel to activities, school and services is an issue for families.

Children's inability to get around safely and somewhat independently is potentially inhibiting their ability to make the most of opportunities in the shire, whether play, education or activities and events.

"Distances required to travel for learning opportunities"

"An inability to get around actively, lack of walking and cycling paths increasing car dependence"

"Hard to get around without a car"

Road safety and the ability for children to walk around town were also raised:

"Roads getting busier - hard to safely walk/ride to school/for leisure (Gisborne)"

"Safe access to local community & environment"

Schools and Education (38 comments)

Schools are perceived as 'at capacity' due to population growth and large classroom sizes, with the following comments being representative of these:

"Overcrowding in childcare, kinders and schools"

"Overflowing education services due to rapidly expanding population"

Comments about a lack of schools generally, and limited options for different schools were also raised as issues:

"Public schools being zoned so if you're unhappy with the one your child is at or meant to go to, it's difficult to move to a better school"

"Lack of schools in rural areas"

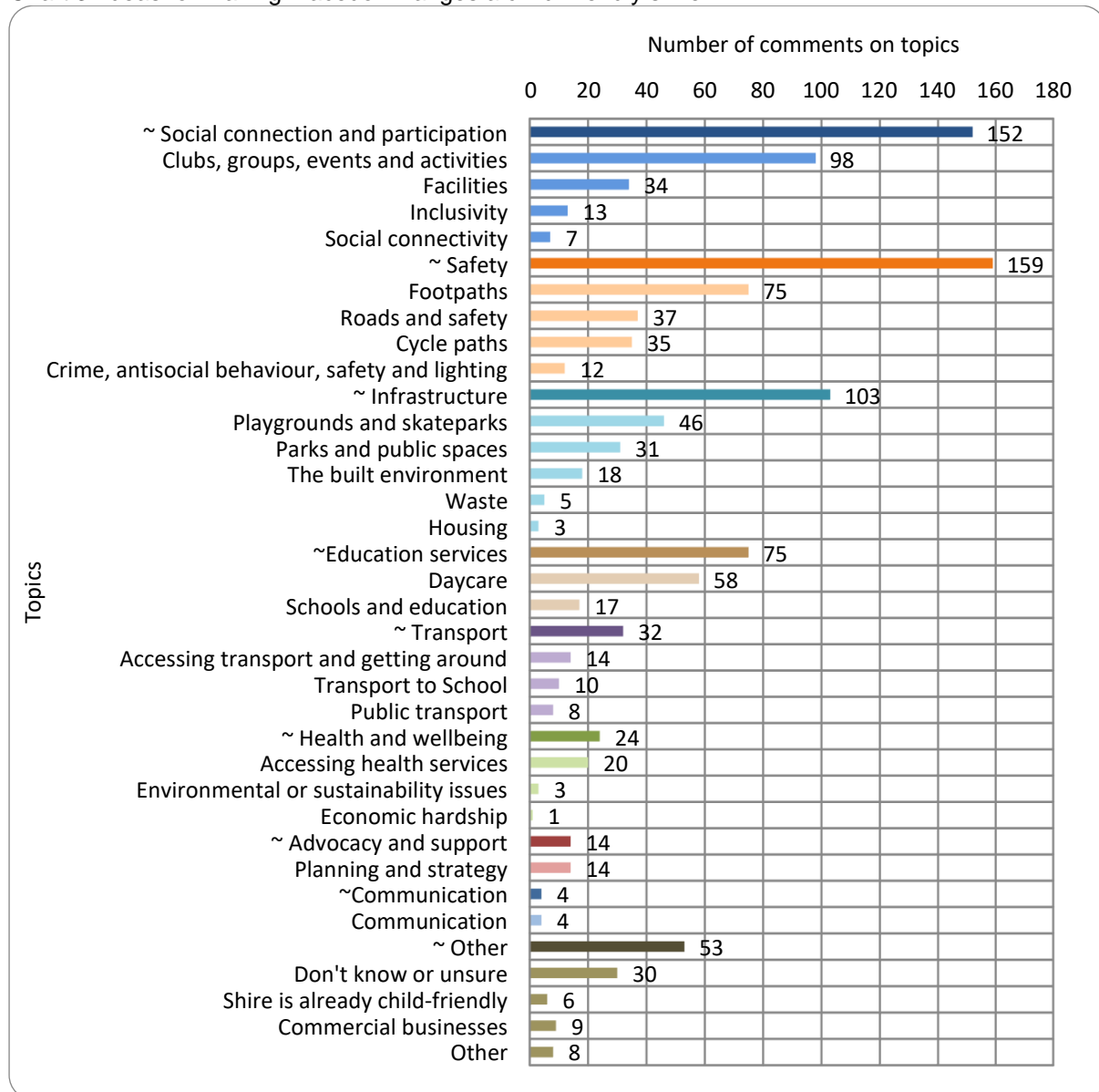


Lancefield Kindergarten

Ideas for making a child-friendly shire

311 respondents listed 576 ideas for making the Macedon Ranges child-friendly. The frequency of comments ranged from three to 98 comments per theme. Given the broad range of issues raised, we have included below the 'top four' ideas for making a child-friendly shire.

Chart 3. Ideas for making Macedon Ranges a child-friendly shire



Given the broad range of issues raised, we have chosen to include the top four ideas for making the Macedon Ranges a child-friendly shire.

Clubs, groups, events and activities (98 comments)

Clubs, groups, events and activities were suggested by a sizeable number of respondents as a way towards becoming more child-friendly. Events and activities are supported with the proviso that they are accessible (physically and financially), age appropriate for younger children, and are conducted at suitable times.

A range of activities and events were suggested, including the simple call for better or more activities or events generally, with the key sentiment being that more activities will allow children to connect with their families and the community.

The following comments are representative of respondents' opinions:

"Free and accessible activities for families in public spaces"
"Continue to invest in free options for fun and educational activities"

Respondents also suggested that there should be more exercise and sporting activities in the area, with swimming lessons common amongst these comments in some townships.

School holiday programs and parents' groups or playgroups were also suggested by respondents as ideas to promote a child-friendly shire.

"Need more activities for under 5-year olds during school holidays. There are lots of good things planned but all for 5 up"
"Free sporting and extracurricular activities"

Footpaths (75 comments)

Respondents suggest improving and adding to the footpath networks in the shire will make it more child-friendly and allow children to get around with more freedom and safety.

Suggestions include that the current footpath networks should be fully interconnected, the quality of the footpaths should be improved and more pedestrian crossings should be added.

"More footpaths, they seem to just end and have nowhere but the road to continue on"
"More footpaths and crossings to keep families safe and able to keep fit and walk around the town"

"Creating safe & accessible routes for cycling & walking around town (to kinder/schools, libraries, playgrounds). Should include pedestrian's right of way over vehicles, safe crossings of all roads"

"We need a better network of footpaths so we can walk, and kids can ride into town"

Daycare (58 comments)

Families want to see childcare be more available within existing providers, more affordable and they would like a greater selection of options to choose from, including Council run childcare. Several comments also suggested school holiday programs for the area, and subsidised after school care.

A moderate number of respondents commented on kindergartens, suggesting there should be an increased number of spaces available and the hours should be extended:

"Increase the hours of the 3 year old kinder program"

Playgrounds and skate parks (46 comments)

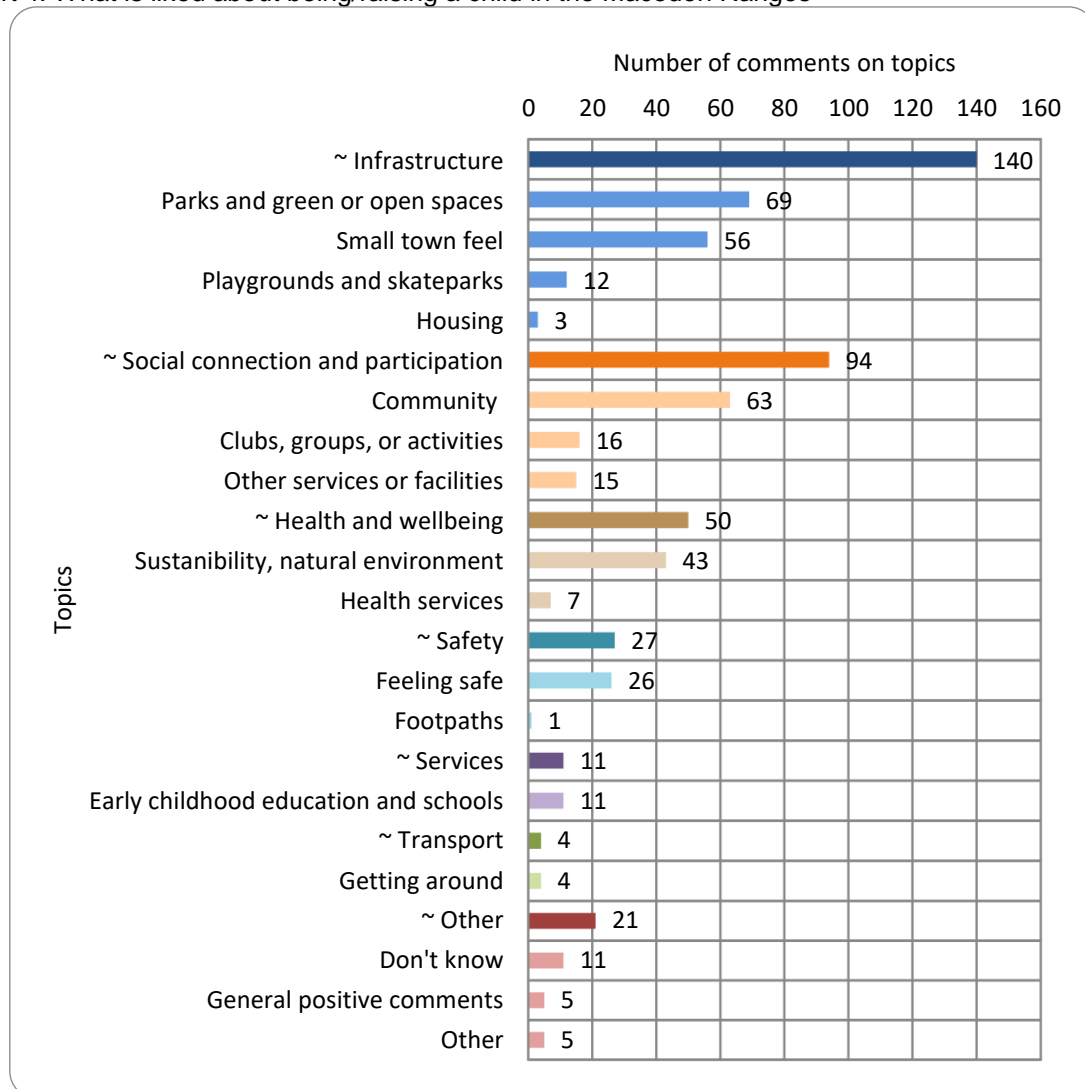
Playgrounds and skate-parks can actively encourage a child-friendly shire, and respondents requested the addition of new facilities, and the improvement of existing ones by, for example, adding shade and improving the safety of these play areas with fences. A few respondents suggested improving and adding facilities such as BBQ areas and toilets near the playgrounds so families can enjoy these areas together.

What is liked about raising a child in the Macedon Ranges shire?

311 respondents provided 589 comments on what they like about raising a child in the Macedon Ranges. The most common reason is the natural environment, specifically the access to parks and open spaces, enabling a broad-range of safe activities. In addition, the small town feel of places in the Macedon Ranges are appealing for a substantial number of respondents.

People value their communities and the community spirit they experience. The quiet, unhurried lifestyle and supportive community spirit are also valued aspects for respondents.

Chart 4. What is liked about being/raising a child in the Macedon Ranges



Given the broad range of issues raised, we have chosen to include the top four topics highlighting what is liked about raising a child in the Macedon Ranges.

Parks and green or open spaces (69 comments)

It is important to residents that they and their children have access to open spaces, parks and outdoor areas for play, sport or enjoying nature. For many, this is a significant part of what they like about living in the Macedon Ranges and a key resource for those with children aged

nine years or under. Comments were typically short, and often simply stated 'space', 'open spaces', 'parks' or 'outdoor areas'. The following are examples of the more descriptive comments:

“Great open outdoor play spaces available”
“Open spaces, beautiful parks, gardens, bushland”
“Natural settings at the ovals, parks etc”

There is some concern about protecting access to these areas – increases in population and housing developments are viewed as having potential to reduce access to open spaces for residents.

Community (63 comments)

Respondents describe their communities in the following ways; good, happy, friendly, strong, welcoming, small and inclusive. In several comments, people simply stated, 'community'.

People are happy with the level of community spirit they observe, and with the sense of community:

“The close knit and safe community”
“Good community feel, there is a focus on kids within it”
“Sense of community is significantly higher than in the city”

A small number of people note that the abundance of other children nearby is an asset, and they value that their children can make good friends.

Small town feel (56 comments)

The country-feel, smaller communities, and the slower pace of life are viewed favorably by respondents, and a valued aspect of life with children. The atmosphere is relaxed, peaceful, and quiet and removed from the busyness of city life. These comments extend to traffic, which is considered relatively light, and to population density, which is also considered light.

In a few cases comments compared conditions with city living, stating that the quality of rural life is better:

“Feels like the country still”
“The aspect of being raised and raising in a country community environment”
“Children can grow up more slowly, away from city attitudes and affluence”

Sustainability, natural environment (43 comments)

Respondents like the natural environment, including the bush, nature, trees, fresh air and the environment more generally. They stated that the relatively un-built environment is appealing for its natural state and abundance of wild or treed places.

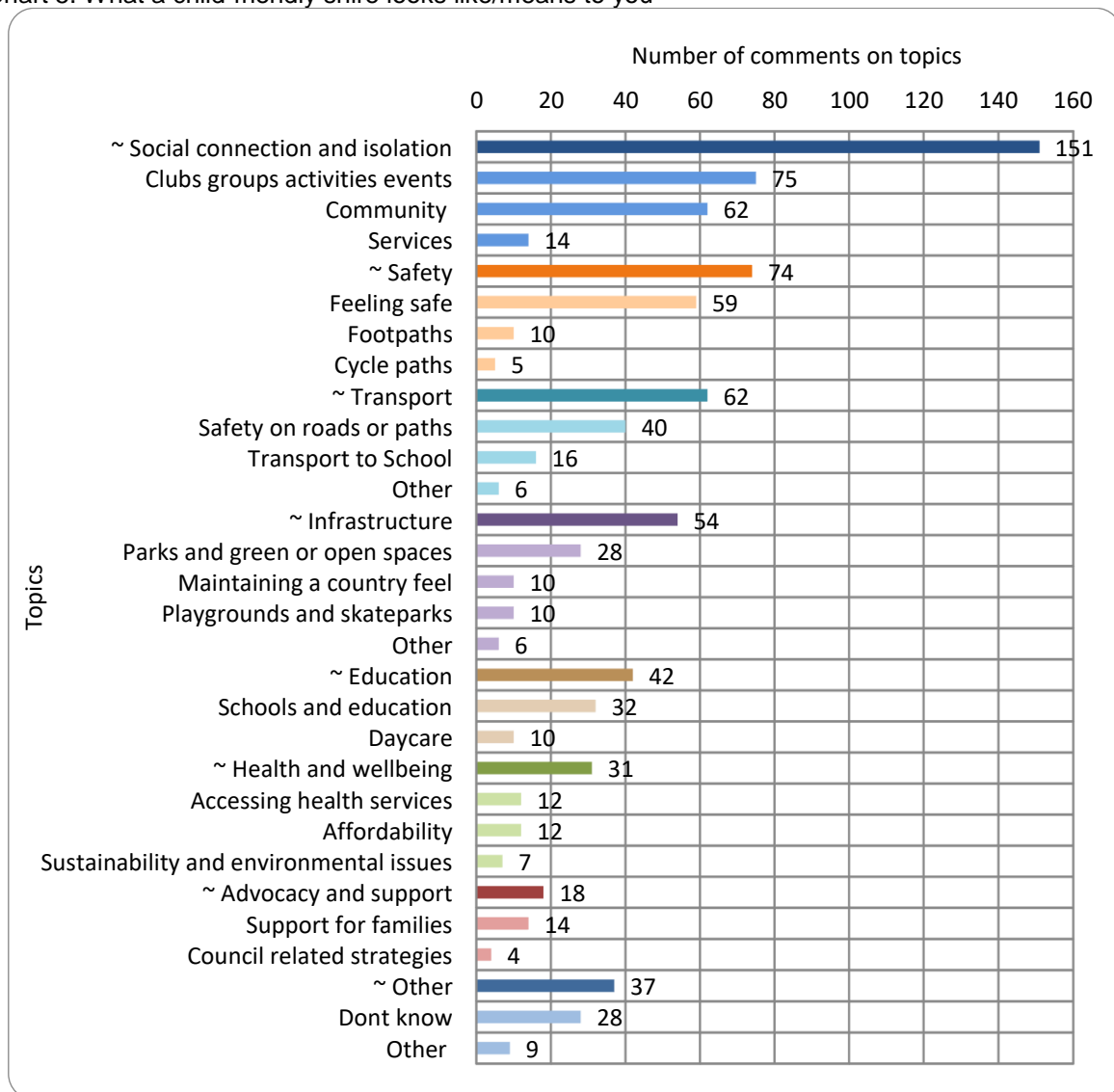
“Raising children it was a safe, friendly and free of pollution environment”
“Lots of natural areas to explore”

What a child-friendly shire looks like

303 respondents provided ideas of what a child-friendly shire looks like. Respondents most often envisaged a child-friendly shire as one which is safe, with an abundance of activities for children to participate in.

Safety was discussed in two contexts; people report that they want to feel safe generally, and that they want their children to be able to be safe when going about the business of being children – that is, when going between home, the places they play and the places they learn.

Chart 5. What a child-friendly shire looks like/means to you



Given the broad range of issues raised, we have included the top four indicators of what a child-friendly shire looks like.

Clubs, groups, activities, and events (75 comments)

A child-friendly shire is one that provides enough activities to keep children entertained, developing, socialising and connecting with their families. Activities need to be affordable, age appropriate and varied in type.

“Children have things to do - where they are encouraged to go outside and explore/enjoy their environment”

“All children have access to activities and spaces where they can engage with other community members (including other children) for fun, culture and development”

It was also suggested by several people that a child-friendly shire is one that has community events in order to entertain families and bring people together. A moderate number of comments suggest that a child-friendly shire is one where there are enough sporting facilities, pools, and child play/learning centres, as the following comments show:

“The kids feel part of the community with lots of sporting facilities”

“Indoor play space due to weather”

“Free activities to allow families to mingle, and room to move and facilities to enjoy the beautiful surroundings of the shire”

Community (62 comments)

A community that is respectful, inclusive, diverse and supportive is desirable, and a child-friendly shire is one where there is a strong sense of community that children and their families feel a part of. The following comments exemplify this:

“All children have access to opportunities and are free to experience differences, making the community inclusive”

“Kids feel carefree in a community that looks out for everyone”

“Children feel included and safe in their community”

Being safe (59 comments)

Respondents comment that a child-friendly shire is one where children are safe. The majority of these comments were put simply, for example:

“One where kids can play at park and feel safe”

“Children are safe and parents are confident in a safe community”

Safety on roads or paths (40 comments)

While respondents typically feel that the areas they live in are safe, they envisage a child-friendly shire as one with greater safety for pedestrians and cyclists. A considerable number of people commented on road or path safety:

“Children being able to move around the Shire without parents – safely”

“Good site lines on roads and paths, so children can see vehicles approaching intersections”

“Children can walk to and from school safely and to friends' houses nearby”

CREATE – Vision and themes

The Municipal Early Years Plan articulates a child centred vision for young children and their families. Our vision remains unchanged from the Early Years Plan 2016-2020, as it is still an accurate reflection of what the community and other stakeholders told us is most important and is supported by our identified priority action areas.

CREATE Vision statement

The Macedon Ranges is a place where childhood is valued and where every child can thrive, reach their potential and actively participate in the community, now and into the future.

Collated feedback from the community consultation process identified four key themes:

- Children are safe.
- Children can move around easily.
- Children can access an abundance of services, opportunities and spaces to live active, healthy and connected lives.
- Children are raised within a supportive and strong community.

CREATE – Priority action areas

Four priority action areas were identified using information from the community engagement, Council Plan priorities and strategies, important work being undertaken across various areas of Council and other known community priorities. These areas are included below along with the key aspects of the themes highlighted by the community:

Priority area - Children are socially connected and active

- Provide opportunities for children to connect in community settings, including parks, playgrounds, shops and neighbourhoods.
- Provide opportunities for children to establish positive relationships with friends and adults outside the family.
- Support the community to deliver a diverse range of clubs, groups and events inclusive of children and supporting social connections.
- Protect opportunities for children to connect with nature.
- Deliver child-friendly events.

Priority area - Children thrive in their community

- Support children to move safely in the community.
- Further investigate issues about supply of health, education and care raised in consultation.
- Continue staff development to ensure council delivered services contribute to positive outcomes for children.
- Support and advocate for the interests of children.
- Enable and empower children to participate in decisions about their needs and interests.
- Support services that support families to provide a stable and loving home environment.

Priority area - Children's needs are recognised in infrastructure and the built environment

- Provide solutions to how children and families navigate their communities to achieve easy and safe access to public spaces and buildings.
- Collaborate with other levels of government to progress infrastructure reform priorities for children.
- Actively seek and respond to opportunities for children to play, explore, solve problems, communicate, think, create and construct.
- Actively seek and respond to the needs of people of all ages and abilities in planning processes.

Priority area - Children are respected and valued in their community

- Promote children's rights and reduce risks to their safety.
- Deliver opportunities for children to contribute to community decision-making processes.
- Inform the community about matters that affect them.
- Recognise and celebrate child-friendly aspects of the local community.
- Deliver initiatives to address ageism and promote child-friendly practices.

These priority action areas were used to guide the development of the CREATE actions. These actions provide the practical framework that sets out Council's response to community feedback within the current environment. The action plan sets out how Council will continue to work towards a child-friendly community.

CREATE - How we will implement

Council's Children, Youth and Family Services department will be responsible for leading the implementation of CREATE and reporting to Council annually.

A collaborative approach is required and, in several instances, responsibilities will extend across other areas of Council and to partner agencies. This includes a range of service providers and agencies of state and federal government.

An annual work plan will be developed by the Children, Youth and Family Services department that incorporates CREATE actions. This work plan will inform reporting to key stakeholders and review of strategies as appropriate in the light of changing priorities at all levels of government, emerging issues and opportunities such as new funding streams.

It is acknowledged that the success of the plan is founded on Council, identified stakeholders and the community working together openly and strategically. We recognise that collaboration is critical to maximising positive outcomes for young children and their families in our community, as identified in this plan.



Riddells Creek Kindergarten

Council acknowledges the ongoing role of numerous agencies, organisations and community groups in the Macedon Ranges shire that support young children and their families.

Each action listed outlines the internal Council stakeholders who carry responsibility for the implementation of that action as well as the role of Council in its delivery. Council's role has been defined as one of the following:

- **Lead:** Council adopts full responsibility for delivery of the action.
- **Facilitate:** Council drives a process heavily involving other stakeholders.
- **Support:** Council adds value to activities that are initiated by, and the responsibility of, other stakeholders. This may include promotion, in-kind support or providing advice.
- **Advocate:** Council uses its role in the community to influence and lobby external stakeholders to undertake an action.

CREATE - How we will evaluate

A quarterly review will be conducted internally to formally evaluate our progress and identify any emerging gaps that need to be addressed and to highlight how effectively programs are achieving the objectives set out in this strategy. Evaluation methods will include:

- measuring against the indicators specified in the action plan
- inclusion and measurement in service planning
- reporting as part of the quarterly reporting process
- reviewing annually and reporting to Council.



Macedon Kindergarten

CREATE – What we will do

Priority area – Children are socially connected and active

OBJECTIVE	WHAT WE WILL DO	CORRESPONDING STRATEGIES	INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS	COUNCIL ROLE	PRIORITY	WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE
1.1 Increase accessible parking options for families	1.1.1 In conjunction with community consultation, Early Years and Maternal and Child Health are engaged as knowledge experts for projects in the community impacting children and families, to gain a better understanding of children's and families' needs, including parking for parents with prams at shopping areas, five minute drop off zones near primary schools and increasing disability parking bays.	2017-27 Council Plan priority area 3 – Improve the built environment – increase the number of accessible parking spaces	Statutory Planning Strategic Planning and Environment Engineering and Resource Recovery Early Years/MCH	Advocate/ Facilitate	Medium	More family friendly and accessible parking options are made available or are planned for in the future
1.2 Improve footpath connectivity	1.2.1 In conjunction with community consultation, Early Years and Maternal and Child Health are engaged as knowledge experts for projects in the community impacting children and families, to gain a better understanding of children's and families' needs, including footpath improvements and better connectivity to meet community expectations, child/family needs and address safety concerns.	2017-27 Council Plan priority area 3 – Improve the built environment – increase walking and cycling connectivity 2018 Shire wide Footpath Plan 2019 Asset Management Plan – Footpaths 2018-28 Sport and Active Recreation Strategy	Engineering and Resource Recovery Strategic Planning and Environment Early Years/MCH	Facilitate	Medium	More footpaths are built in the shire or are planned for in the future that improve access to schools, childcare and kindergarten services, play areas and other community resources and services frequented by young children and their families

<p>1.3 Increase the number of bike paths</p>	<p>1.3.1 In conjunction with community consultation, Early Years and Maternal and Child Health are engaged as knowledge experts for projects in the community impacting children and families, to gain a better understanding of children's and families' needs, including more interconnected bike paths that benefit the whole community</p>	<p>2017-27 Council Plan priority area 1 – Promote health and wellbeing – Facilitate physical activity</p> <p>2017-27 Council Plan priority area 3 – Improve the built environment – Progress construction of primary pedestrian and cycling networks for each town</p> <p>2020-21 Macedon Ranges Shared Trail Project</p> <p>2014 Walking and Cycling Strategy</p> <p>2018 Shire wide Footpath Plan</p> <p>2018-28 Sport and Active Recreation Strategy</p>	<p>Major Projects</p> <p>Open Space and Recreation</p> <p>Engineering and Resource Recovery</p> <p>Strategic Planning and Environment</p> <p>Early Years/MCH</p>	<p>Facilitate</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>More interconnected bike paths are built or are planned for in the future that improve walking and cycling access to schools, childcare and kindergarten services, to play areas and other community resources and services frequented by young children and their families</p>
<p>1.4 Improve pedestrian crossings and school crossings</p>	<p>1.4.1 In conjunction with community consultation, Early Years and Maternal and Child Health are engaged as knowledge experts for projects in the community impacting children and families, to gain a better understanding of children's and families' needs, including a review of pedestrian crossings and school crossings in each township to identify possible improvements that ensure child and family safety</p>	<p>2017-27 Council Plan priority area 3 – Improve the built environment – Progress construction of primary pedestrian and cycling networks for each town</p> <p>2018 Shire wide Footpath Plan</p>	<p>Engineering and Resource Recovery</p> <p>Early Years/MCH</p>	<p>Lead</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>Safety issues related to young children's and their families' use of pedestrian crossings and school crossings are identified</p> <p>There are additional pedestrian crossings, or improvements to existing pedestrian crossings and school crossings, in locations with identified need</p>

1.5 Improve children's bike safety on paths and roads	1.5.1 Introduce bike safety initiatives at Council managed kindergartens	2017-27 Council Plan priority area 1 – Promote health and wellbeing – Contribute to community safety 2014 Walking and Cycling Strategy	Open Space and Recreation Early Years	Lead	Medium	All Council managed kindergartens offer bike safety initiatives Increase in the number of children successfully participating in bike safety initiatives at Council managed kindergartens
	1.5.2 Encourage not for profit and private kindergarten providers, and local primary schools, to participate in bike safety initiatives		Early Years	Advocate/ Facilitate	Medium	Increase in the number of schools and non-Council kindergartens offering bike safety initiatives Increase in the number of children successfully participating in bike safety initiatives across the shire
1.6 Expand local transport options	1.6.1 Advocate for the expansion of bus services and on-demand services including taxis, ride sharing, car sharing and volunteer transport	2017-27 Council Plan priority area 3 – Improve the built environment – Advocate for better access to public transport 2016 Environment Strategy	Strategic Planning and Environment Engineering and Resource Recovery Community & Economic Development Arts & Events Early Years/MCH	Advocate	Medium	Availability of increased public transport options that allow for young children and their families to commute throughout the shire

1.7 Strengthen relationships between playgroups and toy libraries	1.7.1 Review Council's role in supporting playgroups and toy libraries and develop opportunities to strengthen the connections between user groups		Early Years/MCH	Lead	Medium	Council provides clearly defined support to playgroups and toy libraries in the shire
1.8 Improve social connection for children and families with barriers to social engagement	1.8.1 Explore and advocate for additional funding with State Government to increase social connections amongst children and families who are at risk of experiencing social isolation and who may not engage in traditional community programs, eg young parents, families with child protection involvement, families from low socio-economic-status background, families from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities	2017-27 Council Plan priority area 1 – Promote health and wellbeing – Foster social connection and inclusion 2017-27 Council Plan priority area 4 – Enhance the social and economic environment – Consider socio-economic disadvantage	Early Years/MCH Youth Services	Advocate	Medium	Children and families experiencing social isolation have stronger links to peers, community groups and service providers Programs run within the shire that seek to engage and connect with isolated families, and are referred into by local service providers
	1.8.2 Use existing Council relationships to connect local community groups and services to support initiatives encouraging connection/participation of families with young children, including opportunities for intergenerational relationships		Early Years/MCH	Support	Medium	Community groups and organisations are supported to run programs that connect families
1.9 Increase access to Council managed pools	1.9.1 Review accessibility of Council managed pools on an annual basis, and where possible explore options to increase access for young children and their families	2018-28 Sport and Active Recreation Strategy	Facilities and Operations Early Years	Lead	Medium	Annual review of Council managed pools occurs resulting in increased access for young children and their families

1.10 Explore partnerships with local schools	1.10.1 Explore partnerships with local schools around children's use of school grounds outside of school hours and during school holidays		Facilities and Operations Legal and Corporate Governance Early Years Youth Services	Facilitate	Medium	An agreement is reached between schools and Council to support children's access to school grounds outside of school hours
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Priority area – Children thrive in their community

OBJECTIVE	WHAT WE WILL DO	CORRESPONDING STRATEGIES	INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS	COUNCIL ROLE	PRIORITY	WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE
2.1 Provide and support access to quality kindergarten programs across the shire	2.1.1 In Council's role as early years planner, work with all kindergarten providers to ensure there are sufficient places for every three and four year old child to attend kindergarten within the shire	2017-27 Council Plan priority area 1 – Promote health and wellbeing – Increase our capacity to provide accessible facilities and services	Early Years	Facilitate	High	All eligible children in the shire have access to fifteen hours of four year old kindergarten and there are no wait lists All eligible children in the shire have access to five hours of funded three year old kindergarten by 2022 All eligible children in the shire have access to fifteen hours of funded three year old kindergarten by 2029
	2.1.2 Advocate for increased funding and resource investment by the State Government to co-locate new facilities with relevant early childhood services, eg	2017-27 Council Plan priority area 1 – Promote health and wellbeing – Increase our capacity to	Strategic Planning and Environment Early Years	Advocate	High	Increase in number of new facilities with co-located early years services

	schools and Maternal and Child Health	provide accessible facilities and services				
	2.1.3 Explore new partnership opportunities with not-for-profit and private sector agencies		Early Years	Facilitate	Medium	<p>Number of activities occurring in the shire in partnership between Council, and not for profit and private kindergarten providers</p> <p>The Macedon Ranges Approved Provider Network is established and chaired by Council, meeting at least four times a year and facilitating partnership projects</p>
	2.1.4 Explore feasibility of bush kinder programs being run across the shire		Early Years	Lead/ Facilitate	Medium	Bush kinder programs are offered across the shire where appropriate
2.2 Plan for early education reform within Council managed kindergartens	2.2.1 Implement funded three year old kindergarten in Council managed kindergartens from 2022	2017-27 Council Plan priority area 1 – Promote health and wellbeing – Increase our capacity to provide accessible facilities and services	Early Years	Lead	High	<p>Council provides five hours of funded three year old kindergarten in all Council managed services from 2022, and 15 hours of funded kindergarten by 2029, in line with State Government reform</p> <p>Council sets a strategic direction for the delivery of three and four year old funded kindergarten in the shire</p>

2.3 Continue initiatives that improve school readiness	2.3.1 Continue to access School Readiness Funding (SRF) to assist children with communication, wellbeing, access and inclusion outcomes prior to attending school		Early Years	Lead	Medium	School Readiness Funding is accessed on an annual basis with identified outcomes for children and staff
	2.3.2 Explore options and funding for allied health professionals including speech therapists, dietician, autism specialists to identify developmental issues and maximise school readiness		Early Years	Support	Medium	Families feel their children are more equipped for the transition to, and learning once in, school
	2.3.3 Investigate the need for a shire-wide transition strategy		Early Years	Facilitate	Medium	Families, schools and service providers have clarity of steps around transition planning
2.4 Establish a Child and Family Services Network	2.4.1 Facilitate the development of a Child and Family Services Network to strengthen interagency partnerships with early childhood services in the shire		Early Years/MCH	Facilitate	Medium	Regular meetings are held with early childhood services to respond to community needs
2.5 Strengthen early childhood education and health services	2.5.1 Develop a shire wide workforce recruitment and retention strategy for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services		Early Years/MCH Community & Economic Development Arts & Events	Facilitate	High	A recruitment and retention strategy is in place to support a full complement of qualified staff at ECEC services across the shire
	2.5.2 Child safety is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture in Macedon Ranges Shire Council		Macedon Ranges Shire Council	Lead	High	Protecting children from harm and abuse is embedded in the everyday thinking and practice of leaders, staff and volunteers

	2.5.3 Advocate for funding and service opportunities that facilitate connections for families and children who are hard to reach/overlooked, eg young parents		Early Years/MCH	Advocate/ Facilitate	High	Hard to reach/overlooked families and children have stronger community connections
	2.5.4 Advocate for funding and service opportunities with the State and Federal Government to increase holistic access to local family support and educational services such as new parent groups, allied health care providers, paediatricians and child psychologists		Early Years/MCH	Advocate	High	Children and families are connected and have greater access to qualified health professionals Children and families are able to access local allied health care providers, paediatricians and child psychologists There is an increase in paediatricians and child psychologists and a decrease in average wait times for these services in the shire
2.6 Build on existing Maternal and Child Health initiatives	2.6.1 Develop an education campaign to improve breastfeeding awareness, rates and duration in the shire		Maternal and Child Health	Facilitate	Medium	The Breastfeeding Support Service continues to provide early access to a lactation consultant Further breastfeeding education activities are initiated across the shire 'Fully breastfeeding' rates at 6 months are improved from the 2019/20 rate of 24 percent

						Breastfeeding rates improve in the shire and remain consistently above the state average
	2.6.2 Implement the State Government funded sleep settling initiative		Maternal and Child Health	Lead	Medium	The sleep settling initiative is delivered within the Universal Maternal and Child Health services as per the identified targets of 59 education sessions and 183.6 hours of outreach consultation annually
	2.6.3 Continue to strengthen the <i>smalltalk</i> supported playgroup program		Maternal and Child Health	Lead	Medium	All families assessed as meeting the criteria have access to a <i>smalltalk</i> playgroup
	2.6.4 Continue to strengthen Enhanced Maternal and Child Health programming to support eligible families and children					All families who meet the criteria for Enhanced Maternal and Child Health support have access to the service
	2.6.5 Support, educate about and promote use of reusable cloth nappies		Maternal and Child Health	Support	Medium	Number of families indicating they use reusable nappies
	2.6.6 Support, enable and deliver innovative programs and activities targeting diverse parents of young children, eg young parents, parents who are socially isolated, new dads		Maternal and Child Health Youth Services	Support/ Facilitate	Medium	There is an increase in programs and activities in the shire that support a broad range of parents and families

						Vulnerable parents report they feel better connected, resourced and supported
	2.6.7 Implement learnings of COVID-19, to explore innovative ways for MCH Nurses to connect with new parents and to enable new parents to connect with one another		Maternal and Child Health	Lead	High	New parents report that they feel connected, resourced and supported New parents develop relationships with peers outside of the traditional new parent groups
2.7 Support the promotion of events and activities for families	2.7.1 Contribute to the annual planning and promotion of Council-led arts, culture and sporting activities and events for children of all abilities and backgrounds	2017-27 Council Plan priority area 1 – Promote health and wellbeing – Foster social connection and inclusion 2018-28 Arts and Culture Strategy 2018-28 Sport and Active Recreation Strategy 2019-29 Visitor Economy Strategy 2016 Environment Strategy	Community & Economic Development Arts & Events Open Space and Recreation Strategic Planning and Environment Early Years/MCH	Lead	Medium	More children are engaged with arts, culture, sports and learning
	2.7.2 Explore and promote activities, events and programs for children organised by external stakeholders	2017-27 Council Plan priority area 1 – Promote health and wellbeing – Foster social connection and inclusion	Early Years/MCH	Support	Medium	More children are engaged with arts, culture, sports and learning

	2.7.3 Partner with Goldfields Library Corporation to explore opportunities, including events and activities, to enhance social connection, participation, wellbeing, fun, literacy and introduction of lifelong learning for children	2017-27 Council Plan priority area 1 – Promote health and wellbeing – Foster social connection and inclusion	Goldfields Library Corporation Early Years/MCH	Support	Medium	More children are engaged with arts, culture, sports and learning
2.8 Increase capacity of Council staff and programs to support Indigenous children and their families	2.8.1 Provide cultural competency training to Council staff in early childhood and Maternal and Child Health settings	2017-27 Council Plan priority area 1 – Celebrate and respect Indigenous culture 2021-23 Reconciliation Action Plan (in draft form - currently awaiting Council endorsement)	Early Years/MCH Community & Economic Development Arts & Events	Lead	Medium	Number of Early Years/MCH staff participating in cultural competency training
	2.8.2 Continue to work towards goals as identified in the Reconciliation Action Plan		Early Years/MCH	Lead	Medium	Indigenous culture is celebrated across the shire
	2.8.3 Encourage other Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) providers in the shire to participate in cultural competency training	2017-27 Council Plan priority area 1 – Celebrate and respect Indigenous culture	Early Years	Advocate	Medium	Number of ECEC services in the shire participating in cultural competency training
	2.8.4 Continue to explore ways to celebrate Indigenous cultures in public spaces in planning, design and activation of the space		Community & Economic Development Arts & Culture Early Years	Support/ Facilitate	Medium	Indigenous cultures are celebrated in public spaces
2.9 Continue to deliver an immunisation service to babies and children	2.9.1 Continue to provide an immunisation service to families and children in the shire as per the national immunisation schedule		Environmental Health Early Years/MCH	Lead	Medium	An accessible immunisation service is available to all residents across the shire

	2.9.2 Explore opportunities to support hard to reach families to have their babies and children immunised		Environmental Health Early Years/MCH	Lead	Medium	All eligible babies and children in the shire are immunised as per the national immunisation schedule
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Priority area – Children’s needs are recognised in infrastructure and the built environment

OBJECTIVE	WHAT WE WILL DO	CORRESPONDING STRATEGIES	INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS	COUNCIL ROLE	PRIORITY	WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE
3.1 Support children and families of all abilities to access open spaces	<p>3.1.1 In conjunction with community consultation, Early Years and Maternal and Child Health are engaged as knowledge experts for projects in the community impacting children and families, to gain a better understanding of children’s and families’ needs, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all ability access to Council outdoor and community open spaces including seating, shade, BBQ facilities and toilets with baby change facilities and breast feeding amenities • improvements to parks and public spaces to make them more child and family friendly • fencing of playgrounds as appropriate to increase safety of children 	<p>2017-27 Council Plan priority area 1 – Promote health and wellbeing – Increase our capacity to provide accessible facilities and services</p> <p>2013 Open Space Strategy</p>	<p>Open Space and Recreation</p> <p>Strategic Planning and Environment</p> <p>Early Years/MCH</p>	Lead	Medium	All families can access and enjoy open spaces

3.2 Understand community need and satisfaction with baby change facilities in the shire	3.2.1 Undertake a review of baby change facilities within each township		Facilities and Operations Early Years/MCH	Lead	Medium	Review undertaken that provides clarity on possible gaps in baby change facilities in each township
	3.2.2 Support budget bids and grants that allow for upgrade of facilities with baby change facilities as needed		Facilities and Operations Early Years/MCH	Lead/Support	Medium	Number and location of baby change facilities in the shire reflect community need
3.3 Strengthen municipal planning of early years services	3.3.1 Identify the feasibility of a substantive Early Years Planner to address social planning priorities, and to support and lead collaboration and development of the early years sector across the shire	2017-27 Council Plan priority area 1 – Promote health and wellbeing – Increase our capacity to provide accessible facilities and services 2021 SGS Early Years Modelling Report	Strategic Planning and Environment Early Years	Lead	Medium	It is proposed to employ an Early Years Planner on an ongoing basis subject to feasibility and budget
	3.3.2 Work with stakeholders on a process that considers early years expertise in the provision of public play spaces and early years infrastructure in the shire, and broader infrastructure and development projects including new planning applications			Lead	Medium	Multiple early childhood services are available locally to meet expanding community needs
	3.3.3 In Council's role as Early Years' Planner, review the provision of childcare in the Macedon Ranges and investigate opportunities to increase the access				Lead	Medium

Priority area – Children are respected and valued in their community

OBJECTIVE	WHAT WE WILL DO	CORRESPONDING STRATEGIES	INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS	COUNCIL ROLE	PRIORITY	WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE
4.1 Involve children and families in consultation to inform services and program planning, and infrastructure and development projects in the shire	4.1.1 Develop engagement strategies to ensure children and families are included in the planning and development of local activities, services, programs and projects	2021 Community Engagement Policy	Early Years/MCH Communications	Lead	Medium	Children and parent views inform decision making
	4.1.2 Communicate with children and families in child-friendly ways about changes to programs and services that impact them		Early Years/MCH Communications	Lead	Medium	Relevant information is communicated to children in ways that they can understand
4.2 Explore the use of video technology in early childhood services	4.2.1 Explore the use of video tours of Maternal and Child Health centres, toy libraries and playgroups, as per video tours of kindergartens, allowing greater access for families	2021 Community Engagement Policy	Early Years/MCH Communications	Lead	Medium	Video tours are available for Council Early Years/MCH programs and services
	4.2.2 Explore other innovative ideas to showcase early childhood services and add elements of creativity to programs		Early Years/MCH	Lead	Medium	Increase in the use of creative and contemporary technologies in Council's early childhood services
	4.2.3 Kindergarten and MCH staff build a collection of strategies, resources and activities that can be utilised to support with the intention of strengthening children's and families' engagement with services during periods of restrictions due to COVID-19		Early Years/MCH	Lead	High	Children and their families remain connected to Council's early years services when face to face service provision isn't possible

4.3 Explore feasibility of Macedon Ranges becoming a child friendly community	4.3.1 Identify processes and criteria involved in recognising the Macedon Ranges as a child-friendly community		Early Years/MCH	Lead	Medium	Council agrees to work towards becoming a child-friendly shire
	4.3.2 Establish a partnership with UNICEF and obtain UNICEF recognition if recognition criteria are met		Early Years/MCH	Facilitate	Medium	A child-friendly framework is adopted in the Macedon Ranges