

## Connect: A municipal plan for children, young people and their families in the City of Whittlesea 2013 to 2018

### Shaping Our Future

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### Acknowledgements

The City of Whittlesea recognises the rich Indigenous heritage of this country and acknowledges the Wurundjeri Willum Clan as the traditional custodians of the municipality.

Acknowledgement and thanks to the children, young people, parents, community members, staff and local partners who have shared their expertise with Council and informed this plan.

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## **Introduction**

The City of Whittlesea's vision is *"Creating vibrant self-sustaining communities together"*. To assist in achieving this vision, Connect...A municipal plan for children, young people and families in the City of Whittlesea focuses on supporting the wellbeing of children, young people and their families. This five year plan has been informed by demographic data, research evidence, and community and stakeholder consultations.

The City of Whittlesea is a diverse, dynamic and fast growing municipality with natural bushlands, established suburbs and new housing developments, offering a choice of lifestyles to residents and making it a great place to live. However, there are some critical social vulnerabilities and significant infrastructure challenges.

What has emerged from the data and consultations is that geographic isolation, daily pressures, limited services and infrastructure contribute to difficult and complex circumstances and personal vulnerability. Rapid population growth also means there is increasing pressure on the existing infrastructure and demand on community resources in both the established and new growth areas.

This plan is about supporting the whole community, with particular attention to children, young people and their families and carers, from all household types, backgrounds and abilities. Council's emphasis is on prevention, early intervention and creating resilient and cohesive communities now and into the future.

### **A conceptual Framework for children, young people and their families**

Research tells us that what happens to children and young people has consequences right through the course of their lives. There are many opportunities to intervene and make a difference to the lives of children and young people<sup>1</sup>.

### **The ecological perspective**

The health, development and wellbeing of children and young people, and the functioning of their families, is shaped by environmental factors. The ecological model originates from Bronfenbrenner in 1979. The factors that impact on positive development of children and young people are illustrated in the figure opposite.

*This plan is about supporting the whole community with particular attention to children, young people and their families and carers.*

## The ecological perspective

What supports child and adolescent development?



## References

Bronfenbrenner (1979)

Victorian Child and Adolescent Framework (2008)

Youth Support and Advocacy Service (2012)

## **The life Course perspective**

### **Children in the early years: under eight years**

The antenatal, family, social and learning environments are critical in the first eight years of a child's life. The family environment is important because young children develop through their relationships with others<sup>2</sup>. As they grow children experience other environments, such as early childhood education and care.

Two major aspects of children's early experiences that are predictive of their development and functioning at the point of school entry, are the home care and learning environment, and children's experiences in early childhood programs such as kindergarten and childcare<sup>3</sup>.

Rapid brain development occurs in the early years, and is predictive of success throughout the life course. It is also known this brain development continues right through to adulthood<sup>4</sup>.

The family is integral in shaping a child's life, and the experiences within the family shapes brain development, cognitive, social and emotional skills<sup>5</sup>. Therefore strong, positive and shared relationships with family, parents and significant people in children's lives are keys to their positive development and wellbeing.

### **Children and young people in the middle years: aged eight to 12**

This is a period of great opportunity and risk in the development of children and young people. The middle years is a period of major transition and heightened risk and can be a major turning point for children and young people<sup>6</sup>. It involves substantial physiological, neurological, cognitive and psychosocial change.

This transition is accompanied by a number of risk factors in relation to school engagement, peer relations, and identity formation regarding culture, ethnicity, gender and sexuality. Play remains significant for young people in the middle years, as well as social interaction and safety and security at home, and with peers. Challenges can emerge that may impact on social and emotional development.

Policy and practice should focus on strengthening development through the provision of positive experiences, early detection of risk factors, and by creating and securing protective factors.

### **Young people: aged 12 to 17**

Adolescence is a period of rapid physical, social and emotional maturation and an active lifestyle is important for physical and emotional wellbeing. In these years the prefrontal cortex within the brain is developing and is responsible for rationalisation of choices and consequences. This phase is marked by heightened emotional sensitivity and impulsive actions, potentially resulting in vulnerabilities including isolation, mental health and disengagement.

*“Young children experience their world as an environment of relationships, and these relationships affect virtually all aspects of their development.”* Centre on the Developing Child, Harvard University<sup>7</sup>

These vulnerabilities in adolescents highlight the importance of social institutions, such as schools and services, to support families, and to provide young people with opportunities for personal growth through learning and skills development. Also necessary is early risk identification and intervention by families, educators and service providers<sup>8</sup>.

### Young adults: aged 17 to 25

This period of early adulthood is marked by consolidation and a more global view of oneself. Young adults experience a series of transitions, for example, towards independent living, into the labour market, and towards increased financial autonomy. Developmentally, it is a period of consolidating capabilities that have been shaped by their earlier experiences. A young adult's identity formation, in relation to family, community and the wider world are more evolved and they usually experience a greater sense of purpose, personal power, freedom and self esteem<sup>9</sup>.

Cognitively, while the prefrontal cortex, responsible for regulating impulse control is more developed, it is still maturing into its adult form, and continues to undergo pruning and discarding. Parts of the brain structure that are developmentally significant at this time are those responsible for processing and regulating emotional and social experiences<sup>10</sup>. Cultural, social and interpersonal competencies are either strengthened or weakened in young adulthood. These are affected by life experiences and potential risk can be mitigated through early identification and treatment, particularly those associated with isolation and disengagement from the community, work or education.

### Families

For families, their immediate community and wider social environments are critical. The support a family receives from their extended family and/or community is vital<sup>11</sup>.

Factors that impact good developmental outcomes for children and young people include:

- How well basic needs, like income, employment, housing are met
- Social connectedness
- Access to quality services and facilities
- Family friendly workplace arrangements enabling a balance between work and family commitments<sup>12</sup>.

Research emphasises the opportunity that service providers have in enabling and facilitating family strengthening as a vital element of their service delivery to support positive child and young people's development. This also impacts on future learning outcomes. Family

strengthening practices involve cultural competence, understanding the impacts of multigenerational care, and other factors impacting on family life<sup>13</sup>.

### Services and public places

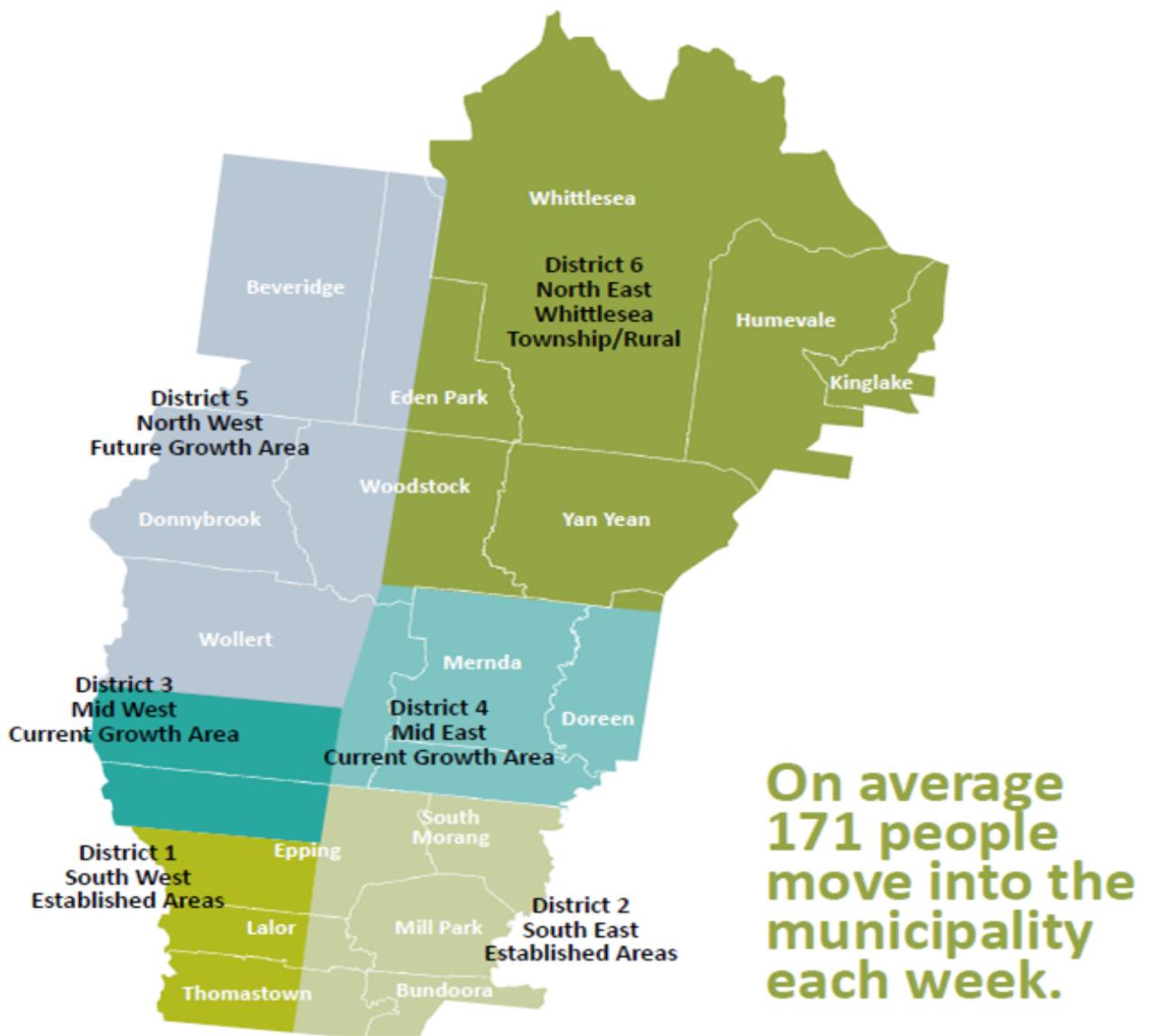
Services and public places have an important role in supporting the physical, social and emotional health and development of children, young people and families. Inclusive approaches to the provision of public places and integrated service systems can ensure access to services and opportunities that connect people, facilitate engagement in physical activity as well as respond to the needs of children, young people and families in a coordinated and timely manner. Research indicates that public environments make a large difference to the wellbeing of children, young people and families<sup>14</sup>.

*“There is growing recognition that the built environment – the man-made physical structures and infrastructure of communities – has an impact on our health and well-being<sup>15</sup>”* **Tim Moore, Centre for Community Child Health**

### Demographic profile

In 2011 the population of the City of Whittlesea was 154,804. Between 2010 and 2011 the population grew by 8,700 people. On average 171 people move into the municipality each week. By 2031, the population is forecast to exceed 290,132, reflecting an average annual growth rate of 3.34 per cent. Between 2012 and 2017 the most significant growth in population is forecast to be in the early years and middle year cohorts and those aged between 35 and 49 years.

The demographic profiling and analysis of population trends within the City of Whittlesea draws on local, regional and state data. This data has been collated within a proposed District Planning Framework as illustrated.



## Districts

### District 1: Epping, Lalor and Thomastown

In 2011, the residential population was 59,188<sup>16</sup>. By 2031 the most significant growth in population will be children and young people aged 0 to 11 years<sup>17</sup>.

Currently the district has:

- The greatest number of households on low income<sup>18</sup> and the highest unemployment rate in the municipality<sup>19</sup>
- The greatest number of households experiencing mortgage stress<sup>20</sup>
- The greatest number of households from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds and who are also Born Overseas<sup>21</sup>

- A high youth disengagement rate<sup>22</sup>
- The greatest number of single parent families<sup>23</sup>
- According to the SEIFA Index of Disadvantage this district has the highest disadvantage in the municipality<sup>24</sup>
- Lalor and Thomastown have one of the greatest number of developmentally vulnerable six years olds<sup>25</sup>.

### **District 2: Blossom Park, Bundoora, Mill Park and South Morang**

In 2011 the residential population was 60,857<sup>26</sup>. By 2031 this district will predominantly experience an aging population<sup>27</sup>.

Currently the district has:

- High rates of rental stress<sup>28</sup>
- The second highest unemployment rate in the municipality<sup>29</sup>
- Over 55 per cent of mothers are employed<sup>30</sup>
- High rates of youth disengagement predominantly in the suburbs of Mill Park and South Morang<sup>31</sup>
- One of the greatest number of one parent families<sup>32</sup>
- One of the greatest number of people over age 15 providing unpaid childcare<sup>33</sup>.

### **District 3: Epping North**

In 2011 the residential population was 7,595<sup>34</sup>. By 2031 this will more than quadruple to 34,972<sup>35</sup>.

Currently the district has:

- The most significant growth will occur in the 8-12 years and the youth aged cohorts<sup>36</sup>
- Between 2012 and 2031 the dominant household type will be couple families with dependents and one parent families<sup>37</sup>
- One of the greatest number of households experiencing mortgage and rental stress<sup>38</sup>
- The greatest number of people not fluent in English<sup>39</sup>
- The greatest number of Recent Arrivals<sup>40</sup>.

**By 2031, the population is forecast to exceed 290,132 reflecting an average annual growth rate of 3.34 per cent.**

#### District 4: Mernda and Doreen

In 2011 the residential population was 19,548<sup>41</sup>. By 2031 the population will more than double to 51,272<sup>42</sup>.

Currently the district has:

- One of the highest weekly household income, earning \$2,500 or more in the municipality<sup>43</sup>
- According to the SEIFA Index of Disadvantage this district has the least disadvantage in the municipality<sup>44</sup>
- The greatest number of mothers in the workforce<sup>45</sup>
- One of the greatest number of developmentally vulnerable 6 year olds<sup>46</sup>
- One of the greatest number of one parent families with children under 15 years<sup>47</sup>.

#### District 5: Wollert and Donnybrook

In 2011 the residential population was 3,316<sup>48</sup>. By 2031 the population will increase to over 40,000<sup>49</sup>.

This district is forecast to experience:

- The most significant growth in population will be children and young people 0 to 24 years<sup>50</sup>
- The dominant household type will be couple families with dependents<sup>51</sup>.

#### District 6: Whittlesea Township

In 2011 the residential population was 4,298<sup>52</sup>. By 2031 it will be more of an aging population and lone person households will increase most significantly<sup>53</sup>.

Currently the district has:

- The lowest number of people from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds and who were Born Overseas<sup>54</sup>
- One of the greatest number of households earning \$2,500 or more per week<sup>55</sup>
- Relatively high rental and mortgage stress<sup>56</sup>

**Between 2012 and 2017 the most significant growth in population in the City of Whittlesea is forecast to be in the early years and middle years cohorts and those aged between 35 and 49 years.**

## Supporting children, young people and their families in the City of Whittlesea

The City of Whittlesea currently offers a wide range of services and supports for children, young people and families.

Council has three main roles:

- **Provider:**  
As a provider, Council provides a number of services, public places and facilities for children, young people and their families.
- **Facilitator:**  
As a facilitator, Council facilitates a range of partnerships and professional development that supports those providing services for children, young people their and families.
- **Advocate:**  
As an advocate, Council works on behalf of the community to generate evidence, consult widely and advocate for vital infrastructure and services to meet the needs of a growing population.

The following provides an overview of the services and supports provided by Council that primarily focuses on children, young people and families.

### Early Years

**‘A connected and inclusive community for all children’**

#### Maternal and Child Health

Maternal and Child Health (MCH) is a universal primary care service for families with children from birth to school age in the City of Whittlesea. It provides preventative, early detection and intervention services addressing physical, emotional and social factors affecting babies, children and their parents. In particular this service provides a universal MCH service, this includes 10 Key Age and Stage visits at the following age points for children.

The MCH services include:

- Breast feeding advice
- Maternal health advice
- Early detection of health and development problems
- Immunisation information and advice
- Parenting support
- Information on nutrition and hygiene

- Guidance about growth and development of children
- Child safety advice
- First time parents' group
- Referral to support groups and agencies
- Ante-natal information.

The Enhanced MCH is a free, confidential and culturally responsive service offering more intensive short term support to:

- Parents experiencing significant parenting difficulties
- Vulnerable families
- Families with children aged up to three years, who are considered at risk of harm.

*The City of Whittlesea currently offers a wide range of services and supports.*

### **Immunisation for children**

Children and young people are protected from serious and preventable diseases through immunisation. Vaccinations for the before school immunisation program begin from six weeks of age and finish at four years. Children can be immunised for free at any of Council's public immunisation sessions.

Each year MCH visits all local secondary schools to provide free immunisation, with parental consent, to year 7 and year 10 students.

### **Inclusion and Professional Support Program**

The Inclusion and Professional Support Program (City of Whittlesea is the lead agency for the Northern Outer Melbourne Region) supports Australian Government Child Care Benefit-approved services so they can welcome and include all children. Inclusion support facilitators work to build the capacity of children's services to successfully include all children, particularly those with additional needs.

### **Family Day Care**

*Family Day Care is a licensed service providing care for a small group of children, aged up to 12 years. The children are cared for in a registered educator's home, and supported by Council's coordination unit.*

### **School holiday care**

Whittlesea Special Kids Holiday Activity Program (WhiSKHA) is a program funded by Council to provide vacation care for primary school aged children who require a high level of

disability support, are residents of the City of Whittlesea, and are experiencing difficulty accessing mainstream vacation care programs.

WhiSKHA Teen is a holiday program for teenagers aged 12 to 18 years living with high support needs that live, attend school, or have a parent/carer that works or studies in the City of Whittlesea. The Family Holiday program caters for families residing within the City of Whittlesea. It offers affordable activities for families whose needs meet the following criteria:

- Referrals from local agencies Current
- Health Care Card holder
- In receipt of a Centrelink allowance.

### **Family Services Training Calendar**

Council facilitates the annual production of the Family Services Training Calendar in collaboration with local agency partners. Planned in response to the voice of services and families a broad range of topics and issues are explored to support improved outcomes for children, young people and families across the municipality.

*Children and young people are protected from serious and preventable diseases through immunisation.*

### **Whittlesea Early Years Conference**

The annual Whittlesea Early Years Conference seeks to strengthen professional learning, practice, and promote networking for early years professionals from diverse services. Planned and created in collaboration with partners it features a range of speakers and workshops on local priorities.

Participants in the conference include education and care services, including kindergarten, long day care, out of school hours and vacation care, family day care, maternal and child health, early childhood intervention, playgroups, library and family and community agencies.

The conference offers the opportunity to explore integrated practice, innovative service delivery family strengthening and interagency partnerships.

### **Kindergarten Central Enrolment Scheme: 4 year old**

Council manages a Kindergarten Central Enrolment Scheme for 4 year old children. It works collaboratively with kindergarten management bodies to provide a place for all children wanting to attend local kindergartens. The scheme ensures that all placements are allocated in an equitable and transparent manner. A quality kindergarten experience provides young children with the opportunities to improve skills that are important for life, including being ready for school. The Council of Australian Governments endorsed a major National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education in 2008. Based on this agreement, all

State and Territory Governments are committed, by 2013, to providing 15 hours of kindergarten for 40 weeks per year, for every child before going to school.

### **Kindergarten lease and service agreements**

Council leases buildings, undertakes capital works and ensures maintenance impacted by regulatory compliance are prioritised. Service agreements are based on a partnership approach with management bodies to ensure the provision of quality integrated programs for children and their families.

### **Kindergarten infrastructure**

In the context of the growing population, Council faces an unprecedented pace of capital and new infrastructure projects. A significant number of these have an early years component that is required under legislation to meet a range of compliance criterion. Council redevelops facilities in established areas, and builds new facilities in new growth areas.

### **Playgroups**

The Early Years Partnerships Team seeks to build community capacity in providing a broad range of responsive playgroup models to improve health and social connection for parents and carers, and afford young children the opportunity to learn and develop through play activities and social interaction. Playgroups are unique, in that they provide the opportunity for shared experiences between children and their significant adults.

The Supported Playgroup and Parent Group (SPPI) project is overseen and facilitated in collaboration with the Whittlesea Early Years Partnership (Best Start) partners.

### **Whittlesea Early Years (Best Start) Partnership**

The Partnership involves agencies that provide early years services in the municipality, to work with and advocate for children, families and the community, and to foster inclusive, responsive and supportive services for children.

There are currently 38 partner agencies supporting the implementation of the action plan, and progressing the four priority areas: early intervention, family violence, parent participation and schools and community engagement.

### ***Youth Services 'Respect and dignity for all young People. Diversity is valued and embraced'***

#### **Baseline Youth Services**

Council's commitment to the best outcomes for all young people, is informed by YouthPlan2030. City of Whittlesea Youth Services, Baseline's, core business is concerned with all aspects of young people's development in the complex transition from childhood to adulthood. Youth Services has a prevention, early intervention and capacity building focus for young people aged 10 to 25 years.

Baseline Youth Services operates at a number of levels including:

- Work in local areas and communities
- Targeted portfolio work
- Creating opportunities through programs, activities and events
- Family strengthening
- Facilitating partnerships and advocacy
- Policy and service system development
- Promoting inclusive planning of the municipal social and physical infrastructures
- Enabling positive outcomes for the wellbeing of young people
- Support for young people - Information provision and referral pathways to services.

**Council is Committed to the best outcomes for all young people, informed by YouthPlan2030.**

Young people are viewed as experts in their own lives and are actively involved in creating change in the municipality. They work with Youth Services informing Council on local priorities. Youth Services also focuses on local geographic areas (or districts) and targeted portfolios. Local area work involves connecting with young people, families, communities and services in strengthening support and developmental opportunities at a neighbourhood level. Portfolios have a strategic focus in responding to specific issues and the needs of diverse groups.

These include:

- Aboriginal young people
- Arts
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse young people
- Recreation & leisure
- Education, employment & training
- Family strengthening
- Interface councils
- Mental health & wellbeing
- Participation

- Renewal and new growth areas
- Same sex attracted young people
- Vulnerable young people
- Young people and the public realm
- Young people with disabilities
- Youth service system development.

## EDGE

EDGE, located at Westfield Plenty Valley, is Council's first significant facility for young people. The design of the youth friendly space was informed by local young people and international research. EDGE accommodates Council's Youth Services and a range of agencies that support young people, including The Pavilion, a school for young people who have disengaged with education. It also offers resources for parents and carers of young people, and other members of the community.

## Whittlesea Youth Commitment

Council supports the Whittlesea Youth Commitment (WYC). The WYC was first established in 1998 to improve education and employment outcomes for young people. It involves community service, education and employment services working together to provide programs and services to meet the needs of young people.

WYC is facilitated by a long standing partnership between the City of Whittlesea, RMIT and the Hume Whittlesea Local Learning and Employment Network. Membership includes schools, community agencies and employers. The Community Team works to improve education and employment outcomes for young people.

## What children, young people, their families and our community told us

Information from local consultations conducted in recent years was analysed to create a picture of community aspirations and needs. The following summaries are what children, young people, parents, carers, the community and service partners have told us.

### The voice of children

This consultation information informs Council regarding children's wellbeing; what they like to do, and what they think local children's spaces and places should be like.

### Parents

Children recognise and deeply value the importance of their parents in their lives. 'Mum and dad are special because they love me'. '(They) care about me, teach me, give me hugs, look after me and love me'.

## Family

Children tell us they are most happy when they are with their family 'having fun and giggling'. They are happy doing special things, as well as doing ordinary things. Special things include being on holiday 'because I spend time with my family', swimming, 'playing basketball with my dad' and 'helping mum and dad make pizzas'.

## Play

The ordinary things children like to do include 'driving to the shops with my dad', 'helping mummy wash the dishes', playing dress-ups, being able to 'play outside and dance with my brother and sister', and 'wrestling with my cousin and practicing my rap dancing'.

## Places

Children in the early years reported they wanted places to be with their siblings and parents. They want outdoor places, places with natural environments as well as places with 'things to play on'..

## Physical infrastructure

Children in the middle years reported that they want public swimming pools, play spaces, 'big' play equipment, a place with a stage and events for children. They also value the outdoors. They said that they 'love' the City of Whittlesea, they see it as a 'peaceful, happy place with heaps of parks and trees'.

### ***"If you could build a kinder, what would it look like?"***

*It would have a big store-room with lots of toys*

*My kinder would be a bus*

*A kinder with train track*

*I like outside, my kinder has a sandpit*

*Me and my friend at kinder*

*There is a rainbow outside at my kinder*

*I would have a slide outside*

*A roof, some toys, play dough and rocks inside*

*I would have lots of different coloured paint at my kinder*

*All the windows are round.*

*A square kinder with round windows and doors."*

**City of Whittlesea Universal Access Consultations, Jacaranda Preschool, 2012**

## **The voice of young people**

The following data was extracted from more than 40 consultations with local young people over the past five years. Most of these discussions revolved around the theme of wellbeing, as defined by young people.

### **Family**

Family is of utmost importance to young people and their overall wellbeing. Young people need their family to provide support and guidance. It is important to them that their parents feel free of emotional and financial stress, or other threats.

### **Friends**

Friends are also significant to young people. They need friendships that are safe and trustworthy. Their peer group environment allows them to gain independence, learn about themselves and the world around them. Sometimes peer experiences can involve negative experiences such as bullying and isolation.

### **Bullying**

A strong message from young people is that bullying is prevalent and that effective interventions are needed both at school, and in environments out of school.

### **Aboriginal young people**

For Aboriginal young people, family is central to their wellbeing. They gain strength from their family and culture and look to their family and community for role models. Young people are distressed when their family is in conflict or family members are suffering.

### **Newly arrived young people**

Newly arrived young people face language and cultural barriers in a number of critical domains in their life including participation in education, employment, sport and leisure opportunities. Overwhelmingly they report experiencing racism, affecting their physical and emotional wellbeing.

### **School engagement**

Young people recognise engagement with school is important for their overall development and their future prospects.

However, they strongly express the need for teaching styles and curriculum content to be relevant to them to keep them engaged. Young people also want schools that are safe and enjoyable places with respectful staff, which acknowledge culture, and are concerned for the welfare of students.

### **Service system**

Young people recognise that at times they need informal support and at other times they need expert support and guidance to assist their development. Feeling confident and

empowered is important to the wellbeing of young people. This comes with having safe environments with support structures in place to prevent isolation. Local young people have experienced positive relationships with Youth Workers.

### **Relationships**

Young people need positive and trustworthy relationships with peers, parents and service providers. They appreciate their relationships with Youth Workers and teachers who care about their wellbeing. Young people often request assistance to manage their relationships with peers, partners and parents.

### **Civic participation**

Young people want to contribute to community decisions for the benefit of themselves and others in the community. They believe in the value of their input.

### **Physical infrastructure**

Young people advise that infrastructure needs to be inclusive of young people, and want places that generate pride in their neighbourhood. They need opportunities to socialise in places that are safe, affordable and welcoming.

Public spaces need to facilitate intergenerational and intercultural mingling, provide shops and amenities, socialising and entertainment opportunities.

### **Sport, recreation and leisure**

Young people want opportunities to participate locally in sport, recreation, leisure and social activities. These are significant for their physical and social wellbeing. These opportunities need to be accessible, affordable, culturally relevant and suitable for young women.

### **A place of wellbeing**

Young people express the strong view that although there is much that can be improved they really like living in the City of Whittlesea.

*Young people need positive and trustworthy relationships with peers, parents and service providers.*

### **The voice of parents**

This summary is drawn from consultations with parents and most significantly the recent reviews of MCH services and kindergarten services.

### **Parenting**

Parents of young children want access to playgroups, support services and parent strengthening programs. Parents also stated the need for affordable, safe places for mothers' groups to meet and local opportunities to 'do things with the kids'. They particularly want information and skills related to children's developmental goals, health and

nutrition, guidance regarding behaviour and play, also support on preparing children for school.

### **Early years**

Working parents advised that to attend programs, they need to be available out of business hours, such as weekends, to cater for working mothers and fathers. Appointments needed to be regular, with consistent access to the same practitioners. Furthermore, the location, atmosphere and the condition of the premises were important to them.

### **Middle years**

Parents value and appreciate the opportunity for their adolescent children to have access to programs where they interact with others of their own age and where they can learn new skills. The services they seek for their kids include out of school hours programs, libraries, and leisure and recreation programs. Parents in both rural and new growth areas would like more opportunities and choices for their children.

Children and young people with additional needs Parents need specialist programs, including out-of-hours programs for children with specific needs and access to integrated services and referrals.

### **Mental health**

Parents seek support to manage their own depression and to adjust to a multitude of pressures, including financial pressure and returning to work.

### **Adolescent parenting**

Parents appreciate opportunities to strengthen their parenting skills and increase their confidence to interact with their adolescent children. They seek websites for parents, support groups, and access to parent strengthening opportunities addressing:

- Understanding adolescent development, what is 'normal behaviour', understanding their point of view, knowing what is going on in their lives, and balancing intervention with respect for their privacy
- Listening and communicating with young people
- Setting boundaries, avoiding and dealing with conflict, managing difficult behaviour and resolving problems
- Preparing kids for transition from primary school to secondary school and adjusting parenting styles as they grow older
- Helping their children with their homework
- Supporting their children under pressure
- Handling alcohol and drug use

- Responding to bullying, keeping their children safe in cyber-space, and safe partying
- Ways to enjoy spending time with their children.

*Parents Appreciate opportunities to strengthen their parenting skills and increase their confidence.*

### **The voice of the community**

Residents of all ages, backgrounds and geographic areas within the municipality contributed to Council's 'Community Plan-Shaping Our Future: Whittlesea 2025'. Council officers, service providers and other stakeholders also expressed their views.

### **Positives in the City of Whittlesea**

It is highly valued that Aboriginal people are recognised as the First Australians and that there is harmony and diversity in the community. Council is perceived as progressive with a consultative culture and offering opportunities for democratic participation. The community also appreciated the high quality, social and physical infrastructure and the natural environment.

### **Concern was expressed about**

Population growth, the aging population, the urban sprawl, the increased cost of living, the lack of work-life balance and sedentary lifestyles. There is also concern about increased gambling.

### **Community connection**

The need for more opportunities for community connection and community interaction with schools was identified. Young people need access to more Youth Workers and more things to do. This included young people with a disability and international students. Young people need opportunities to contribute to planning for their community and more education pathway options. Parents need support and to increase their understanding of young people.

### **Community aspirations**

That everyone belongs and diverse communities are connected and included. That young people are being listened to, catered for and welcomed. There was also recognition that the physical and social infrastructure needs to be put in place, before people move into new areas. There was also support for ample open space to be preserved for play and social interaction and that public transport is adequate. Rural areas should be looked after so that the city remains a green, friendly, happy, safe place.

### **Social infrastructure**

The community aspire to have service hubs that are district based, comprehensive, all age and co-located services with a strength-based prevention and early intervention focus. That there are lifelong learning opportunities for young and older learners, and support for young

people who are working mothers, who have a disability or mental illness, etc. Activities, festivals, entertainment and events were promoted. There is also the need for access to jobs through local businesses employing local workers. The scarcity of services for young people in Thomastown and Epping is a concern. The community also expressed the need for support for vulnerable and disengaged young people, services for troubled and traumatised young people, respite and nursing care appropriately designed for young people.

*“In June 2011, 1.9 million children in Australia usually attended one or more types of childcare. Of the 3.6 million children aged 12 years or younger, just over half (52%) usually attended one or more types of childcare.”<sup>57</sup>*

### **Culturally competent services**

The need for more comprehensive settlement services for newly arrived young people was expressed, particularly as many new migrants and refugees are under 19 years old. There is also demand for awareness campaigns that address racism and discrimination, especially as it relates to the African and Iraqi communities. Also a need was expressed for indoor and outdoor places to be more welcoming and inclusive of diverse communities.

### **Civic participation**

The community expressed the importance of children and young people to be heard, the need for leadership opportunities to be available to them and for consultative practices to be ‘intelligent, transparent and accountable’.

### **Physical Infrastructure**

The community wants its physical infrastructure to be inclusive of all ages and all cultures. That sacred places and spaces are preserved. That new suburbs are designed to be people centred, for intergenerational mingling, with ‘village elements’, integrated public transport, open spaces and parks with linkages between them, community gardens and market places. Also, that the municipality has aquatic, recreation and entertainment facilities, including an open-air sound shell and a regional level sports stadium. Importantly, that the municipality has affordable, social and public housing and affordable rental housing. Specifically the need for facilities for 16-17 year old young people was identified. Street art is also valued and supported by the community.

### **What service providers are saying**

In 2012 consultations were held with the Whittlesea Early Years Partnership (Best Start), Whittlesea Community Futures Youth Cluster and the staff of Council’s Family and Youth Department.

### **Isolation**

This was identified as a very significant issue in many households within the municipality. Isolation is perceived as a result of many interrelated factors, including location, limited English, racism, limited mobility, and a lack of time and places to mingle with people.

### Financial and other stresses

This appears to contribute to strained relationships, parents feeling incompetent as parents, poor community connections, family breakdown, and at its worst, family violence. Associated health issues include anxiety and depression. Service providers report that these pressures particularly relate to some families in the new growth areas, particularly Mernda, as well as the older established areas of Thomastown and Lalor.

### Family violence

The City of Whittlesea has the second highest rate of family violence in the Northern Region. Children are witnessing violence, which is recognised as a form of child abuse. Families are caught in the cycle with disturbances passing from one generation to the next - 'Hurt people...hurt people'<sup>58</sup>.

### New parents

Practitioners observe new parents can initially find parenting overwhelming. They are susceptible to exhaustion, depression and anxiety. This, coupled with the current practice of short-term stays in hospital, can contribute to lack of confidence in the early stages of parenting.

*"Children in one-parent families (55%) were more likely to attend informal care than children in couple families (35%).59" ABS 2011*

### Parents of adolescents

Parents express the need to strengthen their communication and discipline skills, as well as their need to understand and guide their children through adolescent challenges and transitions. Parents seek support with parenting and opportunities and places for positive and affordable interaction with their children and young teenagers.

### Family Support

Local practitioners report school principals have identified a lack of family support services in the municipality.

### 'Young people live in a different world than their parents'

Generational difference is seen as due to rapid changes in lifestyle and the impact of technology. Parents have a different experience and world-view to young people. There is less opportunity to model preferred behaviour to their children. Parents feel they have less time to transmit their values to their children, who generally spend more time in care, than in the past.

### 'Kids are growing up too fast'<sup>60</sup>

This observation relates to current pressures on young people that are caused through media generated culture and images, including the commercial and consumer targeting of children and young people.

### Young people as carers

While parents work, young people are often home alone, or their non-school time is heavily structured with sport and other commitments. Young people are often caring for younger siblings. They are expected to be responsible and be high achievers.

### Disengagement from school

There is significant concern about the increasing number of students disengaged from school in this municipality. Practitioners warn that it is critical to retain students to year 12 and especially to re-engage young people 16-17 years old. Literacy and numeracy levels remain unacceptably low for Aboriginal young people and for refugee young people. Low English proficiency is a significant barrier to educational, employment and social opportunities. Alcohol and drugs The use of alcohol and drugs is noted as significant and of concern in this municipality.

### Social media

All forms of communication and information technology are increasingly occupying time and activity in the home, at school, at work, in personal and social relationships. This raises concern for parents whose children are often more competent in the use of social media devices than themselves. Concerns include cyber safety, bullying, addiction, isolation, lack of physical play and disconnection to other people. These have numerous implications for social, mental and physical wellbeing. Parents seek guidance to increase their understanding and ability to guide their children's use of social media.

*"There is a significant shortfall in the provision of mental health services in many of Melbourne's outer suburbs. Without significant investment, this shortfall will be exacerbated in those areas (of) significant...population growth..."<sup>61</sup> Victorian Parliamentary Paper, No 419, 2012*

### Young people with disabilities

There are increasing numbers of young people with disabilities living in the municipality. This presents the challenge to ensure appropriate services are provided including, the best educational opportunities, respite care, and support for parents and carers.

### Safety

Local concern for safety refers to a spectrum of personal, family and community issues. These include physical safety (bullying, violence,) and psychological safety (cyber bullying, discrimination, racism). It also relates to feeling safe at home, the streets, in the neighbourhood, in public places and safety from environmental toxins.

### Mental health

Local evidence indicates mental health is a serious concern for all ages in this municipality. Mental health has implications across all of life's domains. It is very concerning to practitioners that the municipality lacks the services to adequately respond to this situation that will continue to worsen with rapid population growth.

### **Employment opportunities for young people**

Practitioners noted the dominance of small and medium sized businesses in the municipality, resulting in a significant lack of part time and casual employment options for young people, as well as work placement/experience opportunities. This is especially evident in the Whittlesea Township and the rural north.

### **Civic participation**

Engaging local children, young people, families and residents in community activities, events, services and decision making is seen as fundamental to developing healthy and connected communities and self-determination in individuals. Civic participation promotes democracy and human rights, as well as building strength-based participatory practice. It involves partnerships whereby the community identifies solutions to problems which informs policy development, planning and advocacy. Service providers recognise that a wider approach to consultation needs to be adopted through existing opportunities and mechanisms.

### **Babies' rights**

Based on the United Nation's Declaration on the Rights of the Child, practitioners are increasingly seeking to strengthen the citizenship rights of babies and children by advocating for them through consultation and responsive service delivery.

### **Aligning practice to the voice of the community**

The key to effective service provision is based on the view that solutions are held within the knowledge and experience of the community. This begins with a clear, current, comprehensive understanding of the lives of babies, children, young people and parents and how services can best support them. Services will vary and will benefit from continuous improvement to ensure the delivery of successful outcomes for children, young people and their families.

### **Cultural competence**

Fundamental to democracy is recognising and valuing Aboriginal people as the First Australians, newly arrived and multicultural residents, same sex attracted people and people with a physical or mental challenges. Council should work with community leaders to ensure practices and processes are inclusive and responsive and encourage diverse world-views, languages and ways of working with all members of the community.

### **Evidence**

Service providers report they value the role of Council in generating and distributing consultative and other forms of evidence to inform their practice and advocacy.

### **Service system**

Service providers report on gaps in the current service system and the limited capacity of services, evidenced by long waiting lists. Demand will increase further as the municipality grows.

### **‘Services before the people move in’**

Residents travel long distances to work and school creating ‘dormitory suburbs’ within the municipality. Young people are catching the bus to school at 7am. Service providers emphasise the need for place making and services to be on the ground at the same time as residents move into new growth areas. Young people need more things to do, and places to go beyond sporting activities.

*“The shortfall is particularly severe in the area of mental health services for young people...”<sup>62</sup> Victorian Parliamentary Paper, No 419, 2012*

### **Making connections**

Practitioners propose ‘creating a multitude of connections through places, services, programs, events and civic participation processes’. It is proposed that gathering places for different cultural groups are promoted and parent cafes be created for families to meet.

### **Using new technology to provide information to the community**

Council is seen as having a significant role in communicating and informing the community on local events and campaigns. Creating specialised phone applications for this purpose is seen as an efficient strategy alongside the use of text messaging and creating Info booths in strategic locations and for selected events.

### **Physical infrastructure**

There is a need for safe, affordable and adequate public transport for families and young people. Young people need places to gather and socialise and public transport to conduct their daily lives. The local outdoors environment of the municipality is seen as an important contributor to the wellbeing of families. Outdoor spaces need to successfully compete with the pull of social media and be safe and engaging places for children and young people of all ages and abilities.

**Council is seen as having a significant role in communicating and informing the community on local events and campaigns.**

## **Strategic Directions and broad areas for action**

The strategic directions have been drawn from the research evidence, the demographic data and the consultation information and summarised in the previous section.

There are number of other Council plans that aim to support the whole community, inclusive of children, young people and families, such as the Community Plan: Shaping Our Future: Whittlesea 2025, the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing and Disability Action Plans. There are also strategic links with the Whittlesea Community Futures Partnership Strategic Plan. Whittlesea Community Futures is a partnership of over 40 organisations in the municipality. This plan, Connect: A municipal plan for children, young people and their families in the City of Whittlesea, through targeted and universal strategies aims to support and enhance the life course of children, young people and their families, including in areas

where there are current policy and planning gaps. This life course approach to planning for children, young people and their families is shown in the following figure.

### Life course approach



There are number of other Council plans that aim to support the whole community.

### Strategic direction 1: Partnerships and continuous dialogue with children, young people, parents and the community

This strategic direction is based on the acknowledgement that community members have the expertise to determine local strengths and challenges.

Council has a unique role within the municipal service system and believes that the best outcomes for children, young people and families are likely to be achieved when services work in partnership and are responsive to the voice of the community (residents and services).

### Emerging issues

- Need for increased involvement of children, young people, and parents in consultations and evaluations
- Need for collaborative planning, advocacy and service delivery
- Need for more local evidence to improve policy, planning and advocacy
- Need to ensure access and competence in the delivery of services to the diversity of families in this community.

## Broad areas for action

### Addressing knowledge gaps

Day-to-day pressures affect households in complex and concerning ways, causing vulnerability. Improved understanding is needed to inform policy, planning, practice and advocacy, and to align these to the needs of the community. Council will find out from children, young people and parents, for example, what contributes to their wellbeing, what is causing isolation and stress, and what can be done in response by Council and partners.

### Consulting children, young people, parents, carers, partners and relevant stakeholders

Council will continue to work towards consultative and participatory practices and further embed them in everyday practice related to children, young people and families. This will require building on the expertise of staff, particularly in relation to consultation skills that are age appropriate and based on best practice, and working with the community to increase their capacity to participate in civic processes.

### Partnerships with the community, agencies and stakeholders

Council has established strategic relationships with local groups, clubs, agencies and networks. It does this through leadership roles, administration of networks, and the facilitation of collective planning. Council works to collaboratively develop the social and physical infrastructure and to strengthen community outcomes. Council will continue to strengthen this area of work through generating consultative data, research and evidence, and leading and supporting advocacy.

### Culturally competent practice

Effective and competent practices need to reflect the diversity of all the community. This requires continuous improvement and reflection. It also requires professional development and renewed ways of conceptualising and working with the community, including in partnership with community leaders and relevant stakeholders.

**This strategic direction is based on the acknowledgement that community members have the expertise to determine local strengths and challenges.**

## Strategic direction 2: Family Strengthening

This strategic direction primarily focuses on strengthening parenting and households. It responds to what children have told us, to what parents say, and to what young people report about wanting to be understood by their parents. It also responds to what practitioners report on household stress caused by financial pressure, stress due to working parents and being away from home for long hours, and family members being weary and over committed.

### Emerging issues

- The recognition of isolation, stress and excessive daily demands on households

- Need for policy and practice to reflect the diversity of families
- Support for siblings and grandparents in the role of carer
- Recognition of the high incidence of family violence in some suburbs
- The identification of mental health issues
- Need for families to access local and affordable facilities, services and events.

### **Broad areas for action**

Addressing knowledge gaps Local consultation data clearly indicates that families are under significant pressure with consequences for all household members. Consultation is needed to further understand these knowledge gaps.

### **How to offer strengthening opportunities to families**

Why is there is a high incidence of family violence in some suburbs in the municipality? What is Council's role in the context of local and broader efforts, and what can Council do preventatively? What is the real demand and gaps in relation to service delivery?

### **Developing family strengthening strategies**

Consult with children, young people, parents and collaborate with partners to design family strengthening strategies tailored to respond to all parents, carers and households. Local evidence indicates an urgent need for family strengthening efforts to focus on the suburbs of Mernda, Thomastown and Lalor.

### **Reducing social and physical isolation and stress**

Based on an improved understanding of isolation, develop strategies to reduce social and physical isolation and stresses on families and households, and to effectively equip staff to respond to complex needs.

### **Addressing family violence**

It is acknowledged that there are currently significant efforts in the municipality aimed at addressing family violence in the community, particularly by the Whittlesea Community Futures partnership. This action aims to identify opportunities within the role of the Family and Youth Department, and the broader function of Council.

### **Developing the local service system to address vulnerability, mental health and wellbeing**

The level of services available to local residents is consistently reported as inadequate. Early intervention is needed to curb escalation of mental illness and residents need access to services, particularly in new growth areas. Consistent with current State and Federal government reforms, more attention needs to be given to maximising universal services for early detection and intervention and to build social capacity and connection. As a priority

Council is strongly positioned to lead advocacy for mental health services for the community and especially young people.

*“The family drives their own agenda.”<sup>63</sup> Lisa Thorpe, Chair Bubup Wiliam, 2012*

### **Strategic direction 3: Resilient and robust children and young people**

Connection to culture and to family is reported by local children, young people and community leaders as fundamental to their wellbeing. This strategic direction focuses on Council’s role in the healthy development, and in addressing vulnerability, for children, young people and families.

Emerging issues

- Need for play opportunities and places for healthy development
- Need to address policy and program gaps for 8 to 12 year olds and youth disengagement
- Need for early detection and response to vulnerabilities in children and young people.

### **Broad areas for action**

Services for children and young people Council aims to strengthen its role in the delivery of services and facilities, and offering professional development opportunities with partners.

### **Developing a Middle Years Strategy**

In recent years, practitioners and academics have noted a gap in research, policy and programs regarding the Middle Years. Council will work collaboratively with local partners to develop a Middle Years Strategy for the municipality. This strategy will interface with early years and youth strategies and plans.

### **Addressing youth disengagement**

Local evidence indicates a high number of young people are disengaged from education, employment and training. Local efforts need to be supported and strengthened to address youth disengagement and improve educational outcomes, especially for Aboriginal, newly arrived and refugee young people, and students with disabilities.

### **Improving outcomes for Aboriginal young people**

Data shows that numeracy and literacy achievements for Aboriginal young people are significantly lower than for non-Aboriginal young people. Local Aboriginal young people report their concern regarding personal and parental stress. They also report that they experience racism.

### **Improving outcomes for CALD and newly arrived young people**

Consultations with local young people highlight the need to strengthen support for CALD and newly arrived young people particularly in relation to barriers to education, employment, recreation and leisure. They also request support for their parents and express they experience racism. Practitioners also identified the need to support international students.

### **Improving outcomes for children and young people with disabilities**

Consultations found a need to support families of children and young people with disabilities. In particular, there was a high demand for early and effective assessment followed by comprehensive social and educational opportunities.

### **Generalist Youth Workers**

Local and wider evidence indicates that young people benefit from supportive relationships with generalist youth workers, especially during times of vulnerability and distress.

*“(Support parents to) enjoy parenting, rather than ensure parenting.”*<sup>64</sup> **Consultation participant 2012**

### **Strategic direction 4: Social and physical infrastructure for diversity, all ages and abilities**

This strategic direction is about both social and physical infrastructure.

- Social infrastructure is about civic actions that generate community ownership and build social capital. It includes services, programs, events and campaigns that link a community together
- Physical infrastructure refers to all aspects of the public realm including the built environment, the natural environment, facilities, town centres, streetscapes and open space
- The interaction between social and physical infrastructure is important in order to connect people and meet their services and support needs in an integrated and timely manner.

### Emerging issues:

- Need evidence to inform advocacy to address gaps in the local service system
- Need to build inclusive places that feel safe and welcoming and contribute to wellbeing
- Need to address the lack of affordable social and emergency housing within the municipality
- Need adequate public transport
- Need early delivery of support in the new growth areas and to activate dormitory suburbs.

### Broad areas for action

#### **City of Whittlesea Wellbeing Indicators**

Community Wellbeing Indicators for ages 0 to 25 will be developed to set a baseline level of data from which the wellbeing of the community can be monitored over time. This data will underpin local policy, planning, practice and advocacy.

#### **Building inclusive and timely social and physical infrastructure**

Work will be undertaken to design integrated and sustainable service models based on contemporary need and best practice. An analysis of current and future population identifying projected demands, will inform the identification of strategic locations across the municipality and inform the facilities required to accommodate services. This work will incorporate growth in the new Urban Growth Boundaries as well as address the capacity of the existing service system to meet demand.

#### **Priority areas for advocacy**

Outstanding service gaps will have urgent attention, priority will be given to youth mental health, family violence, emergency housing and improved public transport.

#### **Inclusive places for young people in early adolescence**

Developmentally young people in early adolescence need to take risks in safe and appropriate environments. Experience shows that if young people are not appropriately catered for they will behave inappropriately and possibly dangerously. It is proposed that the Young people and the Public Realm Design Guide be adopted to inform planning, design and negotiations with relevant stakeholders.

#### **Place-based multidisciplinary all age focused teams**

The Family and Youth Department will integrate age-based services and sectors, establishing multidisciplinary, place-based team that cater for all ages. This model would improve the

reach of Council, maximise preventative and holistic approaches and support service provision in new growth areas.

“Poor kids start school with gaps, by the time they finish school the gaps are wider.”<sup>65</sup> Naomi Eisenstadt, 2011

### **Strategic direction 5: Opportunities to connect**

Local consultations highlighted the incidence and impact of social isolation in the community. This strategic direction aims to build and expand on the services, people and places that community members feel they can call on for help and support. Council will work towards this through timely delivery of social and physical infrastructure plans that consider how social connections are developed between residents and how community places and spaces are designed.

#### **Emerging issues**

- Isolation
- Disengaging young people
- Family stress
- Pressured parenting.

#### **Broad areas for action**

##### **Understanding isolation, its impact and how to address it**

Consultations indicate that daily demands and circumstances are causing some people to become socially isolated from the rest of the community. This is further exacerbated by the urban sprawl and poor public transport. There is a need to identify where isolated residents are, and address the impact of isolation on all households. Through local research, Council will identify what opportunities there are to prevent social isolation, and how to respond to alleviate the impact on families. This will provide a range of locally relevant strategies to reduce social isolation.

##### **Information strategies**

The result of consultations with parents and practitioners indicated the need to increase community awareness of public assets and opportunities. It indicated that periodic information strategies are needed to inform and connect people to places and each other, through events and programs. These will need to consider diversity in culture, community languages, and effectively use modern technologies.

##### **Activate ‘dormitory suburbs’**

Evidence shows that isolation and disconnection causes ill health. Therefore there is benefit in focusing on supporting residents to develop social connections within the community,

especially with ongoing population growth in new and established areas of the municipality. This can be achieved through 'place maker' roles that connect community and link people each other and to local services and supports.

### **Engaging children, young people and families in New Growth Areas**

Increased resources are needed to support families in the new growth areas. With parents working and travelling long distances to work, young people in these areas 'need places to go and be engaged'<sup>66</sup>.

*"The way we build and organise our cities is vital to the way we connect with each other, which in turn is critical to our psychological and physical health."<sup>67</sup>* **Grattan Institute 2012**

## Action Plan

It aims to build and expand on the services, people and places that community members feel they can call on for help and support.

### Strategic direction 1 – Partnership and continuous dialogue with children, young people, parents and the community

Links to other plans:

Shape your Community: Whittlesea Community Plan 2025

- Priority: Health and Wellbeing
- Priority: Inclusive and engaged community

Desired outcomes	Objective	Council role*	Actions 2013-2018	Indicative measures***
Children, young people and parents informing policies and strategies in the municipality.	To increase the input of children, young people and parents in informing the policies and strategies which underpin the development of social and physical infrastructure of the municipality.**	<b>Provider</b> <b>Facilitator</b> Advocate	<b>Increasing civic participation</b> Build skill and capacity of Council and partners to increase civic participatory practices for diverse children, young people and families of all ages and abilities. <b>Aligning policy and practice to the needs</b> Align planning, policy and practices to the circumstances and aspirations of the community, as expressed by the community.	Number of children, young people and parents consulted. Number of staff and partners trained in best practice civic participatory methods. Consultative and other data findings disseminated across Council and to local partners.

\* Provider: As a provider, Council provides a number of services, public places and facilities for children, young people and their families.

Facilitator: As a facilitator, Council facilitates a range of partnerships and professional development that supports those providing services for children, young people their and families.

Advocate: As an advocate, Council works on behalf of the community to generate evidence, consult widely and advocate for vital infrastructure and services to meet the needs of a growing population.

\*\* Social infrastructure is about civic actions that generate community ownership and build social capital. It includes services, programs, events and campaigns that link a community together.

Physical infrastructure refers to all aspects of the public realm including the built environment, the natural environment, facilities, town centres, streetscapes and open space.

\*\*\* Baseline measures will be finalised in 2013-14

<b>Desired outcomes</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Council role</b>	<b>Actions 2013-2018</b>	<b>Indicative measures</b>
Council leads and resources partnerships in the development of effective service systems for children, young people and families.	To increase Council leadership, collaborations and resourcing of local partnerships for joint planning, integrated service delivery and advocacy.	<b>Provider</b> <b>Facilitator</b> Advocate	<b>Strengthening partnerships</b> Work with partners towards integrated planning, and collaboration on advocacy, service delivery and sharing assets. <b>Generate evidence</b> Generate and disseminate data to inform policy, planning and practice. <b>Cultural competence</b> Deliver professional development opportunities including those that increase cultural competence and capacity to respond to diversity.	Achievements of partnerships. Number of joint training opportunities. Evidence disseminated across Council and to local partners.

## Strategic direction 2 – Family Strengthening

Links to other plans:

Whittlesea 2025-Strategic Community Plan

- Priority: Health and Wellbeing
- Priority: Inclusive and engaged community

Whittlesea Community Futures Strategic Plan

- Priority: Family Violence
- Priority: Early Childhood Intervention
- Priority: Youth Engagement and Connection
- Priority: Youth Mental Health

Desired outcomes	Objective	Council role*	Actions 2013-2018	Indicative measures***
Support is available to all members of the community both individually and in the context of their family.	To develop and deliver timely programs to ensure people are supported through all of life's stages, in times of vulnerability, and with practices that reflect diversity.	<b>Facilitator</b> <b>Provider</b> Advocate	<b>Family Strengthening</b> Build on develop and implement a plan for the delivery of family strengthening strategies that are informed by the voice of children, young people and parents. This will consider siblings and grandparents as carers, respite and crisis support, and the need to prioritise family strengthening programs for Mernda, Epping, Thomastown and Lalor.	Family strengthening plan. Percentage of parents participating in new parent groups. Percent of children and families participating in community and supported playgroups. Number of referrals to family support services. Number of programs offered for families in the municipality.
Family members are safe from violence in their homes and have access to support when needed.	To contribute to local efforts in response to family violence including the reduction in family violence.	<b>Advocate</b> <b>Facilitator</b> Provider	<b>Addressing family violence</b> With partners work to increase the capacity of the service system to respond to family violence. <b>Improving understanding of family violence</b> Improve understanding as to the causes, and contributing factors, of family violence in the City of Whittlesea. <b>Council's response to family violence</b> Identify opportunities within Council's role to respond to the prevention and alleviation of family violence.	Gather local evidence on family violence to support planning and advocacy. Improved understanding as to how Council, State and federal Government can contribute to prevention.

### Strategic direction 3 – Resilient and robust children and young people

Links to other plans:

Whittlesea 2025-Strategic Community Plan

- Inclusive and engaged community
- Health and Wellbeing

Whittlesea Community Futures Strategic Plan

- Priority: Early Childhood Intervention
- Priority: Youth Engagement and Connection

Desired outcomes	Objective	Council role*	Actions 2013-2018	Indicative measures***
Children and young people have optimal opportunity for cognitive, physical, social and emotional development.	To increase play, social and physical activities for children and young people.	<b>Provider Facilitator Advocate</b>	<p><b>Promoting play, social and physical activity for wellbeing</b></p> <p>Create and promote places and opportunities for play, social and physical activities. Promote the benefit of physical activity as a key contributor to the health and development of babies, children and young people, and generate awareness of local play spaces.</p> <p>Adopt the principles and approaches within the Spaces 8 to 12: creating engaging places for young people Support the increase of playgroups in the municipality.</p> <p>Support the Healthy Together Whittlesea program in promoting physical activity and healthy nutrition across child, youth and family services. Advocate for engaging outdoor play spaces that are suitable for all ages and abilities.</p>	Spaces 8 to 12 informing Council planning. Increase in the number of playgroups. Number of programs offered to young people. Number of young people consulted on their needs. Young people reporting their satisfaction with participation in programs and events. Number of early childhood services and schools participating in the Healthy Together program.

Desired outcomes	Objective	Council role*	Actions 2013-2018	Indicative measures***
	To increase supports for children and young people in the middle years aged 8-12 years.	<b>Facilitator</b> <b>Provider</b> Advocate	<b>A strategy for the middle years</b> Incorporating the voice of young people, with partners, develop a Middle Years Strategy responding to the developmental needs of children and young people aged 8 to 12 years old that strategically links local early years and youth services, and provides a framework for a continuum of services from birth to 25 years.	Strategy developed and implemented.
	To embed evidence and best practice in the delivery of services for the early years.	<b>Facilitator</b> <b>Provider</b> Advocate	<b>Early years policy</b> Develop an Early Years Policy position with the underlining principles of quality and inclusion in service delivery and integrated infrastructure design, planning and delivery. It will define the role of Council in supporting and monitoring the equity and quality practices of the services for children and young people offered by Council, and agencies in Council facilities. This policy will include identifying Council's role in providing facilities for early years universal and targeted services for children and families.	Policy developed and implemented.
	To support service providers to deliver high quality services for children and young people in the municipality.	<b>Provider</b> <b>Facilitator</b> Advocate	<b>Quality improvement</b> Deliver high quality services and supports for children, young people and families. Deliver quality improvement opportunities, including professional development for services supporting children and young people.	Children participating in high quality early childhood education and care. Children and families attending MCH Key Age and Stage visits. Number and quality of Inclusion Support Program visits to childcare services. Number and quality of professional development activities.

Desired outcomes	Objective	Council role*	Actions 2013-2018	Indicative measures***
<p>An effective system of programs and services that enable young people to remain engaged and connected to positive pathways that lead towards successfully achieving their long term goals and potential.</p>	<p>To plan for the provision of effective services for the diverse young people in the municipality.</p>	<p><b>Provider Facilitator Advocate</b></p>	<p><b>Youth Plan 2</b> Based on data and the voice of young people, develop the next action plan for the 2007 endorsed YouthPlan2030. This will continue to consider Aboriginal, refugee and newly arrived young people, same sex attracted and young people with disabilities. It will include strategies to address vulnerability, youth disengagement and racism.</p> <p><b>Youth disengagement</b> Collaborate with partners to develop the capacity of the service system to respond to youth disengagement.</p> <p><b>Generalist Youth Workers</b> Engage generalist Youth Workers to maintain the capacity of Council to address the needs of young people and their families in line with municipal growth and emerging priorities.</p>	<p>Develop and implement Youth Plan 2. Number of programs offered and young people supported through programs. Young people participating in consultation and civic actions. Young people reporting their satisfaction with participation in programs and events. Decreased youth disengagement in areas identified in the report.</p>

## Strategic direction 4 – Social and physical infrastructure for diversity, all ages and abilities

Links to other plans:

Whittlesea 2025-Strategic Community Plan

- Priority: Inclusive and engaged community
- Priority: Accessibility
- Priority: Health and Wellbeing
- Priority: Places and Spaces to Connect People

Whittlesea Community Futures Strategic Plan

- Priority: Early Childhood Intervention
- Priority: Youth Engagement and Connection
- Priority: Youth Mental Health

Desired outcomes	Objective	Council role*	Actions 2013-2018	Indicative measures***
Place-based approaches are adopted for planning, advocacy and service delivery for children, young people and families in the municipality.	To increase the capacity for Council, and partners to respond to the diverse local needs of children, young people and families in the municipality.	<b>Provider Facilitator Advocate</b>	<p><b>Place-based approaches</b> Work within Council and with partners to develop local area approaches to planning, advocacy and service delivery.</p> <p><b>Social Capital and Service System Plan</b> With partners and stakeholders develop a strategic plan to support resilience for children, young people and their families this will involve building social capital and an integrated service system. The plan will map out the current and projected need for services and guide where they should be located.</p> <p><b>Physical Infrastructure Plan</b> Develop a Municipal children, young people and family Infrastructure Plan that is informed by the Service System Plan.</p> <p><b>Family and Youth department Workforce Plan</b> Develop a workforce plan informed by benchmarks to guide the capacity and skill required to match population growth, demographic characteristics and emerging priorities.</p>	<p>Children, young people and families reporting satisfaction with Council facilities and services.</p> <p>Partnerships and place-based strategies developed.</p> <p>Social Capital and Service System Plan developed and guiding community development, and the roll out of the service system.</p> <p>Physical Infrastructure Plan developed and underpinning planning.</p> <p>Family and Youth department Workforce plan developed.</p>

## Strategic direction 5 – Opportunities to connect

Links to other plans:

Whittlesea 2025-Strategic Community Plan

- Priority: Inclusive and engaged community
- Priority: Accessibility
- Priority: Health and Wellbeing
- Priority: Places and Spaces to Connect People

Whittlesea Community Futures Strategic Plan

- Priority: Early Childhood Intervention
- Priority: Youth Engagement and Connection
- Priority: Youth Mental Health

Desired outcomes	Objective	Council role*	Actions 2013-2018	Indicative measures***
Children, young people and families are socially and physically connected and have strong social capital.	To increase social capital, and address social isolation, through actions that connect and engage children, young people and families.	<b>Provider Advocate Facilitator</b>	<p><b>Building social capital</b> Evidence shows that isolation and disconnection causes ill health. Provide opportunities for building the capacity of the community, creating connections and social engagement. These will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunities for children, young people and families to engage with other children, young people and families</li> <li>• Resourcing and supporting a diversity of playgroups and playgroup models across the municipality</li> <li>• Delivering information strategies incorporating community languages</li> <li>• Promoting family access to public facilities and services</li> <li>• Hosting community events, cultural, music and arts programs</li> <li>• Using new technologies to connect people.</li> </ul>	<p>Number of people participating in community events. Number of people supported through programs. Number of children and families participating in community and supported playgroups. Children and young people participating in play-based and physical activities.</p>
	To decrease social	<b>Facilitator Provider</b>	<p><b>Addressing social isolation and activating new growth areas</b> With partners, Council will identify where isolated residents are and</p>	Development and implementation of a plan to

Desired outcomes	Objective	Council role*	Actions 2013-2018	Indicative measures***
	isolation for children, young people and families.	Advocate	develop a comprehensive suite of preventative and alleviation actions.	<p>reduce social isolation.</p> <p>Number of people participating in community events.</p> <p>Number of people supported through programs.</p> <p>Number of children and families participating in community and supported playgroups.</p> <p>Percentage of children and young people participating in play-based and physical activities.</p>

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