



**Macedon
Ranges**
Shire Council

Early Years Plan

2016 – 2020



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1 Introduction

The *Macedon Ranges Early Years Plan* (the Plan) sets out four themes and related actions that, together, create a framework for enhancing and supporting the health and wellbeing of children, aged from birth to eight years and their families.

The Plan provides a framework to prioritise needs and allocate resources for early years services and programs in Macedon Ranges Shire.

The Plan has been prepared with consideration of a variety of sources of evidence. Information has been drawn from:

- Demographic data and population forecasts.
- Current local, state and national policies.
- International best practice guidelines for supporting the rights of children and creating 'child-friendly communities'.

In addition, input and ideas from community members, Council staff, organisational representatives and service providers has formed a valuable source of information for the creation of the Plan.

While an overview is provided below, much of the detailed background and contextual information for this Plan is contained in a separate document, titled, *Macedon Ranges Early Years and Positive Ageing Plans Best Practice Literature Review and Background Research Report*.



2 Context and Background

2.1 Why the early years are important

There is a wealth of evidence demonstrating the importance of an individual's early years, with the quality and range of experience gained from birth to school age being a key determinant in an individual's life trajectory.

Positive early experiences result in optimal brain development, which in turn provides the foundation for the other skills and abilities children need for success at school and throughout their lives. Negative or stressful experiences such as those associated with neglect, family violence or poverty can lead to lifelong problems related to learning, behaviour and physical and mental health.¹

A stable and loving home environment, the opportunity to play, explore, solve problems, communicate, think, create and construct, developing positive relationships with friends and adults outside the family, and access to a network of services and supports, all contribute to positive developmental outcomes for children.

Reflecting this understanding, there are consistent state, national and international protocols for providing optimal support for children in their early years. Immunisation schedules, regular measurement for achievement of milestones of growth and development and pre-school education (kindergarten) are all examples of such protocols.

As with many health, wellbeing and development outcomes, interventions that focus on prevention of negative outcomes are more effective than addressing challenges later in life.²

2 Gallinsky, E. (2006) The economic benefits of high quality early childhood programs: What makes the difference? , Families and Work Institute for The Committee for Economic Development

1 Australian Early Development Census Brain Development in Children



The quality of the pre-school services match and exceed all of their city counterparts and we are very lucky to have such fantastic staff (Online survey respondent)

2.2 Council's role in the early years

Macedon Ranges Shire Council values children and their families and is committed to supporting children during their foundation years. Council is committed to advocating, planning and facilitating for the delivery of early years services that are accessible, affordable and responsive to the needs of children and their families.

This Plan recognises the responsibility Council has in planning for the early years and the important role it plays in achieving positive outcomes for children. The Plan focusses on children aged 0-8 years as Council is a provider of services to children in this age range. Children aged nine and

over are supported by other organisations such as schools and health services, but are not the focus of this Plan.

Council aims to create an environment where all children in the shire are able to participate in a community that values and supports them. In this context, Council recognises the importance of high standards of practice for early childhood professionals and supports an approach that adopts and implements family-focussed practices. Council also has a role in supporting professional development of early years professionals and maintaining a quality work force.

2.3 Existing early years services

Macedon Ranges Shire Council provides a range of services and facilities for families with children from birth to eight years. Council aims to ensure these services are of high quality and accessible for families while also being financially viable. Council offers services including:

- Maternal and Child Health, immunisation, occasional care and kindergarten.
- Recreational facilities such as swimming pools, sporting facilities, shared paths and adventure playgrounds.
- Access to learning and developmental programs and resources in libraries.

A range of government, private and community organisations also play a role in the delivery of early years services in the Macedon Ranges Shire. Council will continue to work in partnership with these providers to ensure the community's needs are met and advocate for services if they are not currently available.



2.4 Consultation summary

A wide-ranging program of consultation was undertaken with internal stakeholders as well as key project partners, community groups and organisations and members of the public.

Over 50 consultation events (a mix of meetings, workshops, interviews, a creative exercise and an online survey) were undertaken. In total, almost 500 individuals participated.

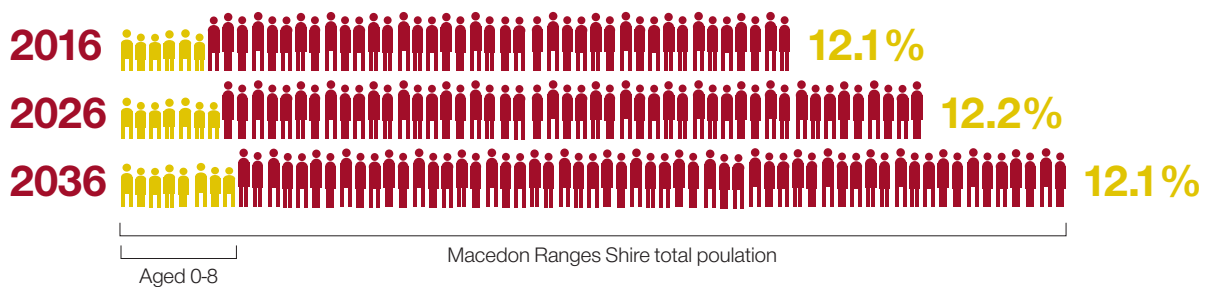
2.5 Population Trends

In 2016, the shires population aged 0-8 years was 5,612 children and is projected to grow to 7,833 children by 2036. The majority of growth in the 0-8 age cohort is likely to occur in the Gisborne District. Strong growth in percentage terms is also likely for the Riddells Creek and Romsey Districts

Table 2-1: Population growth, people aged 0-8 for selected areas 2016 to 2036

Area	2016	2026	2036	Change (2011-2036)	Average annual growth	Total Growth
Gisborne District	1,818	2,468	2,858	1,040	2.3%	57.2%
Kyneton District	949	1,053	1,165	216	1.0%	22.8%
Lancefield District	316	361	390	74	1.1%	23.4%
Macedon & Mount Macedon	384	392	396	12	0.2%	3.1%
Riddells Creek District	575	763	1,035	460	3.0%	80.0%
Romsey District	679	825	1,014	335	2.0%	49.3%
Woodend District	891	897	975	84	0.5%	9.4%
Macedon Ranges Shire	5,612	6,759	7,833	2,221	1.7%	39.6%

Source: Forecast i.d. (ABS Census data)



3 Early Years Plan

3.1 Our vision for young children and their families

The Early Years Plan articulates a child centred vision and for young children and their families.

It reflects what the community has told us and is confirmed by the information and evidence available on how to best support the health, wellbeing, growth and development outcomes of children.

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.



3.2 The four themes

The Early Years Plan sets out four themes and related actions. The four themes are:

Theme 1

Learning and Development

Theme 2

Active and Healthy Lifestyles

Theme 3

Health and Social Support

Theme 4

Enabling Environments

3.3 Implementation

Council's Early Years unit (MCH and EYS) is responsible for leading the implementation of the Early Years Plan and reporting to Council annually.

A collaborative approach is required and in some instances, responsibilities may extend across other areas of Council and partner agencies. This includes a range of service providers and agencies of state and federal government, for example Primary Care partnerships and Primary Health Networks. Emphasis has also been placed on building capacity in the community to support programs that encourage early education and community-led initiatives.

It is acknowledged that the success of the plan relies on Council, identified stakeholders and the community working together.

3.4 Monitoring and evaluation

Macedon Ranges Shire Council will monitor the implementation of the Early Years Plan and gather evidence which demonstrates whether the desired outcomes of the Plan have been achieved. Evaluation findings will be reported to Council, partnering agencies and the community.



“We have a large choice of schools and facilities. Great parks.”

(Online survey respondent)

Theme 1

Learning and Development

Goal

Macedon Ranges Shire Council works in partnership with families and the community to support our children to learn and develop.

Strategies	Actions	Key stakeholders (Lead in bold)	Resources	Outcome	Timeline
Deliver high quality children's services	Improve current practices to ensure better utilisation of data collected (e.g. client satisfaction survey, community satisfaction survey, MCH data etc) for service improvement planning.	Early Years Unit (MCH and EYS) State Government (Department of Education and Training) Communications	Within existing resources.	Improved evidence based to inform planning and development of Council's early years' services.	July 2016 to June 2020
	Continue to plan and implement integrated service practices across Council operated Early Years services.	Early Years Unit (MCH and EYS) Governance Department Community Health Services	Within existing resources.	All Councils Early Years Services are fully integrated and the integration philosophy is imbedded in policy, processes and practices.	July 2016 to June 2020
	Review the current Occasional Care services to determine future service delivery.	Early Years Unit (MCH and EYS) Community Health Services Early Years Service Providers	Within existing resources.	Occasional care services are better meeting communities' needs.	July 2016 to June 2017
	Plan and implement opportunities to introduce innovative and integrated practices, services and/or programs into early years services.	Early Years Unit (MCH and EYS) Community Health Services Early Years Service Providers Immunisation	Within existing resources.	The community will have access to a variety of quality services and programs.	January 2017 to June 2020
	Advocate to State and Federal Government for a long term commitment to fund 15 hours of funded kindergarten for eligible four year olds.	Early Years Unit (MCH and EYS) Community Services	Within existing resources.	Increased awareness of the issue of risks related to funding uncertainty.	October 2017

Strategies	Actions	Key stakeholders (Lead in bold)	Resources	Outcome	Timeline
Support children to express their views and be heard	Lead by example and advocate across Council for the consideration of a child's perspective in relevant policy and strategic development.	Early Years Unit (MCH and EYS) Governance Department Early Years Services Communications	Within existing resources.	Children participate in a consultative process and Council's policies and strategies reflect the needs of children and families.	July 2016 to June 2020
Support strong community partnerships	Maintain strong partnerships with key stakeholders and agencies to support planning and improve outcomes for families and children within the shire.	Early Years Unit (MCH and EYS) State Government Early Years Service Providers Community Health Services	Within existing resources.	A range of services are available to meet the needs of the community.	July 2016 to June 2020
	Empower families and communities to develop and lead community-initiated programs and events.	Early Years Unit (MCH and EYS) Early Years Service Providers Community Health Services Economic Development and Tourism	Within existing resources.	Children and families are engaged and connected in their local community.	July 2016 to June 2020

Theme 2

Active and Healthy Lifestyles

Goal | Families are supported to make healthy lifestyle choices.

Strategies	Actions	Key Stakeholder (Lead in bold)	Resources	Outcome	Timeline
Encourage children and families to make healthy lifestyle choices	Develop integrated programs that promote healthy lifestyle choices.	Early Years Unit (MCH and EYS) Recreation and Sport Community Health Services	Within existing resources.	The community is empowered to make informed healthy lifestyle decisions.	July 2016 to June 2017
	Collaborate with partner agencies to promote and implement healthy education programs.	Early Years Unit (MCH and EYS) Community Health Services	Additional resources may be required.		July 2017 to June 2020
Support families to develop rich social connections across all age groups	In partnership with other service providers, investigate opportunities to deliver initiatives which allow children and families to connect with people of all ages within the community.	Early Years Unit (MCH and EYS) Early Years Service Providers Community Health Services	Within existing resources.	People of all ages have the opportunity to engage in inclusive activities in their local community.	July 2016 to June 2020
	Promote and where appropriate participate in community programs and events that connect all age groups in the community.				
Support children to play, explore, solve problems, communicate, think, create and construct	When reviewing leisure services and open spaces, ensure children and families are consulted.	Early Years Unit (MCH and EYS) Recreation and Sport	Within existing resources.	Children's preferences are considered in the planning for quality play spaces.	July 2016 to June 2020
	Continue to support vulnerable families to access services that support healthy growth and development.	Early Years Unit (MCH and EYS) Recreation and Sport Community Health Services	Within existing resources.	Improved access for vulnerable families to relevant services.	July 2016 to June 2020

Theme 3

Health and Social Support

Goal

A range of developmental and social support services and programs are available to ensure that all children develop to their full potential.

Strategies	Actions	Key Stakeholder (Lead in bold)	Resources	Outcome	Timeline
Identify and support vulnerable children and families	In partnership with key stakeholders, investigate underlying causes of developmental outcomes as identified in the AEDI (Australian Early Development Index) and develop strategies to address findings.	Early Years Unit (MCH and EYS) Early Years Service Providers Community Health Services State Government	Within existing resources.	A strategy is developed to improve AEDI developmental outcomes.	January 2017 to June 2020
	Continue to provide staff training across Council regarding identifying and assisting vulnerable children and families on completion.	Early Years Unit (MCH and EYS) State Government HR Department	Within existing resources.	Staff are suitably skilled to identify and support vulnerable children and families.	January 2017 to June 2020
	Use a family-centred approach when case managing vulnerable children and families.	Early Years Unit (MCH and EYS) Early Years Service Providers Community Health Services	Within existing resources.	Services respond effectively to the needs of vulnerable families.	June 2017 to June 2020
	Work in collaboration with community-initiated groups, programs and activities which support vulnerable families.	Early Years Unit (MCH and EYS) Early Years Services Providers Community Health Services Library Services	Within existing resources.	Collaborative approach in supporting families in the local community.	June 2017 to June 2020
Support parents to be confident and competent in their parenting	Improve on current practices in partnership with key agencies to ensure parents feel competent and confident in their parenting role.	Early Years Unit (MCH and EYS) Community Health Providers	Within existing resources.	Parents have access to appropriate programs and are empowered to parent effectively.	July 2016 to June 2020

Theme 4

Enabling Environments

Goal

The environment of Macedon Ranges Shire supports children and families to grow and develop.

Strategies	Actions	Key Stakeholder (Lead in bold)	Resources	Outcome	Timeline
The physical and social environment responds to the needs of children and families	Participate in Place Making Forums across Council to ensure children's and families' needs are considered.	Early Years Unit (MCH and EYS) Strategic Planning Statutory Planning Infrastructure	Within existing resources.	Early Years services participates in the planning process to advocate for the needs of children and families.	July 2016 to June 2020
	Ensure infrastructure including footpaths is progressively improved to meet the needs of families.				
Advocate for improvements in public and community transport	Continue to advocate for improvements to public and community transport options including the specific needs of children and families when using public transport.	Early Years Unit (MCH and EYS) Engineering and Building Department Strategic Planning	Within existing resources.	All opportunities to influence and advocate for improved transport are acted upon.	July 2016 to June 2020
	Participate in consultations, forums and other opportunities to influence improved public transport including for the specific needs of older people in the shire.				
Provide high quality early years infrastructure	Continue to review the availability, quality and suitability of existing infrastructure in light of projected population growth and service needs.	Early Years Unit (MCH and EYS) Strategic Planning Infrastructure	Within existing resources.	Early years facilities appropriately meets the community's needs.	December 2017 to June 2020
	Continue to seek funding to support necessary facility upgrades/new facilities.		Additional resources may be required.		

Strategies	Actions	Key Stakeholder (Lead in bold)	Resources	Outcome	Timeline
Utilise contemporary digital communication tools	Reviewing current administrative processes with the aim of improving efficiencies and customer service.	Early Years Unit (MCH and EYS) IT Department Communications State Government	Within existing resources.	Improvement plan developed and implemented.	January 2017 to December 2018
	In consultation with families, develop a plan for the use of digital tools in Early Years services educational programs.	Early Years Unit (MCH and EYS) IT Department State Government	Within existing resources.	A plan is developed to inform and guide the use of technology in early years programs.	January 2018 to June 2020