CITY OF GREATER BENDIGO

Municipal Early Years Plan 2015–18

Creating the best future for our children

2 March 2016
Acknowledgement of Country

The ancestors and descendants of the Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung are the traditional owners of this Country. The City of Greater Bendigo acknowledges that they have been custodians for many centuries and continue to perform age old ceremonies of celebration, initiation and renewal. We all acknowledge their living culture and their unique role in the life of this region.

Contact:

City of Greater Bendigo
195 Lyttleton Terrace
Bendigo 3550
Telephone: (03) 5434 6000
Website: www.bendigo.vic.gov.au/meyp
Email: requests@bendigo.vic.gov.au
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1. Introduction

**Greater Bendigo – Working together to be Australia’s most liveable regional City.**

Welcome to the City of Greater Bendigo’s Municipal Early Years Plan for the next four years - 2015/16 to 2018/19.

This is the City of Greater Bendigo’s (the City) second Municipal Early Years Plan with the first Plan released in 2004. In 2007 actions regarding Early Years were included in the City’s Public Health and Wellbeing Plan.

The Municipal Early Years Plan has been developed with a particular focus on the needs of children aged from birth to eight years of age including their families and carers.

The City recognises that the Early Years of every child’s life are crucial for their healthy growth, wellbeing and development throughout life. Accordingly, the Municipal Early Years Plan aims to enhance the health and wellbeing of children and families by providing a framework to prioritise needs, plan for the future, facilitate partnerships and direct resources.

This is why the Municipal Early Years Plan has been subtitled - **Creating the Best Future for our Children.**

The City provides a range of high quality accessible services and facilities for families with children from birth to eight years. The Municipal Early Years Plan aims to guide the delivery of services and decisions about the most important roles for the City in the future. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the strength and commitment of all Early Years agencies and the dedicated contributions of our community to support every child having the opportunities to grow and learn in an inclusive and caring environment.

This is why the Municipal Early Years Plan has been prepared with an emphasis on ‘working together’ in multi-agency partnerships and taking an ‘evidence based approach’ to identify the priority needs of local children, families and agencies.

As well, the Municipal Early Years Plan responds to the City’s population growth by enabling a ‘whole of community’ approach to plan and deliver future services, infrastructure and partnerships to improve our children’s access to quality learning, play and care.
2. The City’s Commitment to Early Years

Children are our future. Investing in the first eight years of a child’s life will improve their health and education prospects and lead to improved social, human and economic outcomes for our community. This is especially true for children from vulnerable families.

(Source: Municipal Association of Victoria, 2011)

The City plays a major role in providing services for children whilst planning to respond to the future needs and infrastructure requirements of our growing population. The Greater Bendigo Municipal Early Years Plan - Creating the Best Future for our Children has been prepared in the context of Council’s Vision, recognition as a Child Friendly City; and community priorities.

The Council’s Vision

Greater Bendigo - working together to be Australia’s most liveable regional city.

Council’s Vision to be ‘Australia’s most liveable regional city’ also commits the City to creating and sustaining a ‘liveable’ environment where all children can grow, learn and thrive.

A Child Friendly City

Council’s vision to be ‘Australia’s most liveable regional city’ builds on a vibrant history of commitment to children, including international recognition of Greater Bendigo as a UNICEF Child Friendly City in 2007.

Council Plan Commitments

The Council Plan sets out the framework to guide Council and the community in terms of priorities of the City of Greater Bendigo. Council’s vision, as stated in the plan is:

‘Greater Bendigo – working together to be the most liveable regional city in Australia.’

Some of the strategies in the 2015/16 Council Plan of relevance to the Municipal Early Years Plan included, the City will:

• Advocate to other levels of government for funding for required infrastructure, key projects and services to be in place for our growing and liveable municipality.
• Promote Greater Bendigo as a Child Friendly City where people report improved health and wellbeing and they can feel safe.
• Progress the Council decisions resulting from the Early Childhood Services Review.
• Work to ensure that services are appropriate to meet the needs of children and young people including early years services, activities, implementation and monitoring.
• Support agreed actions that build and improve the physical and emotional wellbeing of children.
The City’s Commitments to Early Years (Continued)

The Municipal Early Years Plan (2015 - 2018) is a major forward planning process where the City and community stakeholders including families and children will work together to provide services, partnerships and infrastructure to match the future needs of our growing population. In particular, a Joint Partnership Commitment will be developed to acknowledge the contribution of every organisation undertaking action as part of the Municipal Early Years Plan. To be signed by the City and key agencies, the Joint Partnership Commitment will confirm a multi-agency agreement to achieve the Plan’s Vision and Themes and respective actions in the ‘Whole of Community’ Action Plan.
3. Executive Summary

‘There has been a policy shift in recent years as planning for childcare increasingly involves planning for the whole community’.
(Source: Catharine Hydon, Early Years Consultant and guest speaker at the first Municipal Early Years Key Stakeholder Forum.)

The Greater Bendigo Municipal Early Years Plan – Creating the Best Future for our Children (the Plan) provides a vision and strategic directions concerning our Early Years sector with a focus on ‘whole of community’ responses to the priorities identified by the community.

Whilst the City provides such services as Maternal and Child Health, immunisations, child care and facilities for pre-schools, it does so in the context of partnerships with many other agencies to ensure the best possible opportunities and outcomes for our children and families.

There are a broad range of Early Years services in Greater Bendigo including community agencies, voluntary associations and private businesses. As well, the Early Years environment is one of ongoing change where new government policies and programs emerge, funding doesn’t always match requirements and population growth creates new demands for service flexibility and infrastructure.

In response to this constantly changing environment, the Plan is seeking the best ways to plan, lead and advocate with children and families and work in a ‘whole of community’ partnership approach with other levels of government and the community.

3.1 Developing the Municipal Early Years Plan

The City commenced developing the Plan by informing the community about the Plan’s purpose and value and the underpinning principles of the planning process including:

a) There is a vibrant and dynamic history of commitment to Early Years planning and services in Greater Bendigo.

b) There are existing strengths and assets in the community including a significant range of quality Early Years services and businesses.

c) Many local agencies are committed to addressing disadvantage and providing accessible, inclusive and equitable services for vulnerable and at risk children regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion or ability.

d) Participation and community engagement in developing the Plan must involve all key stakeholders especially families and children.

e) The City plays significant planning, leadership and advocacy roles in partnerships with a broad range of Early Years services and relevant State and Federal government departments.
3.2 Key Elements of the Municipal Early Years Planning Process

‘It was important to develop a thorough understanding of the needs and issues facing children and families in Greater Bendigo.’

Understanding the current needs and issues in the Early Year’s environment required a comprehensive and in depth investigation and analysis of the issues being faced by children, families and local agencies.

Accordingly, the process to develop the Plan and its vision and priority themes was multi-dimensional and has comprised gathering information, data and trends from a number of key sources and preparing a range of background reports, these being:

1. Greater Bendigo Demographic Profile for Early Years,
2. The Review of Existing Early Years Plans and Policies,
3. The Community Engagement and Consultation Report into the findings of consultations with children, families and key stakeholder agencies; and

In summary, these four background reports provide the major elements of the evidence base from which the Municipal Early Years Plan’s vision, goals and priority themes have been derived for further action. In particularly:

The Greater Bendigo Demographic Profile: presents census data, research and service trends as an evidence base concerning the social, economic and population issues that impact on children, families and Early Years services in Greater Bendigo.

The Review of Plans and Policies: presents summaries of major strategies, reports, funding resources and research findings from Federal and State Government Departments, the City of Greater Bendigo, local service provider partnerships and community agencies.

The Community Engagement and Consultation Report: captures the broad range of community engagement activities and what people said about local early year's issues and priorities.

Consultations included:
- 25 face to face meetings with professional, parent and service groups and listening posts at local markets and shopping centres,
- 3 Key Stakeholder Information Forums attended by over 130 participants; and
- 305 survey responses from families, children and agencies.

What the community has said and the findings of these four reports has guided the development of the Plan’s Vision, Key Themes and priority areas for action and change.

Finally, an internal Review of the City’s Early Childhood Services was undertaken during 2013/14 to:
- Strengthen the City’s role in leadership, governance and service coordination of the early childhood education and care sector,
- Strengthen the City’s role in early childhood education and care infrastructure planning to meet community needs; and
- Change the focus from direct service provision where possible to addressing identified needs and service gaps.

The bringing together of the analysis and findings emanating from these four reports and community consultations has led to the creation of the Plan’s Early Years vision and priority themes, which now follow.
Our Early Years Vision:

All children aged from birth to eight years and their families are part of an active, healthy and safe child friendly community that promotes and provides real opportunities for learning and development.

Priority Themes:

Theme 1: Safety of Children.
Theme 2: Environment and Facilities for Children.
Theme 3: Active and Healthy Children.
Theme 4: Education and Care for Children.
Theme 5: Whole of Community Partnerships benefitting Children.
Theme 6: A Child Friendly City and Community.

Each of the six themes has led to the development of corresponding objectives and actions to enable the City in partnership with agencies and the community to help create the best future for our children.

The report will now discuss the six key themes in more detail including the related goals, findings and actions developed.
4. Themes, Key Findings and Actions

4.1 The Municipal Early Years Plan Vision

All children aged from birth to eight years and their families are part of an active, healthy and safe child friendly community that promotes and provides real opportunities for learning and development.

4.2 Vision and Themes

This Vision aims to demonstrate the importance of children and families within the community and provide direction to underpin Greater Bendigo’s planning and practices with children and their families as well as reinforce strong ‘whole of community’ partnerships in Greater Bendigo.

Drawing from the Vision, the six themes have been developed in response to the priorities identified during the overall planning and community consultation process to prepare the Municipal Early Years Plan.

The six themes are elaborated upon via the associated findings, purpose, objectives and actions which have been designed to allow the City and agencies throughout Greater Bendigo to respond to an ever changing Early Years sector and support the wellbeing of children and families.

Thus the themes and related purposes aspire to turn the Plan’s Vision into a reality.

Now we will discuss each theme in more detail including the related purpose, findings and objectives.

The findings are also discussed including a summary of the reasons that emerged from our consultations and research for choosing each theme.

Action Plan

Each theme and its objectives has led to the development of a significant range of actions to be undertaken by the City in partnership with a broad range of community organisations. Please see attached the Municipal Early Years Plan – Action Plan for all the details.
Theme 1: Safety of Children

Purpose:

To develop a safe community for children and their families.

Findings:

Children are among the most vulnerable members of our community and it is the role of the whole community to ensure their safety. Every child has the right to feel safe and the community must ensure that all places children go and activities they participate in make them feel safe and secure.

Creating safe and inclusive environments for children is the responsibility of all sectors of the community, families, government and agencies.

The safety of children was discussed frequently throughout the community consultations in particular by families and agencies. It is also at the forefront of key policies and practices being developed across the municipality, for example the Safe Communities Forum and the Family Violence Prevention Action Plan.

Objectives:

1. To support organisations, programs and initiatives that promote children’s safety in the community; and

2. To develop safe environments for children and their families.
Theme 2: Environment and Facilities for Children

Purpose:

To plan for and develop quality and accessible child friendly spaces and supportive infrastructure.

Findings:

Greater Bendigo is a growing municipality. Developing sustainable, cohesive and accessible communities requires a planned approach to the upgrade and maintenance of existing infrastructure and the establishment of new developments. It is imperative that the development of services and infrastructure is responsive to changing community needs, priorities and desires.

The provision of quality and accessible services and infrastructure is crucial to enable the City to fulfil its vision for the municipality and achieve its goals to improve outcomes for children. The community requires access to the services and infrastructure that supports their needs and requirements. This includes access to child care, kindergartens, health services, education facilities, etc.

Children, families and agencies were clear in expressing their requirements for accessible, integrated and quality infrastructure and child friendly environments that allow for all community members to come together and interact including children with different abilities and children from diverse backgrounds.

Objectives:

1. To support and develop additional Early Years infrastructure and child friendly environments; and

2. To provide child friendly environments to encourage community interactions and children’s development.
Theme 3: Active and Healthy Children

Purpose:

To improve the health and wellbeing of children.

Findings:

Improving health and wellbeing outcomes for children is a priority of government, service providers and community members. This is particularly so in the face of increasing risk factors including physical inactivity, drug and alcohol consumption, poor nutrition, and increased stress, all of which impact on the health and wellbeing of children. Addressing these risk factors through promoting a healthy lifestyle reduces the risk of disease, eases pressure on resources and promotes increased wellbeing.

The health of children and families and their access to walking and riding tracks and open spaces was identified as an issue of critical importance. More opportunities for physical activity as a family; and community events that bring families and children together was also identified as being of great importance to the community.

Objectives:

1. To provide opportunities for all children to participate in physical activities,

2. To facilitate a broad range of community based events for children and their families,

3. To improve overall health outcomes for children,

4. To increase participation in Maternal and Child Health Services especially for Aboriginal children and families,

5. To increase immunisation rates to above the Victorian state average; and

6. To increase breastfeeding rates above the Victorian state average.
Theme 4: Education and Care for Children

Purpose:

To ensure children have access to the best possible education and care.

Findings:

Early childhood education and care services play a critical role in supporting families and facilitating opportunities for parents to participate in the workforce. The quality of these services, programs and children’s experiences is therefore paramount to improving outcomes for children and families.

In addition to formal Early Years programs there are opportunities for community activities that are important to create social connections and bonds between families, as well as offering opportunities to participate and have fun.

Families and agencies made it clear that affordable, inclusive and accessible services throughout the community were vital to ensuring all children have the best start in life. Families require up to date and clear information about services available in Greater Bendigo as well as information to assist with the development of their child.

Objectives:

1. To provide families with clear and understandable information about programs, services and children’s development,

2. To ensure Early Learning Services and programs are affordable, accessible and inclusive,

3. To provide professional development opportunities for service providers and educational opportunities for parents,

4. To implement the City’s changed role in response to the outcomes of the Early Years Review,

5. To ensure systemic improvement for vulnerable and at risk children,

6. To increase the literacy and numeracy skills of children and their families; and

7. To support access and participation in early childhood services for children living in Out of Home Care.
Theme 5: Whole of Community Partnerships Benefitting Children

Purpose:

To strengthen Early Years partnerships to improve outcomes for children.

Findings:

Community partnerships are increasingly being identified as a priority of governments, community organisations and Early Year’s agencies to assist understand and address local and regional needs.

Building collaborative partnerships with a range of key stakeholders allows the City to identify local needs and make informed and effective decisions. It also enables key stakeholders to assist in collaborative decision making and building local capacity. The development of Community Partnerships requires stakeholders to collaborate to achieve mutual aims and actions that benefits children and families.

There are a range of partnerships throughout Greater Bendigo between local, State and Federal Government, community agencies, not for profit and for profit organisations and businesses; as well as education facilities including childcare, kindergartens and schools.

Demographic changes in Greater Bendigo and issues that impact on families and the conditions under which they raise children are encouraging service providers and professionals to work together to respond more appropriately to families and children’s emerging needs.

Inter-agency partnerships can support families as they help to provide a more consistent approach across service-types, and can make services accessible.

In particular, it was the agencies consulted who made it clear that inter-agency partnerships require recognition and strengthening to ensure services can be delivered in a timely and effective manner and are accessible to all families.

Objectives:

1. To enhance and develop whole of community inter-agency partnerships across all government and community sectors to enable integrated planning leading to the improved delivery of Early Years services and programs,

2. To encourage the development of research and sharing of research data to improve our evidence base and to help plan, deliver and advocate for services,

3. To advocate to State and Federal Governments for funding and support in response to emerging needs of the community,

4. To provide high quality, accessible and responsive Early Years services and programs which respond to the priority needs of children and their families,

5. To implement the Municipal Early Years Plan as a ‘whole of community’ partnership and evaluate its effectiveness in achieving the goals, objectives and actions; and

6. To ensure systemic improvement for vulnerable and at risk children.
Theme 6: A Child Friendly City and Community

Purpose:

*To ensure the creation of child friendly environments and enhance children’s participation in the decision making processes that impact on their lives.*

Findings:

As a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, all Australian children have recognised rights, including the right to play, health care, and loving and caring home environments.

The responsibility for improving outcomes for all children lies not only with their families but also with the community as a whole. This includes the City and non-government services providing a range of accessible and inclusive programs, activities and facilities for families and young children in Greater Bendigo.

As Australia’s first recognised Child Friendly City, Greater Bendigo families and agencies have shown a clear and strong commitment to the children of the municipality including a commitment to ensure all children have the opportunity to express their opinions and be part of change in the community.

Objectives:

1. To lead the implementation of the Victorian Local Government Association’s Charter for Child Friendly Cities and Communities. Please see Appendix 3 for further details,

2. To enable children to experience environments that respond to their needs and aspirations,

3. To enable and encourage children to express their opinions and to participate in and contribute to decisions about their community and their health and wellbeing,

4. To provide equitable access to supportive environments and services for children, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion or ability; and

5. To incorporate the needs and rights of children when developing City planning documents and strategic directions for the community.
5. Early Years Services in Greater Bendigo

From a social perspective, children who have access to Early Years services are more likely to do well at school, have improved health and wellbeing and have better employment opportunities when they are older. Most importantly, an investment in Early Years helps children to reach their full potential in life and reduces the impact of disadvantage.

(Source: kidsmatter.edu.au)

Greater Bendigo has a vibrant, diverse and highly committed early childhood education and care sector. Most parents will be aware of services such as: Long Day Care, Kindergarten, Family Day Care, Playgroups and Maternal and Child Health.

Early childhood education and care throughout Greater Bendigo is operated by a range of service providers including the City, not for profit organisations and private businesses. Services also operate in a range of locations throughout the municipality including the central business district, surrounding suburbs and outer towns such as Heathcote, Elmore, Marong, Strathfieldsaye and others.

Families will also be provided with a range of new child care choices in the future especially as new Long Day Care services and kindergartens are planned and built in response the City's rising population.

The City’s Review of Early Childhood Services in 2013 discussed the City’s role in planning for the future needs of the early childhood sector. The City consistently reviews planning permits to map service delivery across the municipality to ensure a range of services exist for families and that the level of facilities and services meets the needs of a growing population.

Currently, most kindergartens, Long Day Care and Family Day Care services have very few vacancies in particular suburbs. The increase in infrastructure and services including new early learning and childcare facilities will meet any shortage for families as well as projected population growth throughout the municipality. During the community consultations undertaken to develop the Plan, families discussed the need for flexible service delivery to meet changing needs including the needs of single parents and shift workers; and having early start times or late finishes.

The City has identified areas within Greater Bendigo where infrastructure and services will be required in the future to meet emerging population demands for Long Day Care and kindergarten places. This is due to such changes as the introduction of 15 kindergarten hours per week provided to families; and the change in educator to child ratios implemented in 2013 and again in 2016. The lack of infrastructure in areas of growing need will be identified as part of the City’s strategic planning role.

This problem is set to increase in the future given projected increases in the population of 0-4 year old children especially in Greater Bendigo. The City recently received State Government funding to build an Integrated Community Hub in Strathfieldsaye to meet the high level of demand for facilities such as a new kindergarten in that area.

Early Years Centres

In 2015, there were 16 Early Learning Centres in Greater Bendigo providing approximately 1531 places for children in Long Day Care. Following the closure of the Bendigo Early Learning Centre in December 2015, the City will continue to operate two Long Day Care centres at the Anne Galvin Child Care Centre in Gladstone Street, Bendigo; and the Helen Jessen Early Learning Centre in Crook Street, Strathdale.
The Bendigo Occasional Care Centre transitioned into Long Day Care places in 2016 leading to there being ten places available at both Helen Jessen and Annie Galvin Early Learning Centres for casual care.

The remaining Long Day Care places in Greater Bendigo are provided by a mix of not for profit and private business providers.

As the Greater Bendigo population continues to grow so does the demand for child care places and new centres are being planned by the community and private businesses in areas of projected high population growth such as Huntly, Epsom, Strathfieldsaye and Maiden Gully.

Kindergartens

Throughout Greater Bendigo there are 21 kindergarten facilities catering for approximately 1180 children aged from three to five years. In 2015 there were approximately 1500 children attending a funded kindergarten program across Long Day Care services and stand-alone kindergartens.

Family Day Care

There are currently approximately 70 Family Day Carers offering education and care services in Greater Bendigo. The number of carers is rising as the popularity of Family Day Care grows.

Schools

There are 29 Government Primary Schools, 12 Catholic Primary Schools, two independent schools and three schools for children with additional needs all catering for approximately 18,000 children aged from five to twelve years.

Other Services

There are a range of other Early Years Services available throughout Greater Bendigo for children aged from birth to eight years including:

- Maternal and Child Health
- Enhanced Maternal and Child Health
- Immunisations
- Off to an Early Start
- Playgroups
- In Home Support Services
- Indigenous Kindergarten Services
- Early Childhood Intervention Services
- School Nursing Program
- Out of Home Care
- Child Protection services
6. Community Engagement and Consultation

As part of the process to develop the Municipal Early Years Plan, the City was especially committed to ensuring that children’s voices were heard and acted upon. With a history that includes participation in the UNICEF’s Child Friendly City’s Network, the City is committed to consulting with children when undertaking the planning of programs, services or facilities that will have an impact on children and their families. To ensure that inclusive and appropriate types of consultation processes are used, the City has developed Protocols which are outlined in its Community Engagement Framework.

As part of the development of the Plan, from July 2014 until June 2015, children, community members and service providers were consulted in order to identify respective key issues and priority needs in relation to the future of Early Years programs, services and facilities within the City.

The community engagement and consultation objectives were:

1. To innovatively consult with the community, families, children and key stakeholders to discuss issues, identify priorities and raise community awareness about the purpose of the Plan and the way it will be developed. In particular, to ensure disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in the community were informed and consulted.

2. To ensure key stakeholders and the broader community are involved in the consultation process that ultimately informs the Plan’s themes, purposes, findings, objectives and actions.

3. To ensure that contemporary, effective and clear communication is undertaken with all key stakeholders.

Community engagement allowed us to hear from children, families and agencies about what their vision was for the City, what services and programs were required and what would make Greater Bendigo a great place for children and families to live.

Raising Community Awareness

To create awareness about the process to develop the Municipal Early Years Plan, three Community Bulletins were released to inform the community about the purpose of the Plan and its key stages and timelines.

- Bulletin One was produced and distributed prior to any consultation activities occurring to introduce the aims of the Plan and the process that would be undertaken to produce the Plan,
- Bulletin Two was distributed half way through the process and discussed the consultations and Themes developed to support the Vision of the Plan; and
- Bulletin Three was an Executive Summary of the Draft Plan in the lead up to the release for public exhibition.

The Bulletins were distributed via a range of children’s services and venues such as the City offices and the three libraries within the municipality. Two thousand postcards were also printed and circulated at shopping centres, markets, playgroups, mother’s groups, libraries, at various family related events and through kindergartens and primary schools.
Further, City staff and the Project Consultant, Wendy Holland from communityvibe attended meetings to raise awareness and speak about the process to develop the Plan including a community consultation process to reach children, their families and service providers. The consultation process also included meetings with school principals, kindergarten teachers and City staff.

Details of the Plan’s community engagement and consultation process can be found in the Community Consultation and Engagement Report which is divided into two parts. The first part comprises the Executive Summary, followed by an overview of the consultations with children and community members including families and service providers. The second part of the Report contains the full details of all the responses from children, community members and service providers.

The major elements of the community engagement and consultation process undertaken in the development of the Plan were:

- Three Key Stakeholder Information Group Forums which brought together agencies from across the City to discuss key issues for the families they work with and priority directions and actions to be included in the Plan,

- Receiving 305 Surveys comprising: 211 Family Surveys, 57 Agency Surveys and 37 Surveys from Children; and

- Holding over 25 face to face consultation sessions with a range of groups.

6.1 Summary Analysis – Community Engagement and Consultation Process

The community engagement and consultation process involved over 630 children, families, community members and service providers. The results of the community engagement and consultation process led to the development of the Plan’s six priority themes to help focus and guide future action.

These themes being:

Theme 1: Safety of Children.

Theme 2: Environment and Facilities for Children.

Theme 3: Active and Healthy Children.

Theme 4: Education and Care for Children.

Theme 5: Whole of Community Partnerships benefitting Children.

Theme 6: A Child Friendly City and Community.

The details of each theme emerged directly from the analysis of the discussions, surveys and children’s drawings that occurred as part of the community engagement and consultation process.

As well, many of the actions included in the Action Plan have come directly from participant suggestions at consultation meetings and forums.

For example, analysis was undertaken of the commentary at the face to face discussions, responses to the online surveys and the imaginative sub-text found in the children’s drawings. A range of findings arose including similarities and differences between each key group and what children really felt was important to them.

Creating the best future for our children
6.1.1 When listening to children

When listening to children and analysing their survey responses and drawings it was found that the favourite things identified were playgrounds, bushland, parks and nature in general. In particular, children spoke about and drew pictures of themselves playing in parks, surrounded by family and friends, with trees and animals in the background.

6.1.2 When listening to families and community members

When talking to the broader community including families and residents and analysing their survey results it was found that transport and improved cycling and walking paths were priorities as well as quality playgrounds that are accessible to all community members.

Both children and broader community members especially focussed on nature and the outdoors by discussing what active experiences that can be undertaken as a family in secure environments. This discussion and feedback led to the development of three of the six Key Themes of the Municipal Early Years Plan these being:

**Theme 1: Safety of Children:** especially concerning vulnerable and at risk children, women and families, preventing violence; and ensuring there are services available to assist.

**Theme 2: Environments and Facilities:** especially concerning the facilities available for families to meet and environments for children to play.

**Theme 3: Active and Healthy Children:** including the opportunities for affordable and accessible experiences that allow families and children to be active together.

6.1.3 Dialogue with service providers and agencies:

Consultations with service providers and agencies confirmed the three key Themes raised via consultations with children, families and community members. However, a broader scope of issues was also raised which has led to the development of a further three Themes, these being:

**Theme 4: Education and Care for Children:** especially equality of access to education and care services for all families and children.

**Theme 5: Whole of Community Partnerships benefitting Children** including: agencies working together in partnership and networking more regularly to deliver more effective infrastructure and service responses.

**Theme 6: A Child Friendly City and Community:** especially increasing the opportunities for children to be part of a child friendly city and community.

The range of issues discussed by service providers and agencies was very broad. Whilst many worked in different fields and at different levels with children and families, their issues mostly related to their direct client base.

These consultations focussed on how to improve the services available to children and families including accessibility, affordability, locations, quality, staffing and funding.

Service providers and agencies also discussed family violence which was not a topic raised by community members or children.
Other issues raised by both community members and service providers and agencies were:

- Improved public transport opportunities,
- Servicing of outlying areas and growth areas; and
- Accessible, affordable, inclusive, flexible and quality childcare and early intervention services.

This feedback linked directly to Theme 2 - Environment and Facilities and Theme 4 - Education and Care.

It was also evident through the process that the priority for families and community members was the health and happiness of their children which is covered by Theme 6 – Child Friendly City and Community.

In contrast, the priority for service providers and agencies was the cost of services for families and access and equity in service provision especially for disadvantaged families, children from diverse backgrounds and children with different abilities. Children made it very clear that spending time with loved ones, playing and exploring the outdoors playing was the thing that made Greater Bendigo a great place to them and it also made their family happier.

Community members also saw the cost of services as a major issue, however, this was not identified as a high priority.

More specific details about the consultation process undertaken in relation to children, families and community members and service providers and agencies and their responses in depth now follows.
6.2 Report On Overall Consultation Responses

6.2.1 Children’s Responses

For children a short survey was developed as well as an opportunity to have their say through drawings and art.

Of the 37 surveys returned by children, 57% were completed by girls and 43% by boys.

The distribution of ages of children who completed the survey was relatively even as represented below in Diagram 2.

Diagram 2: Return of Children’s Surveys by Age

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<th>Age</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Number</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

In the surveys children were asked to identify where they live. The most common answer was Bendigo (which could in fact account for anywhere within the City), followed by North Bendigo / California Gully and Flora Hill / Quarry Hill / Spring Gully / Garden Gully. No surveys were received from children living in East Bendigo, Epsom / Ascot, Kennington; and Long Gully / West Bendigo / Ironbark.

The children’s survey raised the following questions:

- Children’s favourite places,
- Children’s least favourite places,
- The thing that children most like about the area in which they live,
- Children’s favourite things to do, and
- Things that make children feel lucky.

The children’s drawing consultations asked children to respond to two questions:

Question 1 - Draw a picture of your town/community and include places you like best in your town.

Question 2 – Draw a picture of your dream place, include all the things you think would make it a great place for children.

An overview of the children’s responses now follow in Table 1.
Table 1: Summary of Children’s Priority Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Highest Priorities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written surveys</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>• Children’s favourite places are playgrounds, parks, gardens, swimming pools and lakes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Children’s least favourite places are shopping centres and supermarkets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• In their local area children like being in nature, family / friends and sport / recreation facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Children’s favourite things to do are: taking part in structured sport, unstructured physical activities and spending time with family and friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Children felt lucky due to having family and friends and being healthy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Things that would make Bendigo a great place to live include: quality playgrounds, walking / cycling paths, good parks and more activities for children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawings</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>• Children’s favourite places are playgrounds, the bush, parks, and swimming pool.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Children’s least favourite places include shops and supermarkets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Favourite activities are unstructured physical activity (e.g. bike riding), playing with family and friends, visiting playgrounds, swimming, playing sport, dancing, art / craft, computer games.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Good aspects of the neighbourhood which children live are nature and the environment, close to family friends and close to playgrounds, cycling / walking paths and sports grounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Ideas to improve Bendigo include more parks, bigger and better playgrounds, water play, more activities for children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening Post at Raywood</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>• Favourite places are: the sports ground, pool, golf course, bike track, other towns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Least favourite places are school and big cities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Suggested improvements include more play opportunities, skate park, bike track, movies and fast food restaurants.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall Analysis of Children’s Responses

Overwhelmingly children talked about wanting more outdoor activities. Going to a park or playground, swimming pool or water park, going for a ride on their bike, playing in their’s or someone else’s garden and getting out into the bush. Walking, bike riding and/or playing in bush cubbies were repeatedly mentioned.

More and varied play spaces are wanted by children with a focus on adventure and natural materials. They also want to be challenged. Children frequently mentioned trees being in their play spaces. They also mentioned community gardens and showed an awareness of the environment and living in harmony with it. Play spaces should also appeal to a wide age range, so that all members of the family can enjoy the space at their own level and ability.

Children identified more water play spaces were needed which included more to do for older as well as younger children including slides, play spaces, climbing and diving.

They also discussed safe spaces to ride bikes with clearly defined bike and walking tracks as well as more bike and skate parks, where children don’t have to share paths or spaces.

Another item raised was the importance of interaction with animals in parks and play spaces. Children felt Greater Bendigo needed facilities where they could interact with a range of animals as well as enjoying other activities at the same time.

Each item discussed by children has been directly related to one of the six Key Themes of Plan. When analysing what was essential for children it echoed many of the principles and actions associated with Theme 6: Greater Bendigo being a ‘Child Friendly City and Community’. For example: a City where children can be outdoors, feel safe, play with friends and family and be active.

As well, being a ‘Child Friendly City and Community’ involves children having the opportunity to have their say in the issues that impact on them, for example: the way the community looks and how it is experienced, the programs that are available to them; and whether or not they feel they can interact safely with their environment.

Children’s Participation

Children were also consulted via other mediums such as drawing and group art.

A significant process of engagement here was when children and staff from the South Bendigo Kindergarten prepared two art canvases depicting what was important in their lives.

The children and staff presented their wonderful art canvases to former Mayor, Cr Barry Lyons and now one canvas hangs on the wall adjacent to the stairs in the City’s Lyttleton Terrace Office and the other hangs on a ground floor wall at the Goldfields Library in Hargreaves St, Bendigo.

6.2.2 Family and Community Member Responses

Community members including families were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed with various statements (please see the Community Engagement Consultation Report) as well as answering questions about:

a) Living in Greater Bendigo now and what families with young children might need in terms of housing, services, facilities, roads, transport and the environment; and

b) Living in Greater Bendigo in five years’ time and what families with young children might need in terms of housing, services, facilities, roads, transport and the environment.
Table 2: Summary of family and community priority responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Highest Priorities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community surveys</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>• Improve cycling and walking opportunities including footpaths in every street.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Develop and upgrade play spaces, for example: more diversity, nature based play,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>water play, challenging play. Improved public transport and safe crossings and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>more family friendly events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Improved public transport opportunities, cycling and walking paths. Quality and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>affordable childcare. Improved playgrounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening posts and</td>
<td>67 respondents</td>
<td>• Childcare - long waiting lists for Occasional Care. Vacancies close to where they</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>workshops</td>
<td>across 27 events</td>
<td>live.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Information - need improved sources of information regarding facilities, services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and programs for children and families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Play - quality, inclusive, local, nature-based and adventure playgrounds are a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>priority, including water play, more seats, shade, toilets and some fences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Facilities - more clean purpose built parents rooms and family toilets are required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>in the CBD area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Transport – need more cycling paths, walking paths and footpaths.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Programs - a playgroup for babies (3-18 month olds); mother’s group for 2(^{nd}),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3(^{rd}) and 4(^{th}) children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Activities - would like to see more family events and activities in Bendigo.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall Analysis of Family and Community Member Survey Responses

Community members and families spoke strongly about upgrading and developing the City to be permeable and responsive to the needs of children and families. This included, for example: bike and walking tracks, playgrounds, activities or events; and access to services.

Improving the cycling/ walking network was a priority for many which also correlated with one of the top things children mentioned they liked to do in the City. Community members and families were obviously in tune with what their children enjoy doing and see improved networks, more off road trails and paths that connect other activities which children enjoy as a major priority. Both community members and children identified they enjoy spending time with family and friends, riding bikes or walking in their local area.

Another major area identified by community members and children alike was playgrounds and play spaces. Children discussed visiting parks and playgrounds as a favourite activity and community members pin pointed the need to maintain upgrade and develop local play spaces including visible toilets, better fencing and play spaces with a range of experiences that will challenge children and extend their development.

Community members were especially aware of the enjoyment children get from local playgrounds and parks and felt the development of these will increase attendance and usage by the community.

There were some key points raised by community members that weren’t discussed by child respondents. These included:

• Improved transport options,
• Holding more affordable (low cost/free) events and activities for families,
• Improved childcare opportunities including Occasional Care, Family Day Care, Long Day Care,
• Increased accessibility to health and wellbeing services; and
• Improved education opportunities.

The major areas of feedback from community members also supported the core issues raised when developing each of the Plan’s six themes. For example, there was strong feedback regarding improving the cycling / walking network within the municipality and improved parks and playgrounds which all linked strongly to the Themes of:

• Safety of Children,
• Environment and Facilities for Children,
• Active and Healthy Children;; and
• A Child Friendly City and Community.

6.2.3 Service Providers and Agencies

The Service Provider survey asked a range of questions requesting participants to rate their responses on particular topics as well as answering more open questions. The focus of the survey was on:

a) What are the major issues impacting on early years in Greater Bendigo?
b) What are the priorities for families in relation to their children?
c) What are the top 5 priorities in relation to early years in Greater Bendigo?
d) What is needed to respond to the major issues identified?
Table 3: Summary of priority responses from service providers and agencies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Highest Priorities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Service provider survey     | 66                     | • Major issues for families include finances / cost of services, service quality, limited collaboration between services, and accessibility of services particularly for vulnerable families, lack of access to specialists and long waiting lists for intervention services.  
• Family priorities are health and wellbeing of children; access to quality, safe, inclusive and affordable childcare. Access to affordable intervention services in a timely manner.  
• Early Years priorities in the City are access to affordable, timely, quality and responsive health and wellbeing services; better communication and coordination between Early Years organisations within the City; and accessible, affordable, inclusive, flexible and quality childcare and early intervention services.  
• What is needed to assist includes more funding, improved planning, service delivery in growth areas, collaboration by service providers and a shift towards more integrated services. |
| Service provider workshops  | 130 participants across two workshops | • Major issues identified as impacting on Early Years in the City were:  
  o An increase in the number of vulnerable families in the CoGB.  
  o Access to and capacity of early intervention services.  
  o Access and participation of Aboriginal children.  
  o Rural access to and availability of services.  
  o Affordability.  
  o Community education, quality education and its importance.  
  o Parenting skills and nutrition.  
  o Assistance available to vulnerable families.  
• Top five priorities in relation to Early Years in Greater Bendigo:  
  o Vulnerability.  
  o Access to services on all levels.  
  o Transport.  
  o Health and wellbeing.  
  o Engagement of families.  
• What is needed to respond to the major issues identified:  
  o Flexible service models.  
  o Funding.  
  o Resources and better utilisation of current resources.  
  o Collaboration and consultation – children, families, communities and other professionals. |
The Key issues identified were:

- Vulnerable children and families including families with a child or carer living with a disability, Aboriginal families Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities.
- Accessibility and inclusivity of services.
- Timely and affordable access to intervention services.
- Improved information provision, including the use of mobile phones and social media.
- Professional development of Early Years staff.
- Servicing of outlying areas and growth areas.
- Continue to expand reach of Maternal and Child Health service.
- Health and wellbeing of children and families including sufficient levels of physical activity and healthy eating.
- Ensuring children’s voices are heard when planning new services, programs or facilities.
- Need for more free / low cost family events.
- Need for walkable communities and improved public transport options.
- Mental health issues for children and parents.
- Need for continued parental education.
- Need for improved service practices and models, e.g. No Wrong Door Policy, Centralised Enrolment System, Kidz Space and Sidney Myer Haven development.
- Impact of family violence and drug addiction.
- Improving literacy and numeracy.
- Improved school transitions.
- Further improvements to safety of public facilities utilised by children.
- Important to provide supported playgroups, particularly for vulnerable families.
Overall Analysis of Service Provider Responses

Service providers most frequently discussed vulnerable children and families in their surveys and via face to face consultations. This included families with a child or carer living with a disability, Aboriginal families; and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities.

In particular, service providers discussed the increase in the number of vulnerable families throughout Greater Bendigo and the complexity in issues they were seeing.

However, in contrast, community members and children did not discuss vulnerable children as a priority in their surveys. Although, some links appeared when community members discussed waiting lists for services and the costs of services that may place a strain on their family.

Other key issues raised by service providers included:

- Accessibility and inclusivity of services,
- Timely and affordable access to intervention services,
- Improved information provision; and
- Professional development of Early Years staff.

Some of the key issues recognised by the service providers were also raised by community members. For example: community members also discussed the importance of accessibility to Early Years services and improved information provision including the availability of APPS or social media to raise awareness about what facilities and services are available.

The range of issues discussed by service providers was extremely broad and as many worked in different fields and with a range of children and families, their issues could be seen to relate directly to their client base.

The consultations with service providers focussed on the importance of improving the services available to families and children including accessibility, affordability, locations, quality, staffing and funding.

Service providers also raised family violence as a priority however this was not a topic discussed by either community members or children.

Face to Face Consultations with Key Stakeholders

Parallel to the surveys, over 25 face to face meetings were held with agencies and community groups from across the municipality. As part of the meetings key stakeholders were asked about the actions their organisation was undertaking in relation to Early Years and how these actions related to the Municipal Early Years Plan's Themes and Action Plan.

The questions asked were the same questions asked of families and community members, these being:

a) What are the major issues impacting on early years in Greater Bendigo?
b) What are the priorities for families in relation to their children?
c) What are the top 5 priorities in relation to early years in Greater Bendigo?
d) What is needed to respond to the major issues identified?

Please see Appendix 1 for a list of people and agencies who participated in face to face meetings.

Key areas raised included:

- Improved sources of information,
- Quality, inclusive, local, nature-based adventure playgrounds are a priority, including water play, more seats, shade, toilets and fences,
• Clean, purpose built parent's rooms and family toilets required in the CBD,
• More footpaths required in Bendigo especially in the outer suburbs and new estates; and
• More pram and child friendly cafes.

The First Quarter Governance Group – Early Years Coordination Group

Members of the Early Years Coordination Group were consulted about the Draft Municipal Early Years Plan and Action Plan. In particular, discussions about the Plan’s commitment to ‘whole of community partnerships’ led the group to request a Joint Partnership Commitment be drafted to assist implement the Plan in a partnership approach with the City of Greater Bendigo and other key stakeholders.

Please see Appendix 2 for the Early Years Coordination Group Membership List.

To see the full version of the Community Engagement and Consultation Report please go to: www.bendigo.vic.gov.au/meyp
7. Greater Bendigo Demographic Profile

The Greater Bendigo Demographic Profile (the Profile) presents census data, Early Years research and service trends as an evidence base concerning the social, economic and environmental issues that impact on children and families.

The data and trends presented in the Profile include an overview and analysis of:

- Greater Bendigo Population Growth Areas
- Population Growth and Planning for Infrastructure and Services
- Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)
- Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA)
- Population and Age
- Households
- Unpaid Childcare
- People Needing Assistance
- Housing Stress
- Mothers in Workforce
- Couple Families and Workforce
- Birth rates and Low Birth Weight Babies
- Teenage Pregnancies
- Breastfeeding
- Immunisation
- Maternal and Child Health
- General Health
- Physical Activity
- Childcare, Kinder and Schools.

As part of the development of the Municipal Early Years Plan, data and trends from the Profile were used to:

a) Inform presentations and meetings during the community engagement and consultation phase,

b) Identify key demographic issues to be responded to in the Plan and the Action Plan, for example: growing populations in new residential areas requiring planning for future Early Years infrastructure and services; and

c) Identify key equity and service access trends on a comparative basis at local, regional and State levels, for example: Socio Economic Indexes For Areas (SEIFA) and Australian Early Development Census (AEDC). In particular, the Profile identifies that the population of Greater Bendigo is growing and is forecast to reach approximately 112,800 by 2016 and 156,000 by 2036 with an annual growth rate of 1,700 additional residents.

To see the full version of the Greater Bendigo Demographic Profile please go to: www.bendigo.vic.gov.au/meyp

7.1 Demographic Overview

The following demographic overview provides a snapshot of broader issues, data and trends that have informed the development of the Municipal Early Years Plan Vision, Themes, Purpose and Action Plan.

Population Growth

The Greater Bendigo population will continue to grow in the long term to be about 156,000 by the year 2036. This number will
include around 18,750 children aged up to eight years which is approximately 12.0% of our overall population.

Greater Bendigo covers an area of approximately 3,000 square kilometres and is the third largest urban area in regional Victoria. Greater Bendigo includes many small towns such as Heathcote, Elmore, Axedale and Marong.

Population Growth Areas

The areas with the greatest projected increase in population between 2015 and 2036 will be Huntly (projected increase 7,970 residents which is an increase of 258.7%), and Strathfieldsaye (7,853, 44.5%).

The 0 - 8 years Population

The population of 0 – 8 year olds in Greater Bendigo is increasing. There are currently approximately 7,700 children aged between 0 – 4 years and approximately 5,900 children between 5 – 8 years in Greater Bendigo.

By the year 2036 this is forecast to rise to 10,340 – an increase of 33.7% for the 0 – 4 year olds and 8,400, an increase of 42.4% for the 5 – 8 year olds.

Growth Suburbs

The 0 – 4 years:

For the 0 – 4’s the majority of growth from now to 2036 is expected in Huntly, with an increase of 537 children up 208%, Strathfieldsaye, 625 children (up by 135%) and Maiden Gully, 450 children (up by 138%).

The 5 – 8 years:

For the 5 – 8’s the majority of growth to 2036 is expected to occur in Huntly, 503 children (an increase of 255%), Strathfieldsaye, 542 children (up by 133%) and Marong, 317 children (125%).

Overall For 0 – 8 years:

The highest population growth suburbs for children 0 – 8 years across the City are: Huntly, Strathfieldsaye, Maiden Gully and Marong.

Map 1: Growth Areas 0 – 8 years
Population Growth and Planning for Infrastructure and Services

This level of population growth across the municipality will result in the need for an additional 413 kindergarten places (or 13 kindergarten rooms), an additional 435 childcare places (or an additional 15 rooms) and an additional five double room Maternal and Child Health services by 2031.

The population growth in Greater Bendigo also means the demand for services will grow. The change in the population and growth areas of the families residing in Greater Bendigo affects the type of services required to meet these needs.
Graph 1: Growth in Population, 0 – 4 years, 2016 – 2036, by suburbs.

Analysis of 0 – 4 years Forecast Population:

In relation to the projected increase in numbers of children between 2016 and 2036, Strathfieldsaye contains the biggest increase of 606 children (126.9%) then Huntly with 514 (153.5%). Maiden Gully, and Marong are also forecast to experience increased growth in this age group with Maiden Gully forecast to increase by 456 children (142.6%) and Marong-Rural West 340 (113.3%).

Some suburbs are forecast to have a decrease in the number of 0-4 year olds between 2016 and 2036. This includes Flora Hill - Quarry Hill - Spring Gully with a decrease of 45 children (-5.6%), Long Gully - West Bendigo - Ironbark with a decrease of 19 (-6.9 %,) and Epsom - Ascot with a decrease of 18 (-4.6 %).

It is noted Kangaroo Flat has a high number of 0 – 4 year olds in 2036 (approx. 800 children) however the area does not have a significant increase in children between 2016 and 2036.
**Analysis of 5 – 8 years Forecast Population:**

In relation to the projected increase in numbers of children between 2016 and 2036, Strathfieldsaye contains the largest increase at 520 children (121.4%). Huntly also has a large increase of 487 (227.5%). Marong and Maiden Gully are also forecast to experience growth in this age group with an increase for Maiden Gully of 351 children (112.6%) and Marong of 303 (112.9%).

The suburbs forecast to have a decrease in the number of 5-8 year olds between 2016 and 2036 once again includes Long Gully - West Bendigo - Ironbark with a decrease of 37 children (-14.8%) and Heathcote and District with a decrease of 10 children (-6.2%).
**Australian Early Development Census**

In 2014, the Australian Early Development Index program was renamed the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC).

The AEDC provides a national measurement to monitor the development of Australian children.

The AEDC provides evidence to support policy, planning and action for health, education and community support. It can assist governments and services to develop flexible approaches to policy and planning that address the evolving needs of children and families in the future.

The AEDC measures five areas or 'domains' of early childhood development. These domains are closely linked to the predictors of good adult health, education and social outcomes, these being:

- Physical health and wellbeing
- Social competence
- Emotional maturity
- Language and cognitive skills (school-based)
- Communication skills and general knowledge.

Communities can influence the earliest years of children's lives. The AEDC results give communities a snapshot of children's development as they arrive at school. The results can support communities to understand the local levels of developmental vulnerability and where that vulnerability exists within their community.

According to AEDC data 19.2% of children in Greater Bendigo are developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains and 9.9% of children are developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains.

Please see Table 4 for a comparative overview of AEDC at the Greater Bendigo, state and national levels.
The areas with the highest percentage of children vulnerable in one or more areas in Greater Bendigo were Elmore/Goornong (38.9%), Long Gully and surrounds (31.1%) and Quarry Hill (28.6%).

The areas with the highest percentage of children vulnerable in two or more areas in Greater Bendigo were Long Gully and surrounds (21.3%), Quarry Hill (17.9%) and Elmore/Goornong (16.7%).

Long Gully was also listed as the area with the most socio-economic disadvantage in regards to the Socio Economic Index for Areas.

Table 4: AEDC Data - Greater Bendigo, Victoria and Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Five areas of early childhood development</th>
<th>Pupils surveyed</th>
<th>Physical</th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Emotional</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Vulnerable on 1+ domains</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greater Bendigo</td>
<td>1,379</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>67,931</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>289,973</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA)

The SEIFA Index of Disadvantage measures the relative level of socio-economic disadvantage based on a range of census characteristics.

Analysis

According to 2011 SEIFA data, Greater Bendigo has an Index of 983, compared with Victoria at 1010 and Regional Victoria with an index of 978. Greater Bendigo is ranked 31 out of the 79 other local government areas in Victoria in relation to disadvantage.

The least advantaged areas of Greater Bendigo were Long Gully with a score of 863.3 and North Bendigo/California Gully with 899.2. The areas of most advantage in Greater Bendigo were Strathfieldsaye with 1090.2 and Maiden Gully with 1084.8.
Table: SEIFA results for Greater Bendigo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>2011 index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strathfieldsaye</td>
<td>1,090.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maiden Gully</td>
<td>1,084.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural East</td>
<td>1,066.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epsom - Ascot</td>
<td>1,038.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marong - Rural West</td>
<td>1,038.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strathdale</td>
<td>1,025.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Melbourne</td>
<td>1,020.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huntly</td>
<td>1,014.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>1,009.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>1,002.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flora Hill - Quarry Hill - Spring Gully - Golden Gully</td>
<td>1,000.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kennington</td>
<td>993.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Bendigo</td>
<td>988.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bendigo SA4</td>
<td>985.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Greater Bendigo</td>
<td>983.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Hills - Jackass Flat</td>
<td>980.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Area - Kamarooka, Hunter and Drummartin</td>
<td>979.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elmore - Rural North</td>
<td>979.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional VIC</td>
<td>977.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bendigo</td>
<td>973.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golden Square</td>
<td>963.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kangaroo Flat - Big Hill</td>
<td>944.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heathcote and District</td>
<td>928.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eaglehawk - Eaglehawk North - Sailors Gully</td>
<td>921.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Bendigo - California Gully</td>
<td>899.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of Home Care

There are currently 47 0 – 5 year olds in Out of Home Care across the municipality.

A range of projects and work is being undertaken by a number of agencies to work with children and carers to ensure ongoing participation in a range of services.
7.6 Population and Age Greater Bendigo (2011)

- The resident population of Greater Bendigo at the 2011 census was 100,611.
- In 2011, 1.4% (1,441) of the population identified as an Indigenous Australian. In addition, Indigenous children aged 0-4 years represented 3% of the total population and 5-8 year olds represented 2.7%.
- The most common countries of birth other than Australia were England 1.9% (1,943), New Zealand 0.7% (666), India 0.3% (325), Scotland 0.3% (318) and Netherlands 0.3% (297).
- In 2011, Greater Bendigo had a higher proportion of 0-8’s compared to Regional Victoria, Greater Melbourne, Victoria and Australia.
- The suburbs with the highest of 0-4 year olds:
  - Strathfieldsaye 9.5% (427)
  - Maiden Gully 9.0% (370)
  - Epsom-Ascot 8.7% (376)
- The suburbs with the lowest of 0-4 year olds:
  - Bendigo 4.9% (305)
  - Heathcote and District 5.0% (184)
  - East Bendigo 5.3% (112)
- The suburbs with the highest percentage of 5-8 year olds:
  - Strathfieldsaye 7.9% (358)
  - Maiden Gully 6.7% (277)
  - Epsom-Ascot 6.3% (270)
- The suburbs with the lowest percentage of 5-8 year olds
  - Heathcote and District 3.3% (121)
  - Kennington 3.5% (197)
  - East Bendigo 3.8% (82)

Households

Couples with young children

- There were 5,963 couples with young children (aged under 15 years) in Greater Bendigo in 2011, which was 15% of all households.
- In 2011 the suburb with the highest proportion of couples with young children was Flora Hill-Quarry Hill-Spring Gully with 1.36% of the overall suburb population (539) and the suburb with the lowest proportion was Huntly with 0.26% of the overall suburb population (106).

Singles with young children

- In relation to singles with young children, North Bendigo had the highest proportion in 2011 with 0.69% of the overall suburb population (272) and again Huntly had the lowest proportion with 0.05% of the overall suburb population (20).
Creating the best future for our children

Couple families

- Kangaroo Flat-Big Hill is forecast to have the highest proportion of couple families with dependants in 2016 (2.4%, 1102), Rural East in 2021 (2.55% of the overall suburb population, 1171) and Strathfieldsaye in 2026 (2.57% of the overall suburb population, 1395), 2031 (2.93% of the overall suburb population, 1704) and 2036 (3.14% of the overall suburb population, 1984).

- East Bendigo of the overall suburb population is forecast to have the lowest proportion of couple families with dependants in all four forecast years with 0.44% (203), 0.44% (222), 0.43% (235), 0.42% (246) and 0.41% (256) respectively.

Single Parent Families

- It is forecast that Kangaroo Flat-Big Hill will have the highest proportion of single parent families in all four forecast years with 1.32% of the overall suburb population (605), 1.25% (631), 1.17% (636), 1.12% (654) and 1.17% (682) respectively.

- Maiden Gully is forecast to have the lowest proportion of single parent families in 2016 with 0.20% (93). Elmore – Rural North is forecast to have the lowest proportion of the overall suburb population of single parent families in 2021, 0.20% (102), 2026, 0.19% (112), 2031, 0.19% (118) and 2036, 0.19% (123).

Unpaid Childcare

- Compared to Regional Victoria, Greater Melbourne, Victoria and Australia, Greater Bendigo has a higher percentage of its population undertaking unpaid childcare with 29.5% (23,478) in 2011.

- In Greater Bendigo, Kangaroo Flat-Big Hill (2011) had the highest proportion of the total population undertaking unpaid childcare with 2.74% (2,176) and Huntly had the lowest with 0.52% (410).

People Needing Assistance

- Between 2006 and 2011, Greater Bendigo has seen increasing growth in the percentage of children needing assistance, due to a severe or profound disability, compared with Regional Victoria, Greater Melbourne, Victoria and Australia. In 2011 5.7% (312) of children aged between 0-9 years needed assistance.

- When broken down to a suburb level, Huntly has the highest proportion of total children needing assistance with 20% (13), while White Hills-Jackass Flat had the lowest with 0.5% (1).

Housing Stress

- The percentage of households in housing stress in Greater Bendigo is similar to the percentage across Regional Victoria, Greater Melbourne, Victoria and Australia at over 10%.

- Across the 19 suburbs Bendigo had the highest percentage of households in housing stress with 13.4% (2,577) and Maiden Gully had the lowest with 6.1% (1,340).

- In Greater Bendigo nearly half of one parent families with young children are considered to be in housing stress compared to 43.7% in Victoria. One parent families with a
mix of young and older children also had high percentage in housing stress with 25% in Greater Bendigo compared to 29% in Victoria.

**Mothers in Workforce**

- Compared to Regional Victoria (70%, 107,563), Greater Melbourne (68.3%, 337,774), Victoria (68.7% 445,338) and Australia (69.1% 1,777,879), Greater Bendigo had the highest proportion of mothers in the workforce in 2011 with 70.3% (8,494).

- In the City of Greater Bendigo the percentage of mothers in the workforce ranged from a low of 58.9% (320) in Long Gully - West Bendigo - Ironbark to a high of 83.9% (564) in Maiden Gully.

**Couple Families and Workforce**

- In 2011, 27.1% of couple and one parent families in Greater Bendigo had a partner or parent who wasn’t in paid employment.

- Sedgwick had the highest percentage of couples in full time work with 27.4% (34) while Redesdale had the lowest with 7.0% (5).

- Mandurang had the highest percentage of couples both in part time work with 10.1% (14) while Raywood had the lowest with 0.

- Maiden Gully had the highest percentage of one parent in full time work and the other in part time work with 33.5% (375) and Heathcote had the lowest with 12.6% (78).

- North Bendigo had the highest percentage of one parent engaged in full time work while the other wasn’t working with 18.2% (125) and Mandurang had the lowest with 8.6% (12).

- Heathcote had the highest percentage of both parents not working with 40.9% (254) and Sedgwick had the lowest with 9.7% (12).

**Fertility Rates**

In 2013 Greater Bendigo had a fertility rate of 2.0 live births per thousand while Regional Victoria had a fertility rate of 2.1 live births per thousand.

**Birth Rates**

- From 2010 – 2015 there were approximately 7,000 births across Greater Bendigo, with the highest birth year being 2013/14 with 1,509 births.

- From 2017 – 2036 there is forecast to be approximately 34,000 births across the municipality. Maiden Gully will have the highest increase in births with 51%, followed by Strathfieldsaye and Huntly with a 45% increase and Marong with a 42% increase.

**Immunisation**

- Compared to Victoria, Greater Bendigo had a higher proportion of non-Indigenous children aged 24-27 months who were fully immunised.
Maternal and Child Health

- Maternal and Child Health (MCH) visits in Greater Bendigo across all key stages except the 3.5 years visit was lower compared to Victorian rates.

- In relation to the Indigenous community, the percentage of children going to the key MCH visits were lower compared to non-Indigenous community.

General Health

- Both the percentage of children reported to be in excellent or very good health dropped for both Greater Bendigo (down by 3.3%) and Victoria (down by 2.5%) between 2008 and 2013.

- Greater Bendigo had a higher percentage (6.3%) of children who had experienced alcohol or drug related problems in the family, history of abuse to parent, child witness to violence and a history of mental illness of a parent compared to Victoria (3.7%).

Physical Activity

- Both male children and female children used open spaces more than any other recreational facility followed closely by swimming pools. The biggest difference between males and females was the percentage of use of sport grounds/ovals/clubrooms with males 9% higher compared to females.

- The main reason why children do not participate in physical activity was time poor. This was followed by cost, safety and awareness.

Childcare, Kinder and schools

- In 2014 1,477 children attend the City’s funded kindergarten programs, this occurred across 16 Long Day Care services and 21 standalone kindergartens.

- There are 36 Government Primary Schools with 11,459 students, 12 Catholic Primary Schools with 4,747 students and 3 independent Primary Schools with 1,866 students.
8. Review of Plans and Policies

The Review of Plans and Policies has identified key trends and issues in the broader Early Years policy and service delivery environment. By analysing City of Greater Bendigo (the City) plans and strategies, along with Federal, State and local community policies, programs and research projects, we can develop a comprehensive evidence base that:

a) Identifies major policy issues and the programs and the resources available to respond to locally identified priorities,

b) Informs and supports the development of the Municipal Early Years Plan’s six themes and related purposes and objectives; and

c) Supports the development of priority projects and brings together ‘whole of community’ multi-agency partnership responses as part of the Municipal Early Years Plan’s four year Action Plan.

A total of 41 plans, policies and reports were reviewed in order to provide a strategic planning, resource and policy context for the development of the Municipal Early Years Plan. The documents reviewed have been analysed in relation to the agencies and levels they have originated from and there is a particular focus on the plans and polices from the:

- City of Greater Bendigo
- State government; and
- Federal government and National levels.

An overview of the plans, policies and strategies reviewed now follows including a summary of key findings and links to the six themes of the Municipal Early Years Plan, these being:

- Theme 1: Safety of Children.
- Theme 2: Environment and Facilities for Children.
- Theme 3: Active and Healthy Children.
- Theme 4: Education and Care for Children.
- Theme 5: Whole of Community Partnerships benefitting Children.
- Theme 6: A Child Friendly City and Community.

Summary Analysis of the Plans and Policies Reviewed

City of Greater Bendigo

18 plans and strategies were reviewed including:

- Council Plan (2014/15) and (2015/16)
- Review of Early Childhood Services (2014)
- Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (2013)
- Previous Municipal Early Years Plan (2004)
- Other Plans focussed on Child Friendly Cities, safety, violence prevention, access, inclusion, play, open space, community engagement, liveability, physical activity, transport, human rights and asset management.
Key Findings:

1. There has been a significant increase in reported family violence incidents from 649 in 2011 to 1165 in 2013 and child protection reporting is high (Theme 1).
2. Development of any early year’s infrastructure must be able to clearly demonstrate need, benefits, a thorough planning process and the use of external funds to assist with construction wherever possible (Theme 2).
3. The City is committed to promoting the relocation and integration of Children and Family Services with an aim of progressively moving away from stand alone, single purpose settings (Theme 2).
4. The City is focussing more on leadership, governance, service coordination and infrastructure provision in the Early Years Sector to address identified needs and gaps (Themes 2,5).
5. Play offers children the opportunity to develop emotionally, cognitively, socially and physically, thereby maximising their potential. There is a need for more nature based, unstructured, accessible and diverse play opportunities (Themes 2,3,6).
6. The level of participation in physical activity, the amount of fruit and vegetables consumed and people’s body weight are of concern (Theme 3).
7. Additional support needs to be provided to Aboriginal and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities (CALD) to ensure culturally sensitive and responsive services, and also to fathers and grandparents who may become more actively involved in parenting of their children or grandchildren (Themes 3,4,5).
8. The percentage of developmentally vulnerable children in Greater Bendigo has increased (Theme 4).
9. There is a skill shortage in early childcare and family support workers in Bendigo (Theme 4).
10. There has been a significant increase in the number of playgroups operating in Greater Bendigo (Themes 4,5).
11. In order to achieve the best possible outcomes for children and their families, the City must both maintain and forge new community partners that commit to a shared vision of ‘Children as Citizens’ (Themes 5,6).
12. Children should be involved in decision making processes around public design or redevelopment (Theme 6).

State Government

14 State Government policies and reports were reviewed including:

- Early Years Strategic Plan (2014).
- Transition to School – A Positive Start (2009).
- Various strategic plans, guidelines, standards, acts and regulations.
Key Findings:

1. Focus on positive outcomes for children and families (All Themes).
2. Focus on quality standards, performance and accountability – with clear goals, measurable outcomes and monitoring and reporting at both State and local levels (All Themes).
3. The value of investing in early childhood education and care to Australia’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is substantial (All Themes).
4. Focus on supporting and building capacity of parents and communities to give children a great start (Theme 4).
5. Focus on enhancing education so that all children benefit from high quality learning (Theme 4).
6. Ensure that children in Out of Home Care are able to access early learning programs (Theme 4).
7. Children from specific cohorts such as Aboriginal children, newly arrived migrants and children with a disability or developmental delay are often under-represented in early learning services (Theme 4).
8. Implications of forthcoming changes in staff ratios in early learning centres (Theme 4).
9. Uncertainty about funding of 15 hours of kindergarten for four year olds (Theme 4).
10. Provide early and sustained support for those who need it most (Themes 4,5).
11. Develop a shared understanding of the nature and scope of vulnerability (Themes 4,5).
12. Recognise the shared responsibility of the entire community for the Early Years and build effective and connected services (Theme 5).

13. Introduction of planning and endorsement systems by agencies such as the Municipal Association of Victoria (Theme 5).

Federal Government and National Agencies

9 policies and reports reviewed including:

- Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (2009).

Key Findings:

1. Develop National Standards for Out of Home Care (Theme 1).
2. Identify early warning signs (of abuse and neglect) and take early action (Theme 1).
3. Need to ensure that children develop a strong sense of identity, i.e. feel safe, interact well with others, are resilient, etc (Themes 1,3,4,6).
4. Ensure that children are connected with and contribute to their world, i.e. have a sense of belonging and a voice (Themes 1,3,4,6).
5. Ensure that children have a strong sense of wellbeing – social, emotional and physical (Themes 1,3,4,6).
6. Increase physical activity levels of children through a multi-pronged approach using Early Childhood Education and Care, schools, families and community settings (Themes 2,3,4).
7. Ensure that children are confident and involved learners –
demonstrate curiosity, persistence, problem solving skills,
etc (Theme 4).
8. Ensure that children are effective communicators (Theme 4).
9. Ensure that best practice is expected in the provision of
education and care services (Theme 4).
10. Join up service delivery among the different jurisdictions and
share information between agencies (Theme 5).
11. Enhance the evidence base and fill the research gaps
(Theme 5).
12. Advocate for children and ensure that the rights and best
interests of the child are paramount (Theme 6).
13. Ensure that the principles of equity, inclusion and diversity
underlie early year’s laws (All Themes).
14. Ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures
are valued and that ‘the gap’ (level of disadvantage) is
closed (All Themes).
15. Ensure that the role of parents and families is respected and
supported (All Themes).

The full report into the Review of Plans and Policies is available at
Appendix 1

Face to Face consultations.

The professionals and agencies consulted were:

• Bendigo and District Aboriginal Cooperative - Simon Penrose.
• Bendigo Community Health – Anne Somerville and Andie West.
• Bendigo Health – Melinda Charlesworth, Lorraine Flynn, Jennifer Hurrell, David Rosaia and Dr Andy Lovett.
• Heathcote Health – Dan Douglas
• Goldfields Library – Tammy Higgs
• St Lukes – John Bonnice and Naarah Dawes, Paula West and Lyn Turner
• St John of God – Shirley Lechmere
• Raphael Centre – Tina Winzar
• Department of Education and Training – Lorraine Sanderson and Bryn Davies
• Principals meeting at Department of Education and Training
• Department of Health and Human Services – Liz Brooks and Anne Maree Connors

City of Greater Bendigo:

• Alana Cooper, Acting Co-ordinator Early Years.
• Alicia O’Brien, Healthy Together.
• Helen Lees, Maternal and Child Health Clinical Co-ordinator.
• Jolie Middleton, Disability Inclusion Officer.
• Karoline Klein, Landscape Architect.
• Maureen McMahon, Disability Inclusion Officer.
• Maureen Tessier, Co-ordinator Early Years.
• Natalie Jacobson, Co-ordinator.
• Romina Lougoon, Social Planner.
• Rose Pearson Commercial Operations Officer.
• Trevor Budge, Manager Strategy and Development.
• Vanessa Wait, Safe Communities Officer.
• Maternal and Child Health Team.

Community Based Groups:

• Lightning Reef Mothers’ Group.
• Kinship Support Group.
• Kangaroo Flat Library Storytime.
• Bendigo Library Storytime.
• Afghan Women’s Group.
• Bendigo Regional YMCA After School Care Educators.
• Market Place Consultation.
• Eaglehawk Playgroup (Lake Neangar).
• Kangaroo Flat Mother’s Group.
• Elmore Playground.
• Raywood Playground and School.
• Heathcote Playground.
• Bendigo Regional YMCA LDC Educators.
• Mothergoose Playgroup Long Gully.
• Settlement meeting (Afghani women).
Appendix 2

Early Years Coordination Group Membership List (2015)

- Andie West, Bendigo Community Health.
- Heather Paterson, Catholic Care.
- Ann Maree Connors, Department of Health and Human Services.
- Jane Worthington, Baptcare.
- John Bonnice, St Lukes Anglicare.
- Julie Beatty, YMCA of Ballarat.
- Lorraine Flynn, Bendigo Health.
- Maureen Campbell, Department of Education and Training.
- Melinda Charlesworth, Bendigo Health.
- Michael Graham, Department of Education and Training.
- Michael Oerlemans, Department of Health and Human Services.
- Nickie King, Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre.
- Phil Bretherton, Catholic Education.
- Phil Hocking, Loddon Mallee Preschool Association.
- Sue McConnachie, Bendigo Community Health.
- Tracey Abraham, Bendigo Health.
- Christine Keck, Bendigo Health.
- Lisa Clinch, Goodstart Early Learning.
- Jaydene Burzacott, Bendigo and District Aboriginal Cooperative.
- Pauline Gordon, City of Greater Bendigo.
Appendix 3: Child Friendly Cities and Communities Charter

This Victorian Charter for Child Friendly Cities and Communities has been developed specifically for local governments, organisations and individuals to take action. The Charter is a statement of the principles and actions that underpin the right to be considered child friendly.


Recognising the need for increased participation by children in decision-making forums and creating child friendly environments, we support the following principles:

- Freedom for children to experience environments that consider their needs.
- Respect and dignity for children to express their individual opinions, participate in and contribute to decisions about their communities and their wellbeing.
- Equitable access to supportive environments and services for children regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion or ability.