

Engagement Summary

To develop this Strategy, the City of Ballarat undertook a wide-ranging engagement process between February and March 2026, reaching 576 people across three types of engagement activities. Findings were analysed thematically to identify the priorities and challenges that matter most to Ballarat's children and families, and have directly shaped the goals and priorities in this Strategy.

Scale of engagement

576

people contributed across all engagement activities

100+

Children and young people directly engaged

Survey respondents (18% of the total Strategy development participants)

4.5%

Identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

13.6%

Identified as having a disability or chronic health condition

7.6%

Identified as LGBTQIA+

How we engaged

Listening sessions

In-person sessions at community events including the Begonia Festival, Parent Place, Get Ready for Kinder Day, and Ballarat's Biggest Playgroup. Also included children's drawing activities and the Ballarat Kids Think Tank.

Surveys

Online surveys via the MySay platform, with separate surveys designed for adults and for children, capturing written responses from community members and parents across the municipality.

Consultations

Structured workshops with external service providers and professionals, as well as internal consultations with Council staff across business units including Family, Youth and Children's Services.

What we heard

1 Cost of living and access to affordable activities

Families want more free or low-cost things to do, spread across the whole municipality. Financial pressure was also raised as a barrier to accessing services, camps, excursions, and basic essentials.

2 Access to services and information

Families struggle to navigate what is available to them, with long waitlists, limited after-hours availability (particularly between 2:30 and 8pm), and services concentrated in certain areas flagged as some of the challenges. Better promotion and coordination across the service system was a common call.

3 A gap for children aged 7 to 12

Children in this age group consistently fall between early years services and youth programs with limited activities, spaces, and structured support for this cohort. There is a clear need for programs that bridge this gap, particularly for children experiencing disadvantage.

4 Safety, family violence, and trauma

Trauma-informed approaches across Council services, whole-of-family responses that include men and boys, and better support for children who have experienced family violence.

5 Cultural safety and inclusion

CALD families face barriers including difficulty accessing interpreters and services not designed with their needs in mind. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families want stronger connection to country and culture embedded across programs and services.

6 Strengths to build on

Participants across all groups consistently recognised the value of Parent Place, library programs, kindergarten hubs, CALD outreach workers, community events including the Begonia Festival, and Council's genuine willingness to consult and listen.