

FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S STRATEGY 2027–2030

Proudly working
with and for
our community





"They need friends for them because if they don't they would be lonley and sad"
Addison - 8 years

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The City of Ballarat acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land we live and work on, the Wadawurrung and Dja Dja Wurrung Peoples, and recognises their continuing connection to the land and waterways.

We pay our respects to their Elders past and present and extend this to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

—



A Message from the Mayor and CEO

The City of Ballarat Children and Families Strategy 2027-2030 sets out a shared vision for how we support children and their families to thrive.

From pregnancy through to 12 years of age, we recognise that the early years and middle childhood are pivotal in shaping lifelong learning, health and wellbeing outcomes. We are committed to supporting children as they grow and transition through the early years into middle years ensuring high quality care, development and opportunity as they build the foundations for adolescence. This strategy reflects a whole of-city approach, acknowledging that supporting children is not the responsibility of any one service or organisation alone, but something we achieve together as a community.

We would like to sincerely thank the 576 community members including the many children who contributed to the development of the Children and Families Strategy 2027-2030. Your voices have been central to shaping this work through sharing your experiences, challenges and hopes for Ballarat's children. We heard clearly that affordability, accessibility, and unequal access are affecting many families, and we are committed to helping reduce these barriers.

This four-year roadmap places equity and accessibility at its centre. Our aim is to ensure all families can access the social, health and early years services they need, close to where they live. We will continue to work closely with our partners to strengthen local supports and make it easier for families to navigate the system, so that all children in Ballarat are safe, supported and able to thrive



Cr Tracey Hargreaves
Mayor, City of Ballarat



Evan King
CEO, City of Ballarat



"Dance, netball clubs, footy club and sharing yummy food. Make life good"
Pippa - 8 years

Purpose and Scope of this Plan

Children and families are central to a healthy, connected and thriving Ballarat. They strengthen our communities and help shape the future of our city. The City of Ballarat is committed to creating a community where children are safe, valued and supported, and where families can access the opportunities, services and support they need to thrive.

As Ballarat continues to grow, it is important that children and families remain at the centre of planning and decision-making. This Strategy builds on the strengths of our community and provides a framework for how the City of Ballarat can work with partners to respond to changing needs, support positive outcomes, and help ensure Ballarat remains a great place for children and families.

Purpose

The Family and Children's Strategy 2027-2030 sets the strategic direction for how the City of Ballarat will support children and families over the next four years. It succeeds the Municipal Early Years Plan 2021-2026, building on its achievements while broadening focus to reflect the evolving experiences and needs of children and families in Ballarat.

The Strategy focuses on children and families from pregnancy through to 12 years of age, recognising the importance of the early years, the primary school years, and key transition points in a child's life. It also complements the Youth Strategy 2027–2030, supporting a connected approach as children transition into adolescence. Together, these strategies guide our planning, advocacy, partnerships, service delivery and decision-making, while supporting coordinated action across the City of Ballarat and the broader community.

Equity and Inclusion

The City of Ballarat is committed to creating a community where children and families feel valued, included and supported to participate fully in community life.

Ballarat is home to a diverse community, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, children with disability, newly arrived families, and families experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage. Recognising and responding to different experiences and barriers is essential to ensuring all children and families can access opportunities, participate in community life and feel a sense of belonging.

By applying an equity and inclusion lens, the City of Ballarat will continue to work towards ensuring children and families can access opportunities, services and support in ways that are welcoming, accessible and responsive to their needs.

Our commitment

The City of Ballarat recognises that creating positive outcomes for children and families is a shared responsibility. While the City of Ballarat plays an important role through service delivery, planning, advocacy and community development, lasting change is achieved when governments, service providers, schools, community organisations, families and children work together.

Purpose and Scope of this Plan

Through this Strategy, the City of Ballarat commits to listening to children and families, strengthening partnerships across the municipality, and using evidence to inform decision-making. We will continue to build on the strengths of our community, advocate for the needs of children and families, and

support coordinated action that improves wellbeing, participation and inclusion.

By working together, we can help ensure Ballarat remains a child-friendly city where children and families feel safe, connected, supported and able to thrive.

WHAT DO CHILDREN NEED TO THRIVE?



TELL US ABOUT THIS DRAWING

"Playing with my monster trucks
in my rainbow jumper."

NAME: Theo AGE: 4

WHAT DO CHILDREN NEED TO THRIVE?



TELL US ABOUT THIS DRAWING

Children can thrive with good books on different topics.
I can use my imagination.

NAME: Elize AGE: 10

WHAT MAKES LIFE GOOD FOR KIDS?



TELL US ABOUT THIS DRAWING

This is a bright and fun playground to use your
imagination and move your body.

NAME: Abby AGE: 6

WHAT DO CHILDREN NEED TO THRIVE?



TELL US ABOUT THIS DRAWING

More nature and trees.

NAME: Evie AGE: 8

Principles

Our approach to supporting children and families is guided by the principles outlined in the [City of Ballarat Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2031](#).

These principles reflect our commitment to a consistent, whole-of-city approach and shape how we plan, deliver and evaluate services, programs and initiatives for children and families. Together, they guide the decisions we make, the partnerships we build, and the actions we take to improve outcomes for Ballarat's children and families.



Equity

We recognise that children and families do not all have the same opportunities, experiences or access to support. We will work to ensure children and families are treated fairly and respectfully, while responding to differing needs and circumstances to help achieve equitable outcomes.

Inclusion

We will work to ensure all children and families feel valued, respected, supported and welcome in their community. We are committed to creating opportunities for children and families to participate fully in community life and to benefit from social and economic inclusion.

Accessibility

We will work to ensure children and families can access the services, programs, facilities, information and opportunities they need, regardless of ability, experience, language, culture, family circumstance or background.

Community Participation

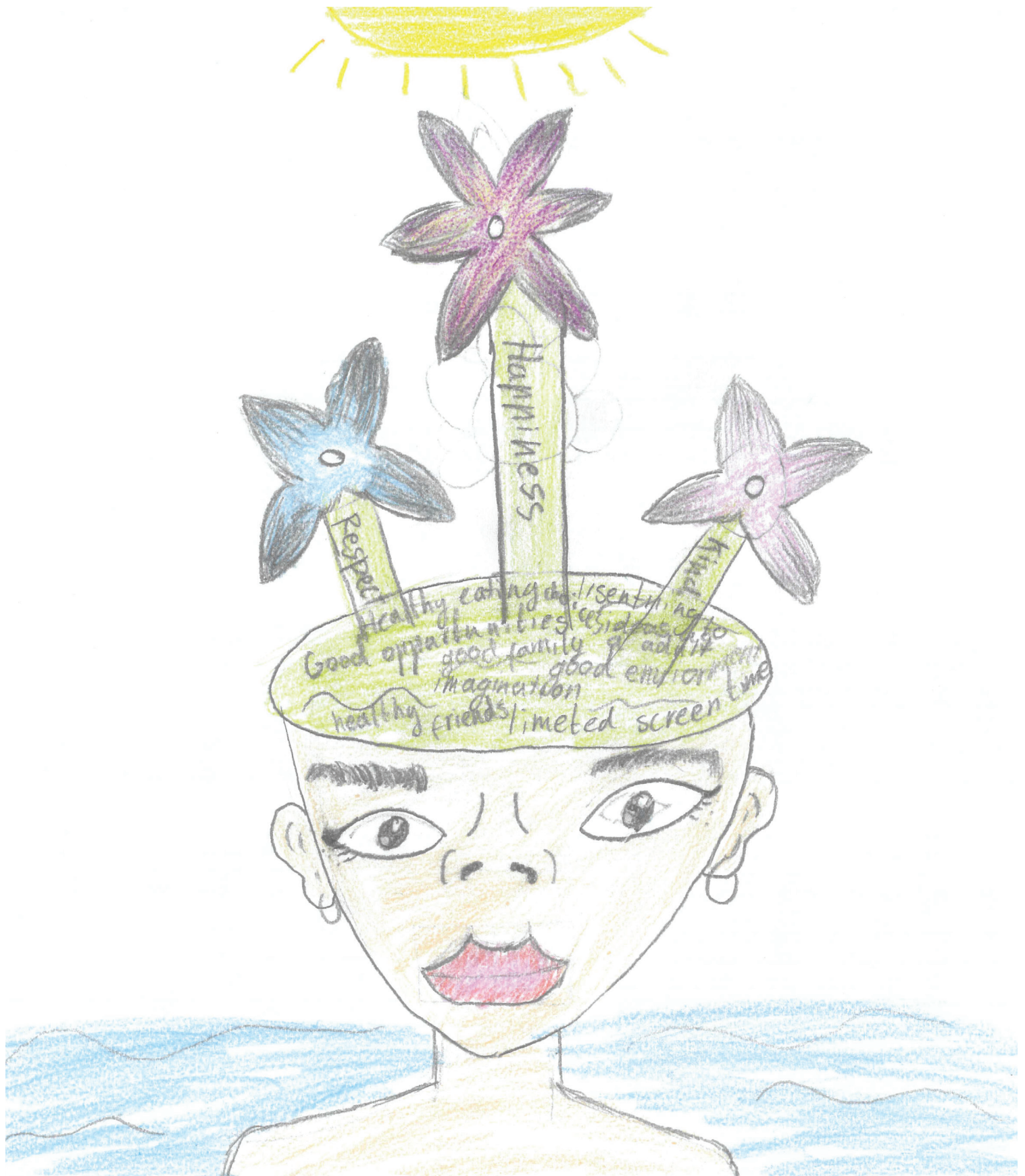
We will support children, families and communities to have a genuine voice in decisions that affect them. We will create opportunities for participation and work alongside children and families to help shape services, programs and initiatives.

Collaboration

We will strengthen partnerships with families, community organisations, schools, service providers and government agencies to support coordinated responses and improve outcomes for children and families.

Evidence based decision making

We will use community feedback, lived experience, data and evidence to understand community needs, guide decision-making and measure progress, ensuring our actions deliver meaningful outcomes for children and families.



"It shows what matters in a kids life"
Marlee - 10 years

Our Community Profile

Who our children and families are



18%

of Ballarat's population is aged 14 years and under
(compared to the state average of 17%*)



2627

additional children aged 0-14 years in the city by 2035
(representing continued growth in demand for children's services, facilities and community infrastructure*)



2 children

The average family in Ballarat has 2 (1.9) children^



1388

births in 2024
(highlighting the ongoing demand for maternal, early years and family services**)



1.4%

of women younger than 20 years old became mothers^^



8413

two-parent households raising children under the age of 15
(making families with young children represent a significant proportion of households across Ballarat^)



844

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander families
(recognising the importance of culturally safe and inclusive services^)

How our families live



\$2,569

median weekly income for two-parent families with children
(which is more than double the median income of one-parent families (\$1,098)^)



5.6%

of two-parent families with children under 15 have no parent in paid work
(which can influence family wellbeing, financial security and access to opportunities^)



21%

of residents were new to Ballarat in the five years leading up to 2021^



7%

of people speak a language other than English at home
(supporting the need for culturally inclusive and accessible services^)

Source: *id forecast 2026, ^ABS Census 2021, **Council MCH Service 2024, ^^Safer Care Victoria 2021 (West Vic PHN Dataset)

Our Community Profile

Health and Wellbeing



92.5%

of children participate in the Maternal and Child Health Service**



94%

participation in the four-week Key Ages & Stages visit (almost aligned with the Victorian average (96%)**)



14.8%

of mothers smoked during pregnancy (which remains an important maternal and child health issue++)



37%

of households in regional Victoria experienced limited or uncertain availability of food in 2024§



27%

(vs 22% state average) of prep children are developmentally vulnerable in one or more domains (with Wendouree as a suburb with the highest percentage.+++)



7.8%

of babies born with low birth weight++



2.3

infant mortality rate per 1,000 births (which is lower than the national rate++)



6%

6% of children aged 5-14 have a disability requiring assistance with daily living (highlighting the importance of inclusive services, programs and community spaces^)

Ballarat LGA percentages based on development demands

Physical

14.5%

(8.5% Victoria)

Social

12%

(10.6% Victoria)

Emotional

13%

(9.9% Victoria)

Language

9.7%

(7.3% Victoria)

Communication

10%

(8.2% Victoria)

Vulnerability in our Community



2,439

family violence incidents were recorded per 100,000 residents‡



24

child protection investigations occurred per 1,000 eligible children***



1,567

family violence incidents involved children‡



485

children aged nine or younger were homeless or at risk of homelessness, (which can have significant impacts on children's wellbeing and development+)

Higher level of disadvantage

Ballarat has a higher level of socioeconomic disadvantage compared with Victoria as a whole. Wendouree and Sebastopol have the highest concentrations of disadvantaged households.^

Source: ^ABS Census 2021,**Council MCH Service 2024-25,++ PHIDU 2019-23,‡Crime Statistics Agency 2024-25,§Foodbank Hunger Report 2024, +AIHW 2026 (Ballarat SA4), ***Department of Health and Human Services 2015, +++AEDC 2026

Our commitment to Children and Families

The City of Ballarat supports children and families at every stage of life. This Strategy focuses on children and families from pregnancy through to the teenage years. We know that every child and family grows and develops in their own way. Together with the Youth Strategy 2027–2030, this plan is designed to meet families where they are and provide the right support as children grow.

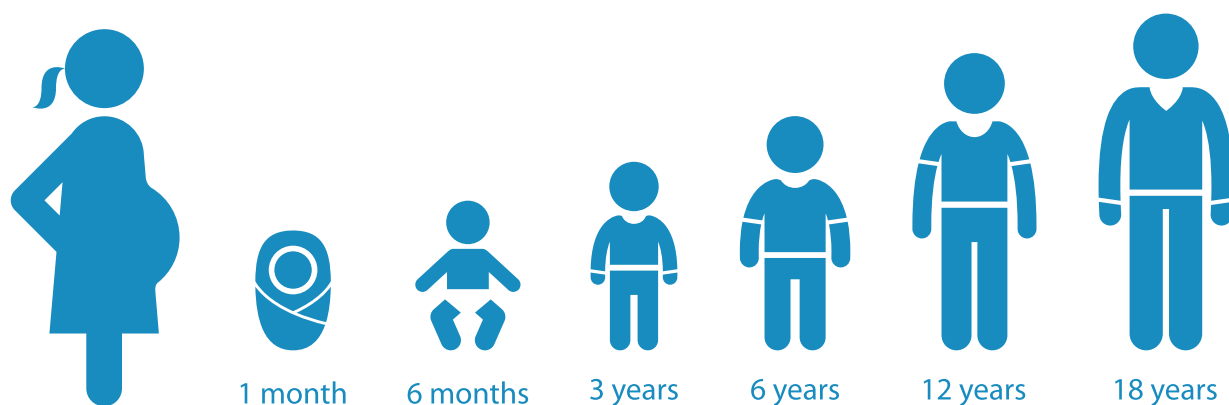
Services we provide

City of Ballarat provides many services and spaces that support children and families, including:

- Maternal and Child Health services
 - » Health and wellbeing support for children from birth to six years of age.
- Child and school immunisation programs
- Parent Place
 - » A welcoming place where parents and carers can feed and change their child, join activities, meet other families, and get information and support.
- City of Ballarat operated Early Childhood education and care, including long day care, kindergarten, occasional care and family day care.
- Central Kindergarten Registration Scheme to help families enrol in kindergarten.
- Supported and Community Playgroups.
- Oversight of City of Ballarat early years facilities, operated by external providers.
- Libraries, including Storytime and other children's programs.
- Children's programs at cultural locations including the Art Gallery of Ballarat, Her Majesty's Theatre, Civic Hall and the Eureka Centre.
- Planning for places families use, such as kindergartens, parks, playgrounds and community facilities.
- Ways for children to share their ideas, like the Ballarat Kids Think Tank.
- Structured and unstructured recreation opportunities.
- Local events and activities.
- Outreach and support.
- Professional learning and networking for professionals working in the industry.

Working with others

In addition to the service we deliver, the City of Ballarat advocates for the needs of local children and families and works in collaboration with local partners and other levels of government.

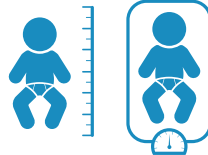


In 2025...



8370

Families were enrolled in the **Ballarat Maternal and Child Health** service in 2025



11,500+

Key Age and Stage visits were provided to families across Ballarat



350+

Hours of **First Time Parent Groups** were provided



2,981

Families attended **Parent Place**, with 2521 of those families accessing professional support services



2,565

Children registered for kindergarten through the **Central Kindergarten Registration Scheme**



1,843

Children* had active **Ballarat Library memberships**

*Under-18 members; also noting most families have one shared membership (usually in a parent's name) so this does not indicate how many children had books borrowed by a parent.



Over 4,000

People attended **Children's Week** in Bridge Mall



28

Supported Playgroups successfully delivered the smalltalk program



40+

Community Playgroups were supported across the municipality

Strategic Context

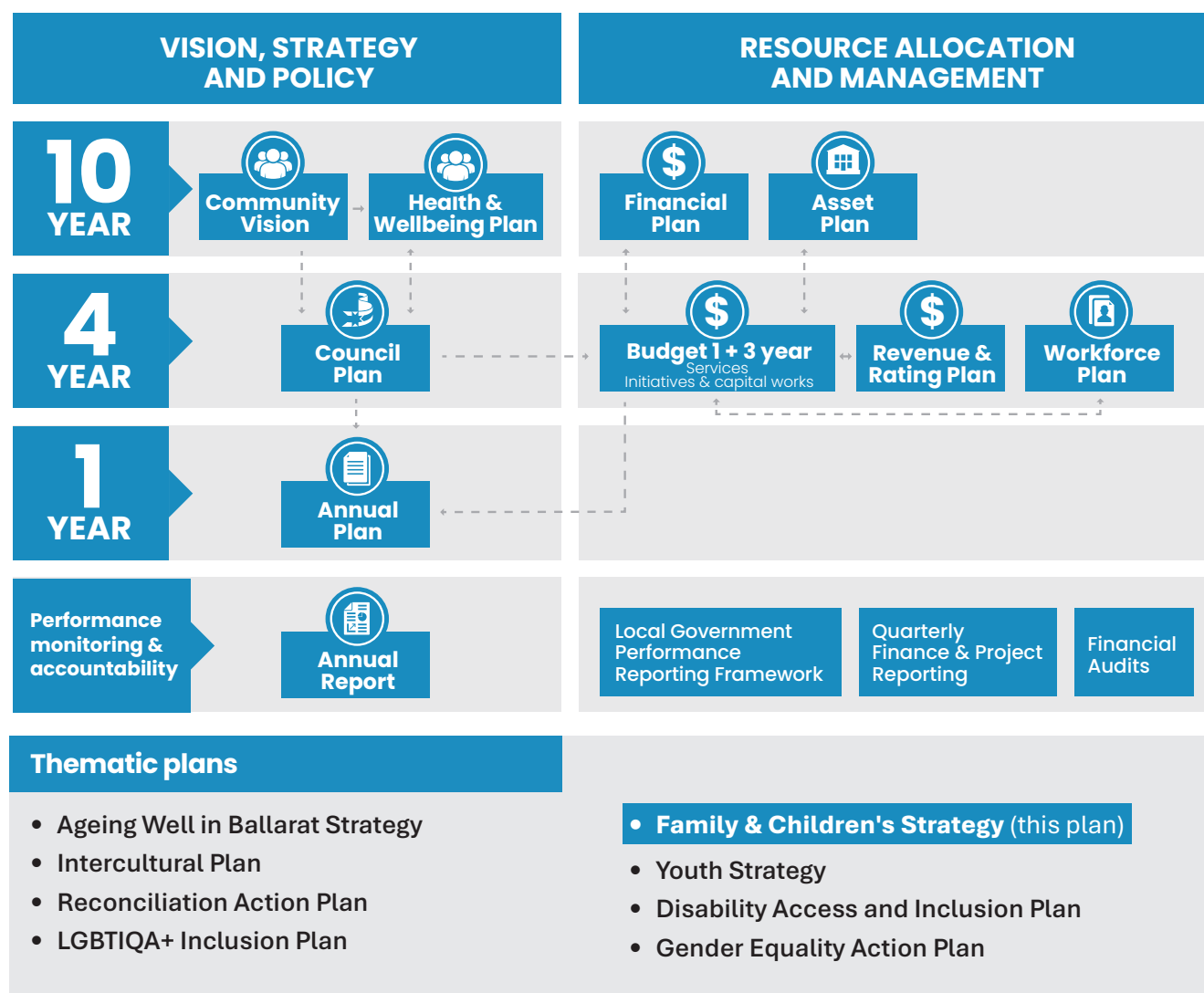
The City of Ballarat recognises that creating positive outcomes for children and families requires a coordinated and connected approach across the City of Ballarat. Children and families engage with a wide range of services, programs, facilities and community spaces throughout their lives, and their wellbeing is influenced by decisions made across the municipality.

The Family and Children's Strategy is embedded within the City of Ballarat's Integrated Strategic

Planning Framework, ensuring the needs and aspirations of children and families are considered across planning, service delivery, infrastructure, advocacy and community development.

By aligning with the Community Vision, Council Plan and Health and Wellbeing Plan, this Strategy helps guide a shared and coordinated approach to supporting children and families across Ballarat now and into the future.

City of Ballarat integrated strategic planning framework



Our Vision for a Child-Friendly Ballarat

Children are an important part of Ballarat's community, shaping the future of our city while contributing to its vibrancy, diversity and wellbeing today. Creating a child-friendly Ballarat means ensuring children feel safe, valued and included, have opportunities to learn and grow, and are supported to participate in community life.

The City of Ballarat is committed to listening to children and considering their needs, experiences and aspirations when planning services, programs, infrastructure and community spaces. By supporting children and families to thrive, we help build a healthier, more connected and welcoming community for everyone.

As a signatory to the Victorian Child Friendly Cities and Communities Charter, the City of Ballarat is committed to creating a city where children's rights, voices and wellbeing are recognised and reflected in decision-making. This Strategy supports that commitment and provides a shared direction for how the City of Ballarat and the broader community can work together to create positive outcomes for children and families.

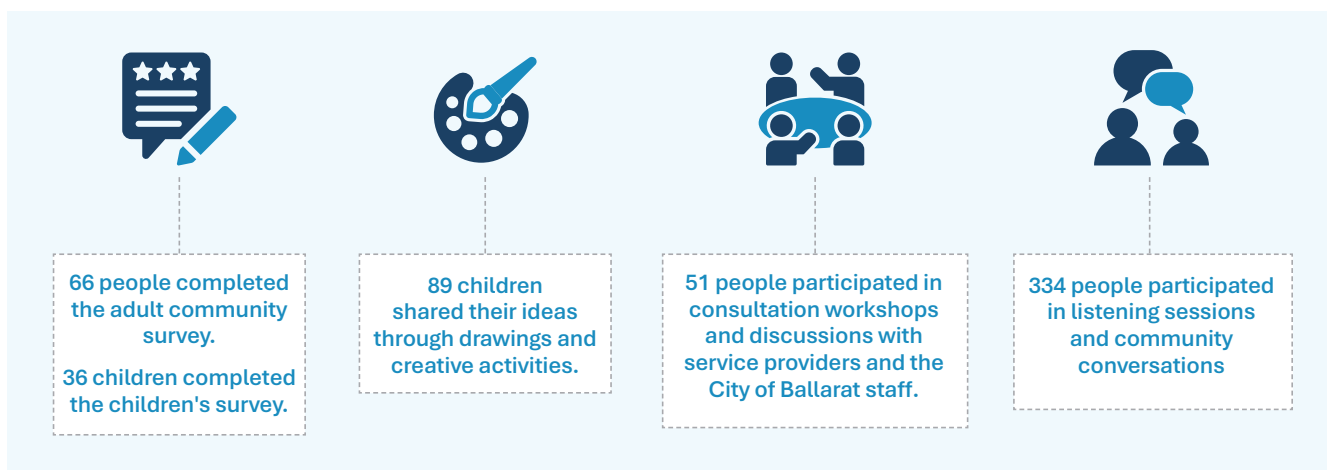


"That my parents love me"
Clancy - 8 years

How This Strategy Was Developed

This Strategy was developed through extensive engagement with children, families, community members, City of Ballarat staff and service providers across Ballarat.

Through surveys, community conversations, workshops and targeted consultations, we sought to understand the experiences, aspirations and priorities of those who live, work and support children and families in our municipality. The insights gathered throughout this process have directly informed the development of this Strategy and helped shape the priorities and actions it contains.



The communities we sought feedback from

To ensure this Strategy reflects the diverse experiences of our community, we sought input from:

- Children and young people
- Parents, carers and families
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- Culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- LGBTIQ+ community members
- Service providers and community organisations
- Education, health and wellbeing professionals

What We Heard

What makes Ballarat a great place for children and families?

We explored the strengths of Ballarat and the aspects that already support children and families to feel connected, supported and able to thrive. This helped identify the places, programs, services and community connections that are valued most in Ballarat.

What challenges do children and families experience?

We asked community members about the barriers that can affect participation, wellbeing and access to opportunities. This included conversations about affordability, accessibility, social connection, access to services, and the changing needs of Ballarat's growing community.

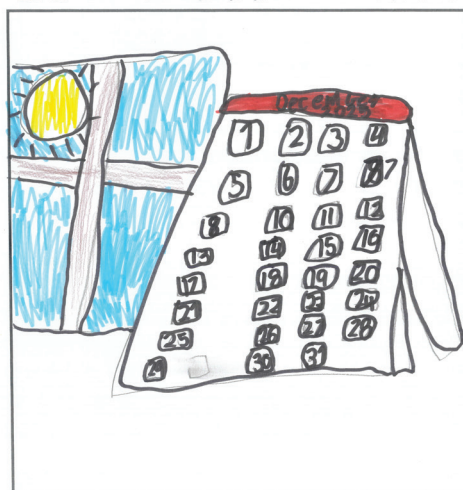
What would help children and families thrive in the future?

Participants shared their aspirations for Ballarat and the opportunities they would like to see for children and families in the years ahead. This helped identify areas where the City of Ballarat and our partners can continue to strengthen support for children and families across the municipality.

What role can the City of Ballarat play?

We asked children, families, community members and professionals how we can make the greatest contribution to improving outcomes for children and families. This helped shape the priorities and actions within this Strategy and identify opportunities for service delivery, advocacy, partnership and community leadership.

WHAT DO CHILDREN NEED TO THRIVE?



TELL US ABOUT THIS DRAWING

Free time for school holidays

NAME: Ayla AGE: 9

WHAT MAKES LIFE GOOD FOR KIDS?



TELL US ABOUT THIS DRAWING

MY HOME WITH MY MUM AND SISTER BONNIE

NAME: JADE

What We Heard

"Safety is about being important to someone, knowing people care and having somewhere safe to play and just be a kid."

Listening session participant

Building on Ballarat's Strengths

Ballarat is a welcoming and family-friendly community with a strong foundation of services, facilities, programs and community connections that support children and families. Community hubs, libraries, events, open spaces and early years services all play an important role in helping children and families feel supported, connected and able to thrive. As Ballarat continues to grow, there is an opportunity to build on these strengths and ensure they continue to meet the needs of current and future generations.

Access and Inclusion Matter

Being able to access services, activities, community spaces and support plays an important role in children's wellbeing and family life. Affordability, transport, awareness of available services and access across different parts of the municipality can influence how children and families participate in community life. Creating opportunities that are welcoming, inclusive and accessible helps ensure all children and families can benefit from what Ballarat has to offer.

Connection Creates Stronger Communities

Children and families thrive when they feel connected to the people and places around them. Safe and welcoming neighbourhoods, opportunities to participate in community life, and places to learn, play and spend time with others all contribute to a stronger sense of belonging. These connections support wellbeing, help reduce isolation and strengthen community life across Ballarat.

Children's Voices Are Important

Children bring valuable ideas, perspectives and experiences that help shape a more child-friendly community. Creating opportunities for children to be heard and involved in decisions that affect them helps build confidence, belonging and participation.

Listening to children and families also helps ensure services, programs and community spaces continue to reflect the needs and aspirations of the community.

"Children have ideas too and should be part of conversations about their community."

Ballarat Kids Think Tank participant

Strategy Priority Areas

The Family and Children's Strategy is guided by the Nest Framework, Australia's evidence-based framework for child and youth wellbeing developed by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY). The Nest Framework identifies the key conditions children need to thrive and provides a shared approach for understanding children's wellbeing.

The six priority areas that follow draw on the Nest Framework and have been shaped to reflect the role the City of Ballarat can play in supporting positive outcomes for children and families. Informed by community engagement, local data and evidence, these priority areas provide a framework for how the City of Ballarat can contribute through service delivery, planning, advocacy, partnerships and community leadership.



Valued, loved and safe

Children feel safe, supported and cared for by the people and communities around them. They experience positive relationships, a sense of belonging, and safe environments where they can grow, learn and thrive.



Material basics

Children and families can access the services, programs, facilities and opportunities they need to participate fully in community life. They are supported to overcome barriers and are connected to the resources that help them thrive.



Being healthy

Children have opportunities to support their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. They are connected to supportive environments, positive relationships and activities that help them stay healthy, active and well.



Children are learning

Children learn and develop through experiences at home, in early learning settings, at school and in the community. They are supported to explore their interests, build confidence and reach their full potential.



Children are participating

Children are listened to and encouraged to share their ideas, experiences and perspectives. They have opportunities to participate in community life and contribute to decisions that affect them.



Positive sense of culture and identity

Children feel a sense of belonging and pride in who they are. Their cultures, identities and lived experiences are recognised, respected and celebrated across the community.



"This is me painting a crocodiles at kinder"
Theo - 4 years

Our Strategy

The Family and Children's Strategy sets a shared direction for how the City of Ballarat will support children and families over the next four years. Guided by our vision, principles and priority areas, the Strategy focuses on the actions the City of Ballarat can take to strengthen wellbeing, inclusion, participation and connection for children and families across the municipality.

The actions that follow reflect what we heard from children, families, community members, service providers and our staff throughout the engagement process. Together, they provide a practical roadmap for how the City of Ballarat will deliver, partner, advocate and plan to support positive outcomes for children and families now and into the future.

Priority Area	Strategic Actions
 Valued, loved and safe	- Continue to strengthen Child Safe and Child Friendly practices across City of Ballarat activities, spaces and services. - Continue to strengthen the safety and wellbeing of children and families through early support, harm prevention, and access to services and information. - Engage children and families to connect with the natural environment. - Provide leadership, partnership and collaboration across the early years sector to improve outcomes for children and families.
 Material basics	- Plan and advocate for equitable access to the social, health and early years services children and families need, close to where they live. - Enable children and families to access the information and services they need.
 Being healthy	- Continue to enable opportunities for children and families to engage in structured and unstructured physical activity. - Support healthy development for children and families through health promotion, early support and access to information and services. - Provide opportunities for social connection for children and families to support mental health and wellbeing.
 Children are learning	- Strengthen support for children and families through key transitions. - Demonstrate leadership in early childhood education and care through partnerships and service delivery. - Deliver accessible and affordable opportunities for learning across City of Ballarat programs including Early Years programs, Libraries, Art Galleries and Cultural Venues. - Plan and advocate for infrastructure for learning.
 Children are participating	- Plan and advocate for inclusive information, facilities, amenities and open spaces for children and families. - Plan, advocate for and deliver community events that are inclusive of families and children of all ages. - Provide opportunities for children to participate in decision making about matters that affect them.
 Positive sense of culture and identity	- Celebrate the diversity of children and families through community events, creative and cultural experiences, facilities and early years programs. - Collaborate with cultural and community organisations to broaden access and improve outcomes for diverse children and families. - Strengthen inclusive, culturally safe City of Ballarat programs.

The objectives and actions identified in this Strategy will be delivered through existing City of Ballarat services, approved operational budgets and existing staff resources. No additional funding allocations are required at the time of adoption. Any future initiatives requiring additional resources will be considered through Council's annual planning and budget processes.

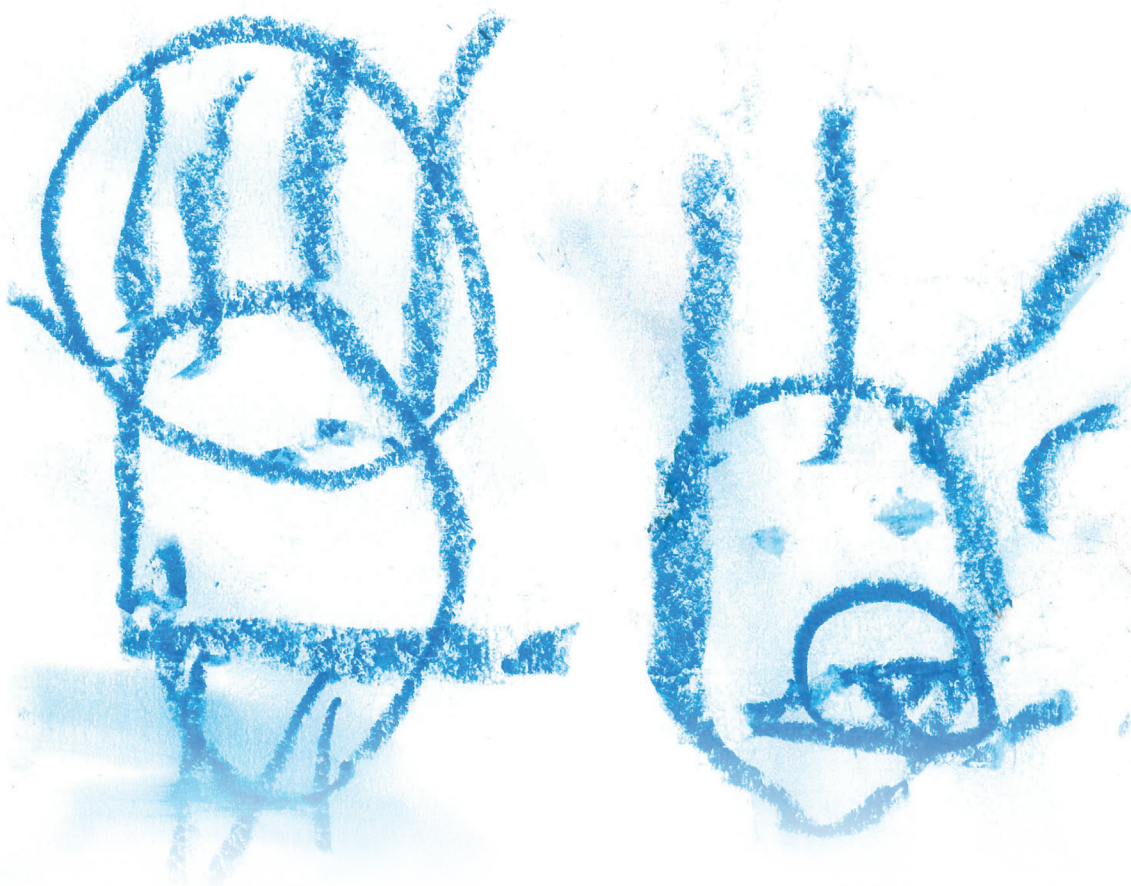
Measuring and Reporting the Success of this Strategy

The City of Ballarat is committed to tracking progress and reporting back to the community on the implementation of this Strategy. Monitoring outcomes helps the City of Ballarat understand what is working well, identify emerging needs and opportunities, and ensure actions remain responsive to the changing needs of children and families.

An annual Report Card will be developed to communicate progress against the Strategy's priority areas, actions and outcomes.

Drawing on community feedback and available data, the Report Card will provide a transparent and accessible summary of achievements, challenges and areas for future focus.

The annual Report Card will support continuous improvement, informed decision-making and accountability, helping the City of Ballarat and the community understand the difference this Strategy is making for children and families across Ballarat.



"Me and my mum having a cuddle together"
Brylie – 4 years



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Call via the National Relay Service
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Translating and Interpreting Services

Call 131 450 for immediate phone interpreting
(available 24 hours)
Visit tisnational.gov.au for online service



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All information correct at time of publication.
July 2026