

YOUTH STRATEGY 2027–2030

Proudly working
with and for
our community



Young People Are Ballarat's Today and Tomorrow



Table of contents

A Message from the Mayor and CEO	04
Purpose and Scope of this Plan	05
Principles – Health and Wellbeing Plan	07
Youth Profile	08
Our Commitment to Young People: Strategic Context	10
Our Vision	11
How the strategy was developed	12
The Youth Co-Designers	12
Key Findings	14
Strategic Priority Areas	15
Our Strategy	26
Measuring Progress	20

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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

Supporting young people to belong, connect and thrive

Around one in six people in Ballarat is aged between 12 and 25. These years are a time of significant growth as young people navigate education, employment pathways, identity and independence. The experiences they have during adolescence and young adulthood help shape not only their future, but the future of our community.

Nearly 1,000 people contributed to the development of this Strategy, including young people, parents and carers, community organisations, service providers and community members. At the heart of the process were 15 young co-designers, whose lived experience and insights helped shape its vision and priorities.

Young people told us that feeling connected and supported matters. They want accessible spaces where they can spend time, make friends, try new things and feel a sense of belonging. They want opportunities to participate in the community, access support when they need it and have trusted adults and organisations that listen to them and care about their wellbeing.

These priorities are reflected in the challenges young people face. Mental health is the most prevalent health concern for Ballarat's young people, and 28 per cent report feeling lonely all or most of the time. Young people also spoke about the impacts of social isolation, boredom, and a lack of affordable and accessible activities and spaces where they can connect with others and feel part of their community. Addressing these challenges is essential to creating a community where all young people experience a sense of belonging and can thrive.

Achieving this requires all of us to play a role. It means fostering strong relationships and support networks around young people, creating welcoming and safe public spaces, providing opportunities for recreation and social connection, supporting positive mental health, and ensuring young people can access the services they need. It also means listening to young people and considering their perspectives in the decisions that affect them.

This Strategy is a shared commitment across the City of Ballarat and an invitation to schools, community organisations, businesses, employers, health services, sporting clubs and the wider community to work together.

Young people are an important part of Ballarat's community today and into the future. Building a Ballarat where every young person feels safe, connected and supported is a responsibility we all share.



Cr Tracey Hargreaves
Mayor, City of Ballarat



Evan King
CEO, City of Ballarat

Purpose and Scope of this Plan

The Youth Strategy sets the shared direction for improving the lives of young people in Ballarat from 2027 to 2030.

It succeeds the Youth Strategy 2022-2026, building on its achievements while broadening focus to reflect the evolving experiences and needs of young people in Ballarat.

Guided by the ARACY NEST Wellbeing Framework, the Strategy recognises that young people thrive when the following six aspects of life are supported:



Healthy



Valued, Loved and Safe



Material Basics



Learning



Participating



Identity and Culture

The City of Ballarat recognises that these six domains are integral to Ballarat's young people, providing the foundation for the actions of this Strategy and helping to ensure that the City takes a whole-of-life approach to supporting young people.

This strategy complements the City of Ballarat Children's and Families Strategy 2027-2030, recognising that the transitions from childhood to adolescence and to early adulthood are important to consider when making decisions and planning for Ballarat's future.

Who this strategy is for

Every component of the Strategy was shaped with young people and is designed to work for all young people aged 12 to 25 who live, learn, work or spend time in Ballarat. It is also for the families, schools, community organisations, businesses, sporting clubs, services and City of Ballarat departments that all play a role in supporting young people.

The actions in this Strategy were co-designed with young people and informed by engagement with the youth sector, City of Ballarat departments and the wider community.

There is no single experience of being young in Ballarat. Every young person has different strengths, opportunities and barriers. This Strategy aims to create a city that works for all young people, particularly those who face the greatest barriers. Young people strengthen our communities and help shape the future of our city. When Ballarat works better for them, it works better for everyone. Recognising and responding to different experiences and barriers is essential to ensuring all young people 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 young people can access opportunities, services and support in ways that are welcoming, accessible and responsive to their needs.

Purpose and Scope of this Plan



This is more than a City of Ballarat Youth Services strategy

The City of Ballarat recognises that creating positive outcomes for young people is a shared responsibility.

While Youth Services will facilitate the implementation of this Strategy, achieving its vision is a shared responsibility across the City of Ballarat and the broader community. The City of Ballarat is committed to creating a more inclusive, connected and youth-friendly community through programs and actions.

We encourage schools, employers, health services, sporting clubs, businesses and community organisations to use this Strategy as a shared framework for supporting young people across Ballarat.

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 young people.

The City of Ballarat commits to listening to young people, strengthening partnerships across the municipality, and using evidence to inform decision-making.

“(in the future) hopefully young people will have the confidence and encouragement to participate in more social activities and engage more in the community.”

Young person, Youth Survey 2026

Principles – Health and Wellbeing Plan

Our approach to supporting young people 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 young people. Together, they guide the decisions we make, the partnerships we build, and we take actions to improve outcomes for young people.



Equity

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

Inclusion

City of Ballarat will work to ensure all young people feel valued, respected, supported and welcome in their community. City of Ballarat are committed to creating opportunities for young people to participate fully in community life and to benefit from social and economic inclusion.

Accessibility

City of Ballarat will work to ensure young people can access the services, programs, facilities, information and opportunities they need, regardless of ability, experience, language, culture, family circumstance or background.

Community Participation

City of Ballarat will support all young people to have a genuine voice in decisions that affect them. City of Ballarat will create opportunities for participation and work alongside young people to help shape services, programs and initiatives.

Collaboration

City of Ballarat will strengthen partnerships with families, community organisations, schools, service providers and government agencies to support coordinated responses and improve outcomes for young people.

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 young people.

Youth Profile

Who are our young people?



16%

of Ballarat's population is aged 12 to 25 years*



23,627

is the forecasted growth of young people by 2030*



530

young people in Ballarat identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander*



14.6%

of young people (aged 15-24) in Ballarat are living with disability ^



1000+

young people (aged 12-24) in Ballarat do not speak English ^



23%

survey respondents identify as LGBTQIA+

Housing, Family and Social Support



64%

of young Australians (aged 14 to 19) named cost of living as the country's most important issue (2025)



25%

of Victorians without a home are young people (aged 12-24 years) ^



With 1.8 vehicles

per local dwelling and limited public transport options, young people in Ballarat may face barriers travelling to work, study and services

Youth Profile

Mental Health and Safety



Mental Health

is the most prevalent health concern for Ballarat's youth ^



17.4%

of young people (aged 15-24) in Ballarat experience mental ill health ^



53%

of young people said a fear of judgement is their biggest barrier to speaking up



72%

of young people (15-19 years) will seek support from peers ^



28%

of young people in Ballarat report feeling lonely all or most of the time, compared with 19% across Victoria



Only 39%

of young people feel safe both online and in their community

Education and Employment



52.72%

of Ballarat residents completed year 12. 14.69% lower than the state ^



1,955

young people (15-24 years) volunteered across Ballarat ^



9.4%

Youth unemployment rate ~

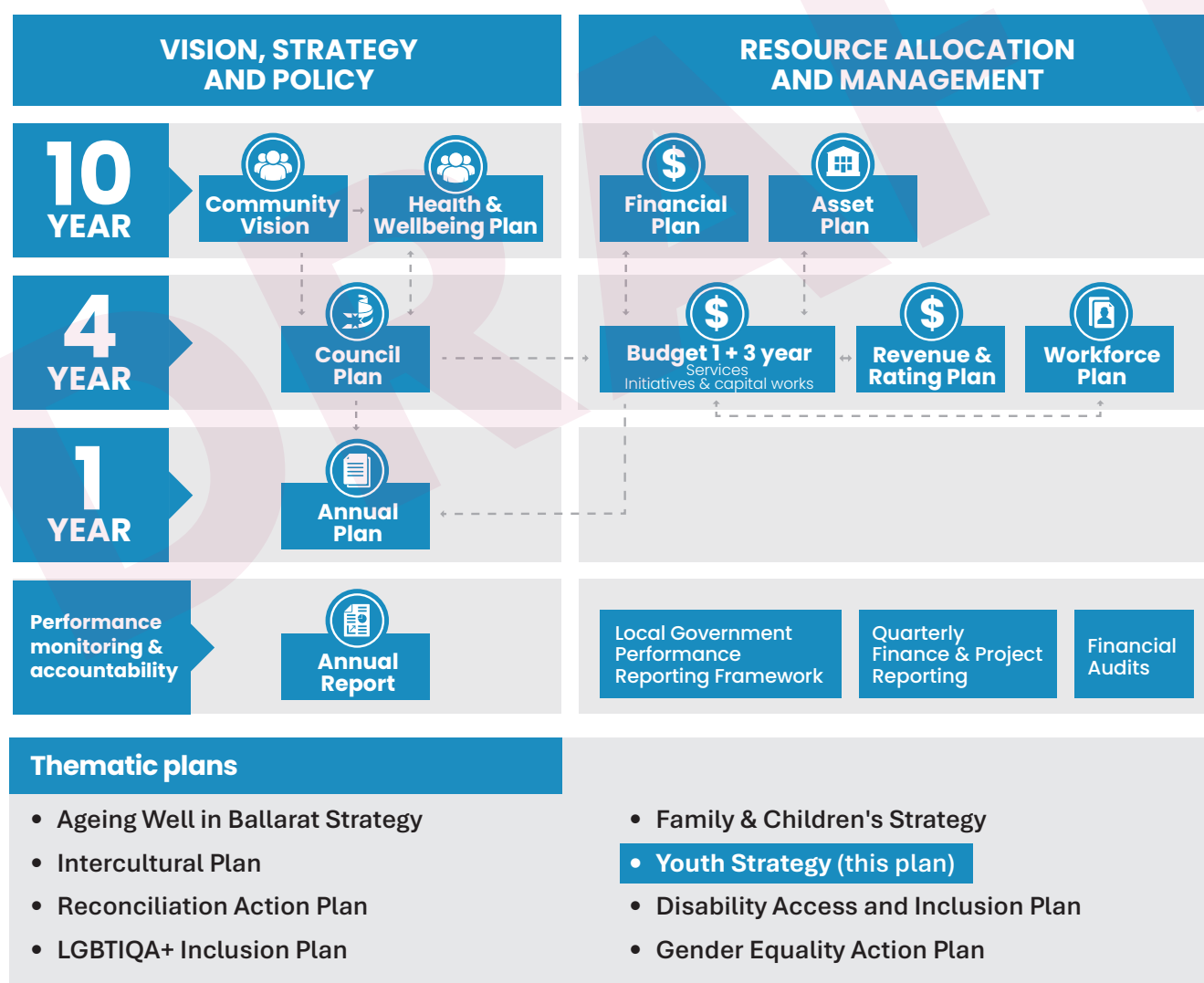
Source: *ABS Census 2021, ^Youth Profile 2024, ~ Jobs and Skills Atlas, June 2026.

Local indicators: Ballarat Vital Signs 2025, City of Ballarat Youth Profile 2024, Mission Australia Youth Survey 2025. Full sourcing sits in the evidence base

Our Commitment to Young People: Strategic Context

The City of Ballarat recognises that creating positive outcomes for young people requires a coordinated and connected approach across the City of Ballarat. Young people 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 Youth Strategy is embedded within the City of Ballarat's Integrated Strategic Planning Framework, ensuring the needs and aspirations of young people 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 young people across Ballarat now and into the future.

City of Ballarat integrated strategic planning framework



Every young person belongs and engages in Ballarat.

It is a community where we can feel safe and decide our own futures.

Youth Strategy Co-designers

Why we chose these words

The vision statement was intentionally written using language identified through the consultation process. Phrases such as "every young person" emphasise our commitment to inclusion, while "belongs and engages" reflects our belief that we should all have opportunities to connect and actively participate in our community. "Feel safe" acknowledges that safety is experienced differently by each of us, and "mould our own futures" was chosen over "build" because it recognises that we are all still growing, with the freedom to shape our own pathways and futures.

Importantly

When this strategy says "we", "us" and "our", it means Ballarat's young people.

When it describes responsibility for delivering something, it names the City of Ballarat, or Council, directly.

How This Strategy Was Developed

Young people displayed their leadership at every stage of this Strategy; from the process and language through to the priorities, aspirations and actions.

Fifteen young co-designers aged 14 to 24 years were employed by the City of Ballarat to develop the engagement process, design the youth survey, and lead community engagement activities across schools, youth groups, expos, and community events. The City of Ballarat provided the evidence-based framework that underpins the Strategy,

while young people shaped its language, priorities, and direction through their lived experiences and through engagement with their peers and community.

Guided by the six ARACY NEST wellbeing domains, the engagement process explored the many aspects of life that influence the wellbeing of young people. This approach ensured the Strategy reflects the perspectives and experiences of a diverse range of young people across Ballarat.



995

people contributed to the overall engagement



331

MySay Survey responses



15

young people co-designed the strategy



78%

of survey respondents were aged 12-25



23%

identify as LGBTQIA+



16%

live with disability or chronic illness



12%

are culturally or linguistically diverse



9%

are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

The Youth Co-Designers

The City of Ballarat extends thanks to the group of co-designers for their energy, insights and willingness to be brave through connection with peers.

Key benefits of the co-design approach included:

- Aligning with co-design and IAP2 engagement principles
- Extending engagement through the co-designers' diverse networks and reach
- Building skills in leadership, facilitation, community engagement, and data analysis
- Increasing confidence, particularly in public speaking and peer engagement
- Creating pathways to further development, employment, and leadership opportunities
- Fostering new friendships and connections across schools and communities
- Providing greater understanding of local government and civic participation.



Youth Strategy 2027 – 2030 Co-designers From left: (Back row) Ynez, Steph, Frankie (Third row from the top) Cleo, Asha, Brody (Second row from the front) Declan, Chloe, Amethyst (Front Row) Maggie, Anushka, Jo (Absent) Ruth, Hesandu, Aditi.

“The Codesign program was an excellent way for young people to build skills and learn about the different roles and work that happen across council, government and community organisations. Through accessible surveys and conversations with other young people, we were able to hear honest experiences and future hopes for Ballarat, helping Council better understand what different groups need. I really enjoyed connecting with other young people and encouraging them to share their views. Hearing different perspectives was enlightening. It was a fabulous opportunity that helped young people thrive with guidance, while opening up new spaces, ideas and opportunities”

Ruth

Key Findings

Young people's lives do not fit into neat boxes. Cost and transport affect whether someone can get to school, work, support or community activities. Feeling unsafe or judged affects whether young people speak up, ask for help or take part.

We need places where we are welcome, not merely permitted to be

Young people need free or low-cost places outside home and school where they can meet, talk and spend time with each other without having to buy something or justify why we are there. Relationships are strong. The places for those relationships to grow are missing.

Relationships matter as much as services

Young people rely on friends, families, peers, youth workers and other trusted adults. Parents rank first as a source of support, friends second, formal services well below. Young people do not necessarily want another workshop or event or app. We want the people around us to be able to listen, respond and help them find the next step.

We need to be respected for who we are

Young people want to see themselves, their identities and our cultures reflected in public and civic life. We also need spaces with clear expectations about respect, equality and discrimination. Safety is not the same for everyone: First Nations, LGBTIQ+ and culturally diverse young people carry an extra layer of concern that can keep us out of public space.

Help needs to make sense before, during and after difficulty

Health is broader than crisis care. Young people talked about mental health, physical activity, food, sleep, drinking culture, relationships, sexual health, reliable information, and knowing when and where to seek help. We feel constantly connected online and still isolated in the real world.

Cost and transport decide whether opportunity is real

An activity can be welcoming in principle and unreachable in practice. Transport is really about fairness, not logistics. Young people who are underage, unlicensed or on a low income, and those in the outer suburbs and rural fringe, face additional barriers to taking part.

Speaking up should lead somewhere

Young people are wary of extractive consultation. There is a strong sense that only certain voices matter, the high achievers or those in trouble, while everyone in the middle is overlooked. Fear of judgement is the number one barrier across every age group. Where participation does work, young people show up with friends, invite each other along, and choose environments that feel safe rather than scrutinised.

We want practical pathways into adult life

Young people are motivated. The gap is between academic preparation and real-world readiness. We ask for two things: practical life skills such as managing money, cooking and living independently, and short, accessible qualifications that help them get work quickly. The issue is both awareness and access.

“As a queer person, walking around certain parts of Ballarat after dark does not just feel uncomfortable, it feels genuinely dangerous.”

Young person 2026

Strategy Priority Areas

Every young person belongs and engages in Ballarat.
It is a community where we can feel safe and decide our own futures.

These six aspirations reflect what young people told us matters most for their future in Ballarat across each of the six domains of the ARACY framework. Each aspiration is paired with an impact statement that describes the change City of Ballarat is committed to working towards, in partnership with young people, caregivers, organisations and the wider community.

OUR ASPIRATIONS



We belong and feel safe

By 2030: We have access to resources and places where we feel safe, welcome and connected.



We are respected for being ourselves

By 2030: Who we are and who we become are respected within our community.



We have the help and support to make healthy choices

By 2030: We have the tools and support to build healthy habits for life.



We have the essentials that we need to thrive

By 2030: Money, transport and access to essentials do not stop us from joining in.



Our voice changes things

By 2030: When we speak up, Ballarat listens and action follows.



We can decide our own futures

By 2030: We are well-equipped to decide our own futures.

OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Each principle is accompanied by a commitment outlining how the City of Ballarat will apply it in practice.

Shape decisions with us early

The **City of Ballarat commit** to involving young people early in decision-making, ensuring their voices shape outcomes from the start.

Aim to reach all of us

The **City of Ballarat commit** to design opportunities where young people have a fair chance to participate and benefit.

Make it work in our real lives (real life)

The **City of Ballarat commit** to consider cost, time, transport, accessibility, digital inclusion, safety and confidence, so opportunities are practical and accessible.

Strengthen relationships, not only services

The **City of Ballarat commit** to support the relationships that help young people thrive, including connections with peers, families, trusted adults and the wider community.

Keep the conversation going and continue the connection with us

The **City of Ballarat commit** to share outcomes, explain decisions and show how young people's contributions have shaped change.

Make this a community-wide commitment

The **City of Ballarat commit** to facilitate this Strategy through the Youth Services team with the understanding that supporting young people is a shared responsibility across the community. City of Ballarat will work with schools, businesses, sporting clubs, community organisations and other partners to help achieve the Strategy's vision.

Our Strategy



We belong and feel safe

By 2030: We have access to resources and places where we feel safe, welcome and connected.

Why this matters

Young people consistently said that feeling welcome is fundamental to belonging. Safe, inclusive places help young people build relationships, access support and participate in community life. This aspiration focuses on strengthening the network of places, people and opportunities that help young people feel connected across Ballarat.

What we heard

- Only **52% of young people** reported a strong sense of belonging, with an average rating of 6.3 out of 10.
- **Sense of belonging declines** as young people get older, with average ratings falling from 6.6 out of 10 among 15 to 17-year-olds to 5.6 out of 10 among 18 to 20-year-olds.

- **93% rely on friends or family** when they need support.
- **LGBTIQA+, First Nations and culturally diverse** young people were less likely to report feeling safe and welcome.

What success looks like

- More young people know where they can go for support and opportunities to connect.
- More young people report feeling welcome and safe in City of Ballarat spaces.
- Young people are invited to influence the design of spaces and places across Ballarat.



We are respected for being ourselves

By 2030: Who we are and who we become are respected within our community.

Why this matters

Young people said they want to feel respected for who they are and who they are becoming. Feeling seen, represented and safe helps young people build confidence, connect with others and participate fully in community life.

What we heard

- **58% of young people** feel their identity is represented well or fairly well.
- **24% identify as LGBTIQA+**
- **63% shared a diverse identity** or lived experience.

- Young people from **diverse backgrounds** consistently described feeling less safe, less represented or more likely to experience judgement.

What success looks like

- More young people see their identity and culture reflected in Ballarat's public life.
- First Nations, LGBTIQA+, culturally diverse and young people with a disability have the opportunity to influence the decisions that affect them.
- More young people report feeling respected and safe to be themselves in Ballarat.



We have the help and support to make healthy choices

By 2030: We have the tools and support to build healthy habits for life

Why this matters

Young people indicated that wellbeing is about more than clinical services. It includes feeling connected, knowing where to find reliable information, having trusted people to turn to, and being able to access support before challenges become a crisis.

What we heard

- Young people rated community support of **youth mental health 6 out of 10**.
- **Loneliness** was one of the five biggest concerns affecting young people.
- Many young people described **difficulties accessing** timely and appropriate support.

- **181 survey respondents** indicated that the Ballarat community support young people's physical health (sports, parks, health providers) at a ranking of 7 or above.

What success looks like

- More young people know where to go when they need help.
- More young people access health and recreation and social connection opportunities.
- Stronger partnerships improve pathways into local services and identify gaps requiring advocacy.



We have the essentials that we need to thrive

By 2030: Money, transport and access to essentials do not stop us from joining in.

Why this matters

Young people said that opportunities are only meaningful if they are accessible. The cost of living, transport and other everyday essentials can prevent young people from participating in education, work, recreation and community life. This aspiration focuses on reducing those barriers and creating more equitable access to opportunities.

What we heard

- **55% feel secure** accessing essentials most of the time.
- **59% identified cost** as a barrier to participation.
- **Employment and adequate income** were identified as major concerns.

What success looks like

- More young people can access City of Ballarat activities regardless of cost or location.
- Fewer young people identify cost, transport and access as barriers to participation.
- Strong advocacy contributes to improved access to essential services.



Our voice changes things

By 2030: When we speak up, Ballarat listens and actions follows.

Why this matters

Young people want meaningful opportunities to participate in community life and influence the decisions that affect them. They are more likely to get involved when opportunities are welcoming, accessible and inclusive, when they feel safe and respected, and when they can see how their ideas and contributions have made a difference.

What we heard

- **School is the primary place** where young people feel they have a voice and participate in community life.
- **49% of young people** use social media as their main source of information about local opportunities and events.
- Many **young people are unsure** where they can have a voice outside of school or do not believe their views influence decisions.

- **Young people value volunteering, leadership opportunities and youth advisory groups** and want these opportunities to be more visible, accessible and representative of all young people.
- Young people consistently identified better promotion, lower costs, safer and more inclusive spaces, and genuine opportunities to influence decisions as the biggest factors that would **encourage greater participation**.

What success looks like

- More young people feel they can influence decisions that affect them.
- More young people participate in leadership, volunteering, co-design and community decision-making.
- Young people can see how their ideas have influenced Council decisions, projects and advocacy.



We can decide our own futures

By 2030: We can see real pathways into skills, work, independence, community connection and a future that works for us.

Why this matters

Young people want practical opportunities that prepare them for adulthood. This includes pathways into employment, volunteering, creativity and further learning, as well as developing the life skills and confidence needed to navigate everyday life.

What we heard

- **80% of respondents** participate in education, school or training.
- **19% are unclear** about, or disagree that, clear pathways into work, education or training exist.
- **41% participate** in creative or skill-building activities.

What success looks like

- More young people know where to find local opportunities to build skills, gain experience and prepare for adulthood.
- More young people participate in employment, volunteering, training, creative and practical learning opportunities.
- More young people feel confident they have the skills, support and pathways to achieve their goals.



“(Young people) are all included and fully knowledgeable on how to live well and confidently.”

Young person, Youth Survey 2026

Measuring Progress

The City of Ballarat is committed to tracking progress and reporting back to Council and 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 young people. 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.

The 2030 statements are the public tests of success

Each aspiration's 2030 statement will be measured throughout the life of this strategy. The City of Ballarat will regularly report on whether young people agree that:

- They have access to resources and places where they feel safe, welcome and connected.
- Who they are and who they become are respected within their community.

- They know where to go, what to do and who to talk to, before, during and after.
- Money, transport and access to essentials do not stop them from joining in.
- Ballarat listens and things change when they speak up.
- They can see real pathways into skills, work, independence, community connection and a future that works for them.

Progress is tested with three kinds of evidence:

- what young people say
- what City of Ballarat data shows, and
- what partners across the municipality report.

The indicators sit in the corresponding implementation plan. Results will be examined across different groups and locations, not only averaged across all respondents.

Share the report widely

City of Ballarat will strengthen accountability by providing regular reporting on progress, outcomes and ongoing priorities to young people and the wider community. Young people can also play a role in assessing whether progress is meaningful and reflective of their aspirations through consultation opportunities.

“If you miss the bus, you are stuck for an hour, or you just do not go. If you live out of the centre, you have no freedom unless your parents can drive you everywhere.”

Young person, Youth Strategy co-design 2026





Customer Service

Monday to Friday, 8.30am–5pm

Phone

5320 5500

Email

info@ballarat.vic.gov.au

Postal Address

PO Box 655
Ballarat, VIC 3353

Website

ballarat.vic.gov.au

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