



Youth Strategy 2027-2030 Engagement Report

Proudly working with and for our community

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Executive Summary

Between 2 March and 31 May 2026, the City of Ballarat undertook community engagement to inform the development of its Youth Strategy 2027–2030.

The engagement sought input from young people, families and local youth organisations on the challenges affecting young people in Ballarat and the opportunities to address them over the next four years. A variety of methods were used, including a survey, interactive external workshops, drop-in activities, direct conversations and internal workshops, ensuring young people, service providers and the broader community could share their experiences, ideas and priorities in ways that can inform real change.

The feedback highlights both existing strengths and the priorities needed to help young people thrive in Ballarat. Findings point to systemic and environmental barriers, with key areas for improvement including access to mental health supports, cost of living relief, safety, service navigation, employment and volunteering opportunities, and community inclusion. These insights will inform a targeted, evidence-based Youth Strategy 2027–2030 focused on improving outcomes for young people across Ballarat.

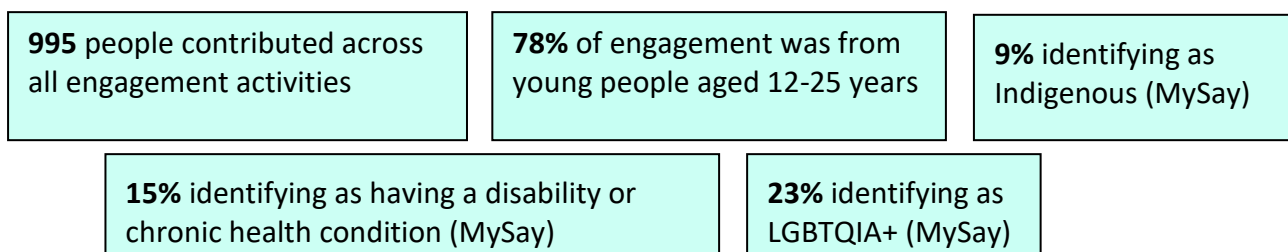
Consultation findings were considered through the lens of the *ARACY Nest framework*, which is structured around six interconnected domains:

- Identity and Culture
- Healthy
- Learning
- Participating
- Material Basics
- Valued, Loved and Safe

The Families and Children’s Strategy 2027–2030 will also use this framework, creating greater consistency across planning for children and young people aged 0 to 25 years.

Building on the 2022–2026 strategy, the Youth Strategy 2027–2030 reflects the City of Ballarat’s commitment to reducing barriers and creating equitable opportunities for young people across community life. Over the next four years, it will guide Council’s work to strengthen inclusion and connection while creating meaningful opportunities for young people to be heard and shape their community.

Engagement Summary



Introduction

The current City of Ballarat Youth Strategy 2022–2026 concludes at the end of December 2026. A new strategy is therefore needed to guide how the City of Ballarat will support young people to thrive over the next four years. The Youth Strategy 2027–2030 will be informed by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Young People (ARACY) Nest Framework.

Overview of the ARACY Nest Framework

The ARACY Nest is Australia's first evidence-based wellbeing framework for children and young people. Developed in 2013 through consultation with more than 4,000 children, youth, families and experts, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, it provides a shared foundation for policy and practice. The framework takes a holistic view of wellbeing, recognising that children and young people need multiple aspects of life to be supported to enable them to thrive. It organises wellbeing into six interconnected domains: Identity and Culture, Healthy, Learning, Participating, Material Basics, and Valued, Loved and Safe.

Discover the nest at www.aracy.org.au

Image 1. ARACY Nest Framework



The Community Response - Key Themes

Across the survey, engagement sessions, workshops, and drop-in visits, the following key themes emerged:



Mental Health

Mental health and emotional wellbeing emerged as one of the strongest themes across the engagement process. Young people described feeling stressed, anxious and overwhelmed by academic and financial pressures, as well as uncertainty about the future.

Many participants highlighted difficulties accessing timely and affordable mental health support, particularly for young people living in growth areas or facing barriers such as transport, long waitlists and limited awareness of youth-specific services. Young people also emphasised the importance of safe, non-judgmental spaces where they feel heard, understood and supported.

Schools, youth programs, sporting clubs and community spaces were identified as important settings for promoting wellbeing, social connection and early support. Participants emphasised the value of preventative and community-based approaches that reduce stigma and normalise conversations about mental health.

Young people also highlighted the value of opportunities that foster belonging, creativity, recreation and peer connection,

identifying these as important contributors to positive mental wellbeing.



“Mental Health education like the Live4Life program help young people seek support for themselves or their friends”



Cost of Living

Cost of living pressures were frequently identified as a major concern affecting young people and their families across Ballarat. Participants described growing financial stress related to housing, transport, food insecurity, and the rising cost of education and social activities.

Young people reported that financial barriers can limit their access to opportunities and reduce social connection. Many also expressed concerns about limited casual employment, job insecurity, and the challenge of balancing work with education.



Affordable and accessible activities, free community programs and low-cost transport were identified as essential supports to reduce isolation and improve participation. Participants also emphasised the importance of creating accessible and inclusive pathways into employment, volunteering and skill development for young people.



“Less day-to-day stress for YP re cost of living, access to transport and services”



Safety and Inclusion

Safety and inclusion were identified as critical priorities for young people across the consultations. Participants highlighted the importance of feeling safe within public spaces, schools, environments and community settings.

Young people discussed concerns surrounding discrimination, bullying, racism, homophobia, gender-based harassment and social exclusion. Many expressed the importance of creating environments where diversity is respected and where young people feel accepted, represented and able to participate with complete authenticity.

Public transport, poorly lit areas and limited after-hours activities were also raised as factors impacting young people’s sense of safety and connection within the community. There was also a clear need for increased safe and accessible recreational locations for young people to gather and connect.

Participants highlighted that inclusion goes beyond access, requiring meaningful opportunities for young people to feel valued, heard and connected. Young people identified youth-led initiatives, culturally safe spaces and inclusive community programs as important ways to strengthen belonging and participation across the Ballarat area.



“More inclusive social environments where everyone and anyone is welcome to have a go.”





Service Awareness amongst Youth

Young People frequently expressed limited awareness of the services, supports and opportunities available to them within the Ballarat community. Participants described difficulties knowing where to go for support, how to access programs, and what services were available for different needs. Young people mostly use social media to stay informed, making their awareness both central and limited.

Items such as advertising, direct marketing at schools and other places that young people frequent were identified opportunities for communication improvement.

Beyond awareness of programs, fear and anxiety can hinder their capacity to be involved. Providing avenues to build connection and familiarity with services may be an important factors in increased participation.

“Making sure young people know about activities and asking young people the activities they want”

Engagement methods

The consultation period lasted 3-months, extending from the 2nd of March through to the 31st of May 2026. The following engagement methods were employed throughout this consultation period.

- 36 Consultation workshops/ activities led by young co-designers
- My Say Survey hosted at <https://mysay.ballarat.vic.gov.au> 313 responses
- 2 Interactive Workshops (Youth Advisory Groups, Adults working with young people & general youth)
- 1 Swimming carnival – voting activity
- 8 Direct conversations (Young People and Adults supporting young people)
- 3 Internal workshops (in partnership with the Family and Children services team)
- Promotion on social media across multiple platforms (Facebook, Instagram and the Youth Services Link Tree pages via the City of Ballarat website)
- Strategy Information and MySay survey links were sent through to Youth Service agencies and individuals within their networks
- City of Ballarat Youth Services mailing list was utilised to provide an EDM to the data base.

- Hard copies of the survey were available from City of Ballarat's Phoenix Building customer service
- Media release on the City of Ballarat Website
- Live4Life Partnership Group Newsletter
- Posters, flyers and core flute signs were placed across the city, including a QR that links to the MySay survey, across several locations, including: Len T Frazer Skate Reserve, Ballarat Sports and Events Centre Ballarat, Ballarat Aquatic and Lifestyle Centre and the Lucas Playground.

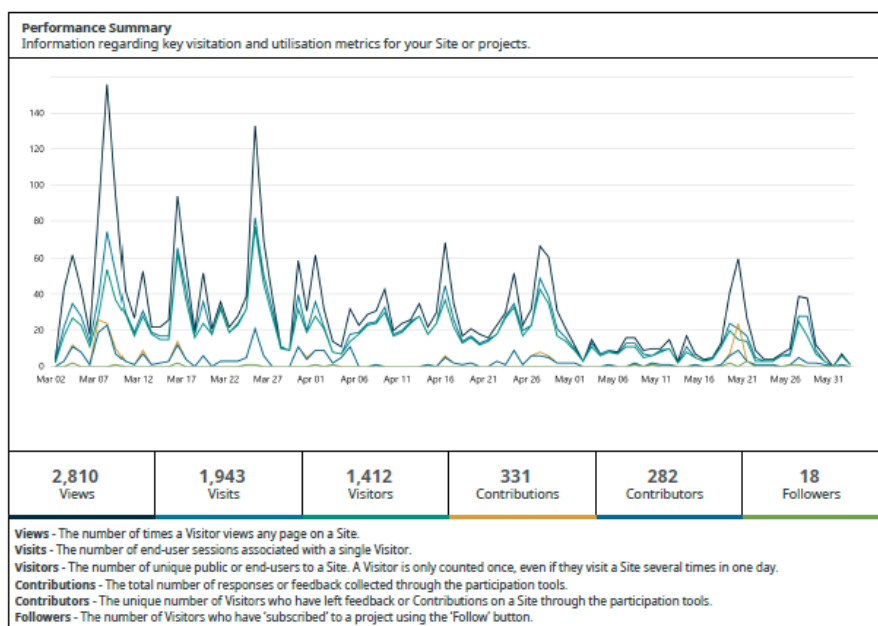
Audience and reach

Across the My Say Survey, in-person engagement sessions, workshops and drop in visits we engaged 995 people in total.

MySay Page

A total of **331** people responded to the survey.

Image 2. My Say Performance summary



Who we heard from

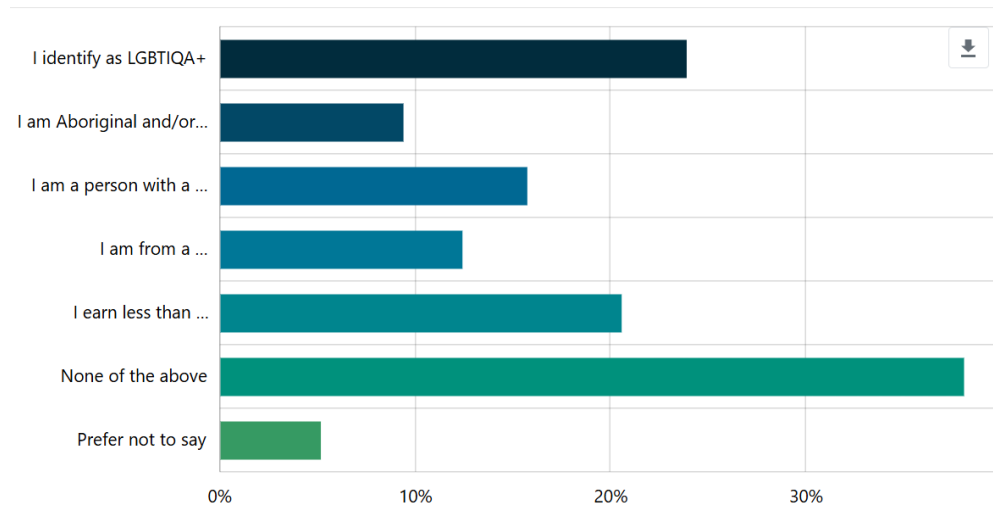
Approximately **78%** of respondents were young people aged between 12 and 25 years.

The MySay survey was completed by a diverse audience

- 23% identifying as LGBTQIA+
- 9% identifying as Indigenous
- 15% identifying as having a disability or chronic health condition
- 12% identifying as being from a CALD background
- 20% earning less than \$650 per week

The above demographics are represented in Image 3.

Image 3. My Say Survey demographics



Additionally, there was solid representation across all suburbs of Ballarat along with some suburbs in surrounding Local Government Areas (LGA's).

A total of **254** survey respondents provided an email address to go in the draw to win one of five gift voucher incentives.

Targeted engagement

Midway through the consultation phase, it was identified that there were gaps in our survey responses; to rectify this, the co-designers came up with strategies to engage those cohorts. Co-designers identified gaps in responses and target demographics e.g. young males, first nations community, young people with a disability. Further workshops were then designed to meet these priority groups.

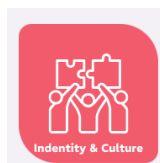
Overview of participation

- Pride in schools
- KEAG Koorie Engagement Advisory Group
- Ballarat Special School
- CMY Centre for Multicultural Youth
- Disengaged from formal education young people
- Geographically diverse (including surrounding local government areas)
- Young Males
- Older Adults (Grandparents)

Conducting a targeted approach ensured that we had a broad representation included in the results to reflect a diverse perspective across the community.

Emerging themes (ARACY Aligned)

From the Survey responses in conjunction with the consultative workshops the following items emerged (aligned to the ARACY Nest framework).

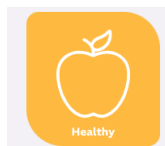


Identity and Culture

The representation of Identity and Cultures around Ballarat is well recognised. Survey participants reported that individual differences and community diversity are at least partly acknowledged.

More community education, training and awareness can bring about better understanding for the differences and similarities to make everyone more comfortable with interacting with the community.

- Close to 10% identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, this is a much larger sample size than is common in other surveys.
- Almost a quarter identify as LGBTQIA+
- Majority of participants acknowledge that their Identity and/or Culture is somewhat represented.
- More community education/training and links to services may help express broader Identity and Culture recognition.

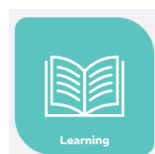


Healthy

Access to Health and Wellbeing services was raised through the engagement. A particular focus on Mental Health and significant wait times was high on the list of priorities.

Overall, the physical spaces designed to promote healthy lifestyle in Ballarat are appreciated with an emphasis on continued development of community hubs and outdoor play / exercise spaces

- Most recognise the efforts made by the community and the City of Ballarat to support physical health.
- There is less certainty however to Mental Health support and services that are offered.
- Eating a balanced diet, Exercise and less Stress and Anxiety were all equal priorities to improving health.



Learning

Survey respondents and consultation findings demonstrated that there is a gap in the delivery of life skill type learning. Young people and their supporters would love to see additional sessions that focus on financial literacy, budgeting, and other general life skills that support their entry into early adulthood

- Over 60% of survey respondents were full-time students

- Young People primarily engage with the community through School and education.
- Although a third of the respondents chose a traditional school environment. However, it was stated in survey responses that young people learn from many different avenues as well.
- More people would like to learn life skills such as budgeting, cooking, taxes, first aid outside a school environment.



Participating

It became evident throughout the consultations, that young people need to know what is happening more to enable them to have greater opportunities to participate. Schools rated highly in providing places for young people to have their voice heard. Additionally, City of Ballarat Youth Services provide an opportunity outside of school through programs like Youth Ambassadors and this co-design process to elevate youth voice.

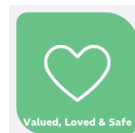
- 45% of respondents held some type of employment
- Volunteering was seen as a strong opportunity for young people to participate and contribute to the community.



Material Basics

Cost of Living, Transport, housing and Employment were the key items discovered as part of the consultation under the Material Basics banner. Cost of living plays a significant role in young people's ability to partake in programs and activities from the cost of sporting registration or uniform. City of Ballarat plays a key role in advocating for systematic change to address some of these key material basic needs

- Only half of respondents were completely certain of their food security and housing situation.
- There is a common uncertainty with employment and adequate income.
- Close to 50% of survey respondents believe Ballarat offers access to Material Basics for young people and into the future.



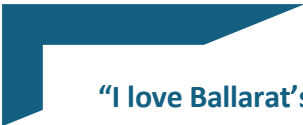
Valued, Loved & Safe

Safety was a prominent theme raised through the survey and consultations.

- Majority of participants felt safe or somewhat safe in both online and offline spaces.
- Most participants have a somewhat positive sense of belonging.
- Most would say they have very comfortable relationships.

What's Working Well

Despite the barriers identified throughout the engagement process, participants also highlighted the City of Ballarat's strengths. This included its resilience and non-tolerance to discrimination of any level. There is also a note that disability services and accessibility are not a priority issue. Ballarat has shown to, despite common societal discontent, be a relatively safe and stable city. There is a strong sense of diversity and inclusion to which any individual can feel they can be involved without pressure. Overall, people appreciate the historic buildings, the opportunities and the diversity in culture and cafes/ restaurants as highlights of living in Ballarat.



"I love Ballarat's cultural diversity, choice of cafes/restaurants"

"Living in Ballarat has provided me with many great opportunities and resources."



Engagement Limitations

The engagement process generated valuable insights from young people, families, community members and organisations; however, the following limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings.

Despite a targeted approach at the mid-point of the survey to engage more male identifying young people, there remained almost double the number of female identifying participants compared to male identifying respondents who partook in the survey/ consultations. This greater female orientated response is typical in surveys. This difference in demographics may influence how the data presents. Data may appear skewed in certain categories i.e safety, where traditionally women and gender diverse people generally experience increased perceived or real safety concerns.

The Co-designers set a target of 2,000 youth responses, to represent approximately 10% of the total Ballarat youth population. The total number of participants fell short of this target. The total responses/consultations was approximately 1000 people. This still provides a reasonable sample size to inform the strategy priorities.

Schools were much more difficult to engage than anticipated. A potential reason for this was schools are mandated to complete several Department of Education/ Catholic Education surveys. Therefore, schools tend to prioritise these to avoid survey fatigue from their students and families.

Participation in the survey and engagement activities was voluntary rather than based on random sampling, meaning the results may reflect the perspectives of individual who were already engaged with Council processes. While a range of engagement methods were used to encourage broad participation, some young people and community members may still have experienced barriers to participation, including limited digital access, time constraints or lack of awareness of the consultation process.

Co-designer Engagement

Fifteen young co-designers between the ages of 14 and 24 years were employed through City of Ballarat to deliver the co-design process of the Youth Strategy. The benefits of engaging young people to lead this process were:

- Aligned with co-design principles/ IAP2 engagement framework
- Across the diverse group of Co-designers, Young People had a greater reach to other young people through their networks
- Upskilling of young people to facilitate community engagement
- Connection into further development opportunities for co-designers (including link to Human Rights commission, Municipal Association of Victoria, Youth Parliament, Urban Planning walking tour, Ballarat Youth Services agencies and internal Council Advisory groups, Yo Bou consultants.)
- Increased confidence of young people, speaking in front of peers and members of the public
- Further employment opportunities, references and unique skill set to bring throughout recruitment process
- New friendships formed outside of own networks, school etc.
- Data analysis of survey responses

- Exposure to Council operations, processes and methods of Civic engagement

Image 4.

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

To the Co-designers – Thank you for your energy, insights and wiliness to be brave and reach your peers.

Conclusion

The engagement revealed both the strengths and challenges experienced by young people, their families and the youth sector more broadly across Ballarat. Mental health and wellbeing, cost of living pressures, safety, inclusion, transport, employment, opportunities and service awareness were consistently identified as priority areas throughout the consultation process.

At the same time, participants emphasised the importance of belonging, connection, creativity, recreation and meaningful participation in community life. Young people expressed a strong desire to be actively involved in shaping a community where they feel safe, supported and valued.

The findings provide an important foundation for the development of the Youth Strategy 2027-2023 and will support a targeted and evidence-informed approach to improving outcomes for young people across Ballarat.

Continued engagement with young people and the broader community will remain essential to ensuring the strategy remains current, responsive, inclusive and reflective of real, lived experience.

What's next?

The feedback collected through this engagement process will directly inform the development of the Youth Strategy 2027-2030.

The findings will assist in identifying key priorities, opportunities and actions that support positive outcomes for young people across Ballarat over the next four years.

Executive Leadership Team and Councillors will receive a copy of the draft strategy in July 2026. It will go out for public submission and comments during August with a final strategy document completed by the end of September 2026. The Youth Strategy 2027 – 2030 is expected to gain Council endorsement in November 2026, with the new strategy to be implemented from January 2027 to December 2030.