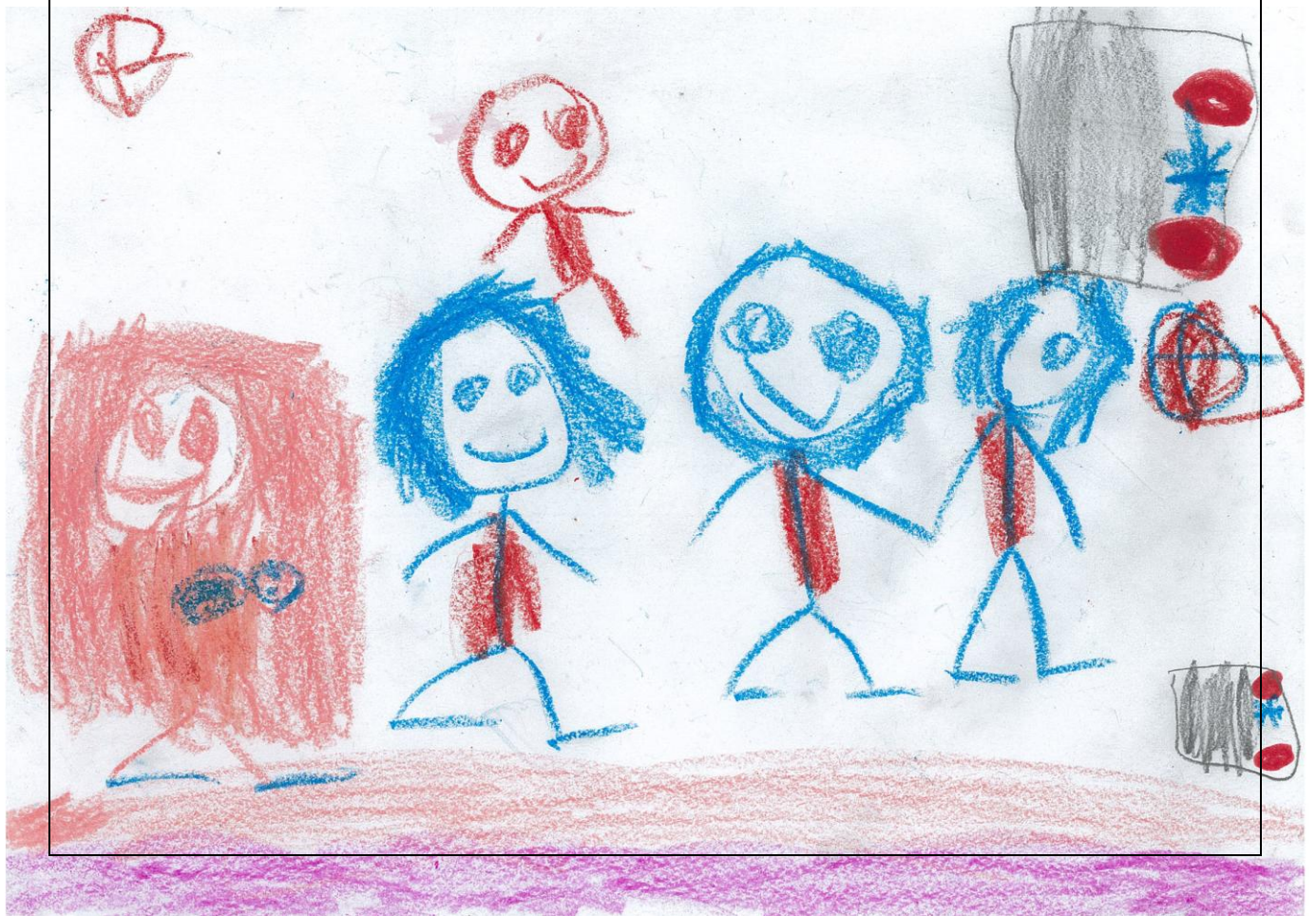


# Yarriambiack Shire

## Council Municipal Early

### Years Plan

2018 - 2022



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Yarriambiack Shire Council's Municipal Early Year's Plan (MEYP) has been developed to provide a future vision and strategic direction for the municipality in the development, coordination and maintenance of early education, care and health services for children and their families living within its boundaries.

### **MAYOR'S MESSAGE**

The Local Government Act 1989 states that two of the objectives of a council are to improve the overall quality of life for the people in the local community and to ensure that services and facilities provided by the council are accessible and equitable.

Yarriambiack Shire Council has embodied these into the key objective strategies of our Council Plan 2017-2022. These are good governance, a place to live and grow, a safe and active community and sustainable environment, a planned future and health and wellbeing.

The priorities in our Municipal Early Years Plan 2018-2022 reflect these objectives and strategies. We will provide supportive co-ordinated strategies and engaging services that meet the needs of all our children, especially those that improve wellbeing and health and we will continue to improve the learning and development outcomes for young children with particular attention to social inclusion and connectedness.

## **POLICY CONTEXT**

At the core of the Yarriambiack Shire Municipal Early Years Plan are the needs, concerns and priorities for children and families within the Shire. These can be reflected through Bronfenbrenner's Model of Ecological systems. This model places the child at its center and highlights the importance of a supportive, caring environment whilst recognizing the importance of the child's parents as their most influential teachers.

It further recognizes the strong influence family support has on the wellbeing and success of children's learning and development outcomes and the flow on influence of the wider community and the broader government, social and economic impact.

## **GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES**

Furthermore, the MEYP is informed by research and contemporary practices and is underpinned by the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child

Yarriambiack MEYP reflects a commitment to uphold the rights of the Child as documented in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990)

Significant evidence shows a clear link between experiences in early years and future health, wellbeing and learning outcomes for children. The Harvard University Centre for the Developing Child states that 'Children need positive relationships, rich learning opportunities and safe environments.' Research from around the world clearly shows that investment in early year's services pays for itself.

*The early childhood period of children's lives has a profound impact on their learning and development for the long term. From birth to eight years, children's developing brains undergo rapid change. This is when children have the greatest opportunities to develop neural pathways for learning and are also most vulnerable to negative experiences. Research underscores the imperative for comprehensive and integrated systems that support children's learning and development, health and wellbeing in partnership with families.*

*Research also demonstrates the importance of the first three years of life in shaping learning and development. From birth, early experiences and relationships influence children's long-term outcomes and life chances. This includes the development of executive functioning and the capacity to experience, regulate and express emotion, to form close, secure and satisfying relationships and to explore, discover and learn about themselves and the world around them (Institute of Medicine, 2015; AIHW, 2015)*

## **FEDERAL PERSPECTIVES**

The National Quality Framework (DEEWR 2009) underscores the delivery of high quality early childhood services nationally. This Framework houses the National Law and Regulations as well as the National Quality Standards for the delivery of early childhood services and in 2017 has undergone revision with the objective of raising the quality of service provision nationally.

These standards are inherent in all early years' programs within the Yarriambiack Shire.

## **STATE PERSPECTIVES**

The Victorian State Government has currently committed \$202.1 M to reform the Early Years. This reform will provide opportunities for additional, tailored support for those who need it, increased support for kindergarten and Maternal and Child Health services to be more accessible and inclusive for children and families who are struggling. (Early Years Reform.)

Furthermore, in line with the Early Years Reform initiative, a significant opportunity exists for Yarriambiack to examine current services available in the Shire - especially those pertinent to vulnerability and take a lead role in service coordination, in order to make Early Childhood services more accessible and inclusive. The Victorian State Government has currently made available, funding specifically to develop and enhance service delivery in the early year's space. This funding will be delivered through Wimmera Southern Mallee Rural and Regional Partnerships and will require a very considered and strategic approach in order to attain the significant outcomes this Community requires.

## **LOCAL PERSPECTIVES**

The MEYP is a Council initiated plan which has been developed in consultation and collaboration with a range of stakeholders including children, families, service providers, community members and professionals. It is integrated within the Yarriambiack Shire Council Plan. The Municipal Early Years Plan is one of a range of plans that council develops in partnership with its community to support enhancement of the wellbeing of its community. It has been informed by robust discussion within the Community and by understanding of the issues that confront our municipality.

The Yarriambiack MEYP will outline how effective and coordinated services can be delivered across all the communities within the Shire which will engage with all families and enhance service provision and inclusion for vulnerable families.

Four key themes emerged from the consultation process:

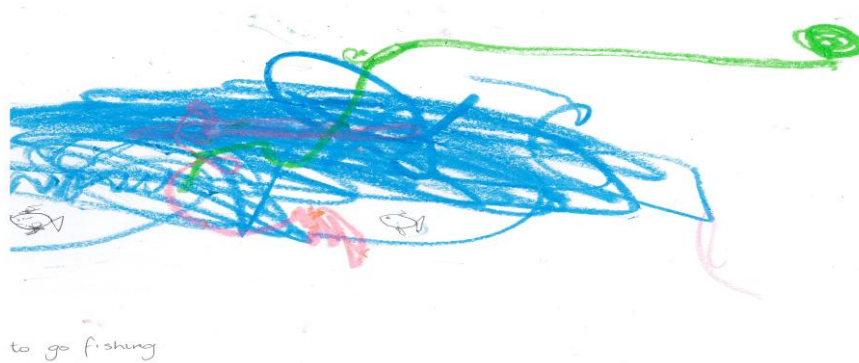
- Having a sense of Identity
- Being connected with others in the community
- Having physical and emotional well-being
- Improved learning and development outcomes

The four themes link strategically to the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework which provided a platform for analysis of services and desired outcomes for children and families. Also, the Early Years Reform Plan, launched by the Victorian State Government provided a critical framework for development of the Yarriambiack Municipal Early Years Plan.

Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (2016)

Victorian Early Years Reform Plan (2017)

## STRUCTURE AND SCOPE OF THIS REPORT



### Consultation Processes

1. A comprehensive Literature and research review has been conducted which can be accessed by reference to the Reference List. (pp )
  - Internal YSC documents to provide contextual data
  - Extensive range of policy documents and reports published by all levels of government
  - Australian and International current literature covering contemporary research pertaining to child development, and early years and family research.
2. Stakeholder consultation
  - Face to face discussion with a range of stakeholders across Early Years services
  - Telephone and email interviews with a range of Early Years service providers
  - Group discussion with a wide range of children aged between 4-7 years of age

### 3. Community consultation

- Three community consultation sessions were held throughout the Northern, Central and Southern communities of the Shire.

These provided opportunities for interested individuals to provide input into current services and offer suggestion and insight into ways the Shire might enhance service provision for both children and families into the strategic environment.

#### **COMMUNITY PROFILE:**

Yarriambiack Shire is located in the Wimmera Region of north-west Victoria, about 300 kilometers north-west of the Melbourne CBD and about 430 kilometers south-east of the Adelaide CBD. It is 7324 Km<sup>2</sup> and has a population of 6738 people comprising 50.4% males and 49.4% females. (ABS QuickStats 2016)

Yarriambiack Shire is predominantly a rural area, spread across six major communities (towns with population greater than 200 people) which includes Warracknabeal, Minyip, Murtoa, Rupanyup, Hopetoun and Beulah and a number of smaller communities which include Woomelang, Speed, Yaaapeet, Patchewollock, Tempy, Lascelles, Brim, Lubeck and Sheep Hills.

Rural land is used largely for agriculture, particularly grain growing (mainly wheat and barley, also legumes and oilseed) and sheep grazing.

In 2016 children aged 0-4 years of age made up 4.3% of the population. There were 287 children aged between 0-4 years of age in the Shire which is a significant decline from the 2011 figure of 391 children in the same



age bracket. Out of 807 households with children, 36% comprised of couples with young children (0-15 age), whilst 11% were single parents with young children.

3% of the population of the Yarriambiack Shire come from countries where English was not their first language. (ABS QuickStats 2016)

**Table 1: How many 0-8 year olds live in the Yarriambiack LGA?**

Area	Total Population	0-4 year olds Numbers and % of population	5-9 year olds Numbers and % of population	0-9 year olds Numbers and % of population
Yarriambiack Shire Council	6684	287 (4.3%)	402 (6%)	689 10.2%
Victoria		(6.3%)	(6.2%)	
Australia		(6.3%)	(6.4%)	

**Table 2: Family Composition in Yarriambiack LGA?**

Family Composition	Yarriambiack %	Victoria %
Couple with young children (0-15)	(10.2%)	(17%)
One Parent Family with young children	(3.0%)	(3.4%)

Table 2 indicates that there is a lower than average number of families with young children in the Yarriambiack Shire compared to Victoria. (.idcommunity 2016)

With declining populations and changing demographics within the population, Council is strongly focused on building community connectedness and delivering sustainable and accessible community services.

Yarriambiack Shire Council has an ongoing commitment to supporting young children and their families through the delivery of high quality early years services and building a better system of service delivery in line with the Early Years Reform Plan. Council recognizes that whilst there will be ongoing challenges in ensuring the future of early years services in the Shire, the future of the area is dependent on sustaining vibrant local communities through retaining and attracting new families to the municipality. Quality early year's provision is a strategy to achieving this outcome.



## **YARRIAMBIAK SHIRE COUNCIL CURRENT CHILDREN'S SERVICES PROFILE**

Within the Shire, a number of services are provided including:

- Maternal and Child Health (MCH)
- Playgroups
- Kindergartens
- Schools
- Childcare
- Library services
- Kindergym
- Occasional Care
- Play to Learn
- Mini Mallee Music

## **Identity - Feeling safe and included in my family and community**

**Identity-** - *Children who have a strong sense of identity feel comfortable within local, social and cultural practices important in their lives. Children feel safe and secure and experience close attachment and kinship with those close to them – parents, grandparents, family groups, caregivers and friends. Children are supported to act with self-confidence and autonomy. They learn about reliance on others and about our ability to help and support others. Children are comfortable in the here and now of their lives*

A 2015 report on the State of Australian Mothers has listed the Yarriambiack Shire as the third worst Local Government area for young mothers to raise a family. This report used five domains to rate all LGA's in the state and considered:

- Maternal health
- Child wellbeing – related to the Australian Early Development Census.
- Education status - proportion of women aged between 15 and 74 who no longer attend any education facility or who attained year 12 or above
- Economic status - median household income
- Relative socio-economic disadvantage

Parental services support the development of strong parent-child relationships and strengthen parental wellbeing, enhancing parental coping and reducing negative stress on family relationships. High quality, coordinated family support services that are well connected to universal services, such as Maternal and Child Health services and early childhood care and education services, have been shown to be effective in providing positive support and outcomes for disadvantaged parents and children, particularly where these services have strong relationships with

communities in which they work. These early interventions can break the cycle of disadvantage, reduce lifetime inequality and promote economic efficiency. (Lalitha N. (2012))

Provision of effective services which engage vulnerable families and provide enhanced support for parenting issues is viewed as vital in increasing holistic outcomes for children in the Yarriambiack Shire.

Social structure boundary spanning to effectively and equitably engage lower socio-economic families continues to prove challenging. Some independent groups or individuals are making progress with this, however funding and sustainability of these groups continues to be challenging. Some success has been demonstrated in the Base 8 program conducted by an individual, however this program requires ongoing financial support and increased leader capacity in order to remain effective and sustainable.

Success in engaging with vulnerable families has also been achieved with the Mothers of Pre-Schoolers (MOPS) program – a church based initiative for young mothers of preschool aged children and members of each group expressed a feeling of belonging by association.

These two groups have the potential to make inroads into providing parental support services which ultimately enhance wellbeing and provide more secure environments for children.

There is anecdotal evidence that cost and transport are barriers to accessing a range of services, including early year's intervention services, pediatricians and even access to local allied health services. These issues were identified in community feedback with one young mother stating that she had only ever been out of Warracknabeal to Horsham twice in her life-

a distance of 60 kms from her home and that accessing services for her family there was 'just not possible.'

**Table 4: LGA Indicators for Yarriambiack**

Indicator	Yarriambiack	Victoria
Index of Socio-Economic Disadvantage	952	1010
% of highly disadvantaged	42.9%	20.0%
Low income families with children	9.1%	8.7%
Child protection investigations/1000 eligible population	31.1	19.4
Child FIRST assessments/1000 eligible population	19.8	10.1
Children with Kindergarten fee subsidy	38.8%	26.8%
People with income less than \$400/week	47.8%	39.9%

*(Source: Community Indicators Victoria, 2016)*

There is both anecdotal evidence and data which indicates that a significant proportion of the population lives in 'vulnerability'. This is highly concerning for Council, especially given such statistics as those outlined in the above data.

Understanding the nature of 'vulnerability' and finding effective ways to support families and children is consistently highlighted throughout this report, as is the need to find ways to assist families to referral pathways for the help they require.

## Health and Well-being – Keeping healthy, happy and well

***Wellbeing - Children and families. Children have a sense of Wellbeing. They are happy, healthy and are socially and emotionally resilient.*** From birth and throughout early childhood, the foundations for physical, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing are laid. Wellbeing means having good mental and physical health, including attachment, positive affect and self-regulation. This means being able to manage emotions productively and build resilience and persistence, being adaptable and confident, and experiencing feelings of satisfaction and happiness.

The Socio-economic index (SEIFA) which primarily ranks areas according to their advantage or disadvantage positions the Yarriambiack Shire as the fifth most disadvantaged LGA within the State with a SEIFA index of 14 compared with a State average of 40. (ABS Census Data 2016).

### Maternal and Child Health Services (MCH)

The provision of high quality MCH services within the Community is widely held as being invaluable in supporting young families and children. Maternal and Child Health services within the Yarriambiack Shire provide information, support and guidance to families with young children on issues such as adjusting to the arrival of a new baby, breastfeeding and nutrition, immunization, child health, behavior and development and hearing and eyesight checks.



Universal MCH services are provided throughout the Shire by two qualified and experienced nurses who are available for consultation on specific days throughout the municipality. Home visits are conducted for all families with new born babies, with additional visits provided for families experiencing increased vulnerability such as breast-feeding issues, babies with an additional need or if the mother experiences chronic illness.

MCH services in the Yarriambiack Shire have high rates of participation. Families that miss a scheduled visit are sent a reminder text message which assists in maintaining contact.

Table 3 Yarriambiack participation rates for Key Ages and Stages Consultations

Key Age and Stages	Participation rate %
Initial home visit	98.6%
2 week	94.3%
4 week	91.4%
8 week	85.7%
4 months	82.9%
8 months	88.6%

12 months	92.9%
18 months	99.3%
2 years	90.1%
3.5 years	98.0%

Table 3 demonstrates the very good to excellent participation rates right through the Key Age and Stage consultations. This participation rate is largely in response to the significant work that is carried out by MCH to engage with families and support their regular attendance.

It was noted by MCH staff that Yarriambiack Shire families have good access to speech pathology services through Rural Northwest Health (RNH) or West Wimmera Health Service (WWHS). Accessing other specialist child and family services such as behavioral and or physical assessments, accessing parenting support or financial skills and management for example can have long waiting lists as these services are provided through a key worker model of service delivery from Horsham or further away, which often implies capacity to deliver is limited.

The provision of parenting programs within the shire is dependent on MCH staff capacity and the number of babies born within a specific time.

If there are sufficient families to form a 'mothers group' this will be facilitated by MCH staff, however given the demographic of the area, this is only rarely feasible.

Over the Shire, immunization rates are excellent with 100% of infants and children aged 24-27 months being immunized. These rates have always been good, but have been increased more in response to the "No Jab, No Play" reforms which links Centrelink payments to completion of the immunization process.



## **YCHANGe**

In 2016 Yarriambiack Shire was identified as having the highest levels of obesity (79%) in Victoria. The obesity prevalence in the Yarriambiack Shire sits at 30 per cent, 13.6 per cent above the Victorian average. The Shire also has the state's highest daily intake of sugar-sweetened drinks and the third lowest intake of fruit and vegetables. (Victorian Population Health Survey 2011-2012, 2016)

In response to these exceptionally high rates, the Yarriambiack, 'Creating Healthy, Active, Nourished Generations',( YCHANGe) partnership between Yarriambiack Shire Council, Rural Northwest Health, Deakin University and WWHS has been developed.

This partnership has been very active in introducing a range of initiatives which support improved nutritional outcomes and reduced obesity and overweight related issues for all age groups within the Shire.

Two of eight key prioritized action areas introduced have related to the area of early childhood and school age children and are highlighted in the Yarriambiack Shire Council Health and Wellbeing Services and Programs on the Yarriambiack Shire Council website.

They include:

1. A 'Food and play policy' which states that food brought from home in Kindergartens is to meet healthy eating guidelines in the Nutrition and Active Play policy of YSC.

2. All schools across the Shire to meet or exceed the traffic light system of food provided in school canteens and through lunch orders as per the Healthy Eating Advisory Service (HEAS) Guidelines. Aiming for School policies/guidelines re food as rewards & healthy fundraisers, treats limited to two per term

Research confirms that early childhood is the most effective time for establishing children's healthy food choices. It is a vital time to build the knowledge of what it takes to remain healthy and well.

Learning about *how* to live in a healthy way, and being able to take increasing responsibility for making good health choices and caring for themselves, enables children to experience wellbeing in their present lives, and lays the foundation for a healthy lifestyle in the future

[www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au)

Throughout the consultation, family and professional stakeholders all strongly advocated for the initiatives developed by the YCHANGe program within and spoke of implementing them as effectively as possible. Some comments included:

"The earlier we can get our children eating healthy options, the better."

'People often think it doesn't matter what you feed your children because they will burn it off, but that is not true.'

'Children's taste buds develop when they are toddlers and so we need to make sure that children do not have too much sugar as it will determine what taste preferences they develop.'

## PLAYGROUP SERVICES

*Play provides opportunities for children to learn as they discover, create, improvise and imagine. When children play with other children they create social groups, test out ideas, challenge each other's thinking and build new understandings. Play provides a supportive environment where children can ask questions, solve problems and engage in critical thinking. Play can expand children's thinking and enhance their desire to know and to learn. In these ways play can promote positive dispositions towards learning.*  
EYLF (P12) 2009

Playgroups have been identified by a range of professionals, as important in facilitating a range of play opportunities for young children as well a source of support in parenting for young families.

Throughout the Shire seven playgroup services have been identified as operating. However it is becoming increasingly challenging to operate these on a volunteer basis.

Due to the significant distance from Kindergarten services in the area, the Temy Patchewollock Playgroup is a facilitated playgroup. This Playgroup offers play based experiences for young children to participate in as well as offering support for young mothers to connect. This format proves very successful with consistent attendance from a range of families.

The remaining six playgroups are community run playgroups, which appear to be less successful in attracting regular attendance. Attendance at these playgroups is generally reported as decreasing for a range of reasons including, and not confined to, cost, inclusivity of the families, isolation, changing opening times and access to the service (knowing where the key

is). However, the lack of a facilitator in each of the centres is highlighted as the most significant contributing factor in this, as families' report that they feel less than adequate in providing appropriate play experiences.

Some short-term services such as 'Play-to-Learn' conducted through RNH, Shake, Rattle and Read and the much loved privately operated 'Mini Mallee music' group have high regard and families have welcomed these programs, finding value both for themselves and their children. Again, cost is highlighted as an excluding factor for some families.

Strong partnership with RNH, and YChange were advocated for quite strongly by several families as the belief is that these programs contribute significantly to the wellbeing and health of both children and families in Warracknabeal and Hopetoun communities in particular.

A hiatus of services for children aged between 18 months and 4 years of age and their families was also highlighted through consultation with both families and professionals, identifying gaps for children and families.

This does appear to be an area of need for all centres and facilitated Playgroups and/or three year old Kindergarten were highlighted as going part way to filling the gap.

Childcare did also provide some concerns for families across the Shire. Availability was highlighted as being irregular whilst the cost of care was prohibitive for some families. Given that rebates can often be accessed for care, the process of waiting until the end of term or semester until accessing the rebates creates real challenges in affordability for some families.



## Learning and Development – Loving learning and growing

**Learning and Development-** Children learn in the context of their families and communities. From birth to eight years children continue to establish learning dispositions and patterns of engagement with others that have a profound influence on their learning, behaviour, motivation and capacity for being confident and involved life-long learners. Responsive learning relationships with all children support them to learn successfully. They are encouraged to be curious and enthusiastic about their learning.



## **KINDERGARTEN SERVICES**

Kindergarten services are provided out of five Shire owned Kindergarten buildings within the Yarriambiack Shire. The Beulah Kindergarten however, is conducted from a Department of Education and Training (DET) owned building situated at the Beulah Primary School. These services are led by qualified early childhood teachers and supported by one or two educators as per ratio requirements of the National Regulations. (ACECQA 2011)

The Kindergartens form part of the Early Years Management Service, which is provided by The Yarriambiack Shire Council. Kindergartens included in the Cluster are Hopetoun, Beulah, Warracknabeal, Minyip, Murtoa and Rupanyup.

The provision of Kindergarten services throughout the Shire is widely regarded and highly valued. The consultations throughout the Shire, highlighted great satisfaction with the Kindergarten service provided for their children in the year before school. Staff were praised for their provision of welcoming and educational programs and highlighted the importance of these for children.

The provision of three-year old Kindergarten programs in all areas of the Shire were emphasized. In centres such as Hopetoun, where a combined three and four year old program is offered, families expressed a desire for an independent three year old program in years when enrolments were sufficient. In other centres, where there is no provision for three year old children to attend a specific or blended group, the need for this was raised.

However, it was recognized that the lack of government funding to subsidise costs for this service makes it prohibitive for some families and advocacy for this was highlighted as pertinent.

## **AUSTRALIAN EARLY DEVELOPMENT CENSUS (AEDC)**

The development of the Yarriambiack Shire Municipal Early Years Plan draws upon a range of data including the Yarriambiack Shire Council Plan and Strategic Resource Plan. Data which provides insight into the current and future needs has also been assessed and included and this provides further insight into the needs of children and families in our municipality.

The AEDC is a nationwide data collection of early childhood development at the time children commence their first year of full-time school. It is collected by their teacher and highlights what is working well and what needs to be improved or developed to support children and their families by providing evidence to support health, education and community policy and planning.

The data collected relates to five key areas of early childhood development referred to as 'domains', which include:

- Physical health and well being
- Social competence
- Emotional maturity
- Language and cognitive skills
- Communication skills and general knowledge

The most recent data was collected in 2015 and indicated that 30.4% of children tested within the LGA were vulnerable in one or two areas.

This equates to almost a third of children in the LGA and is even more significant when compared with the Victorian figure at 19.9% and nationally 22%. (AEDC 2015)

Table 5: Percentage of children developmentally vulnerable in 2015

<i>Geography</i>							<i>Vuln 2</i>
Australia	9.7	9.9	8.4	6.5	8.5	22.0	22.0
Victoria	7.9	8.7	8.0	6.3	7.6	19.9	19.9
Yarriambiack	13.9	13.9	15.2	15.2	13.9	30.4	30.4

(Source: AEDC 2015)

Addressing the concerns raised by this data and developing strategies to tackle the evident disparate vulnerabilities and gaps when compared with state and national results, has been a high priority in Warracknabeal in particular. After attracting funding through DET, stakeholders in partnership with Yarriambiack Shire Council, RNH and the Murdoch Institute have been deeply committed to developing a range of strategies to attempt to counter the low literacy results. These literacy outcomes were also reinforced by NAPLAN results in several levels at school. This will forthwith be referred to as the WORDS Project.



## LIBRARY SERVICES

*Previous studies have found a positive association of parents reading to their children and the child's subsequent reading skills, language skills and cognitive development. Children who are read to more frequently at an early age enter school with larger vocabularies and more advanced comprehension skills (Mol & Bus, 2011)*

Awareness of the need to read to children from a young age was almost universally understood by families across all socio-economic groups. This understanding has been attributed to strategies and opportunities provided by the WORDS Project in Warracknabeal in particular.

However, factors such as poor literacy skills in parents and lack of interest by children were cited as contributing factors to this often not being carried out regularly in the home learning environment.

Consultation with families and some professionals identified a clear desire for the Library to provide more targeted reading and literacy sessions for preschool children. Utilising this indoor environment and being able to maintain safety in a confined space for children was viewed as important in this preference.

Library times of operation were challenged and suggestions that possibly a morning opening time would facilitate greater attendance for families of young children, given that the afternoons when the Library was usually open children were often resting.

Plans for 'Rhyme Time' sessions or story times to be regularly delivered from the Library were received with enthusiasm from families as were plans to develop a Lego club.

The Warracknabeal Library makes linkages with the Warracknabeal Kindergarten carrying out a weekly borrowing service at the Kindergarten. In the smaller centres, Wimmera Regional Library Corporation (WRLC) provide a mobile Library service one day per week which limits the times of visiting for families and obviously the programs which can be facilitated in these smaller towns.

## **WORDS PROJECT**

The consultation revealed that programs developed through the Linking Learning and WORDS projects are highly regarded as effective literacy supports for families and anecdotally, have proven hugely beneficial in raising literacy awareness in all families.

However, the conclusion of the project funding, has placed pressure on the sustainability of strategies.

There is a definite perception that some of these initiatives such as 'Street Libraries', reading sessions at MCH immunisation days or public story times for children have been very successful, however they will require ongoing coordination.

Rural Northwest Health has provided substantial resources to sustain these initiatives and enhance literacy outcomes for particularly vulnerable children and families into the future.

## **CHILDCARE SERVICES**

In partnership with Yarriambiack Shire Council, Uniting Wimmera operates two childcare services in Hopetoun and Warracknabeal.

Care is charged on a daily basis with means tested rebates available.

Both services operate out of Children's HUBs in each town. Warracknabeal offer full day service three days per week, whilst Hopetoun Childcare Centre provides care on four days per week.



The demand for childcare appears to fluctuate within the Shire, with changes in operating days reflecting the perceived needs of the communities.

Occasional care provision is available in Warracknabeal and Murtoa.

Warracknabeal Take-A-Break service operates five days per week for four hours each morning. The service provides care for twelve children each day and is utilized to capacity on most days with families reporting that it is difficult to access because of its popularity.

Some families highlighted concern at the cost of these sessions, but generally it was defined by the high-quality care afforded children.

The Murtoa occasional care service operates one day per week for three hours.

Rupanyup/Minyip also has an occasional childcare service operating alternatively between the towns.

Other smaller communities in the municipality have little access to childcare and parents are therefore heavily reliant on family or friend support in order to be able to work.

### **SCHOOL SERVICES WITHIN THE YARRIAMBIACK SHIRE**

Fourteen schools service the educational needs of students within the Yarriambiack Shire.

Of the fourteen, eleven are state schools and three are Catholic schools.

School buses collect children from outlying areas and deliver them to the schools of choice within each closest town.

The schools are well supported by parent groups, parent helpers, school council members, and volunteers are usually readily available for special events.

In summary, given the range of data that has informed this Plan, coordinated service delivery, characterized by strong partnerships with providers and advocacy for services to be provided locally, will be a strong determinant of improved outcomes for families and young children.

It was clearly identified by several of the professionals interviewed that accessing support services for children in Kindergarten or school has been challenging. Breaking down 'silos' between government departments has been an exciting outcome of the WORDS Project and paves the way for future strengthening of service provision.

However, the capacity of the local allied health professionals (such as speech pathologists or podiatrists for example), to provide service is also a limiting factor for additional local support and would also need to be addressed.

## **Community and Connection- Having friends and groups to be a part of.**

*From birth, children strive for connection and seek belonging - to people, country, place and communities that help them to learn about local ways of being. They learn about sharing common values, traditions and practices. Through the support of family and others, children learn more ways to connect and contribute. Contributing in social settings strengthens children's sense of identity, wellbeing and belonging. Children's wellbeing is linked closely to the wellbeing of their community. Providing equitable opportunities for children with diverse capabilities and life circumstances supports engagement and connection, enabling them to contribute positively to their world. VEYLDF 2016*

One of the key messages of the consultation revolves around communication. Families and children from all sectors of the Shire considered communication within the Shire – especially that which could facilitate social connectedness, could be a significant point for Shire contribution and facilitation.

The northern families expressed acceptance generally of the 'tyranny of distance' and that remoteness leads to more limited options for their children and young families, however they also highlighted the point that if information about services in other Centres in the Shire were indeed shared, they could have agency to make a decision to travel to participate. Reference to social connectedness with families and children within small communities as well as from other centres within the Shire was of significant importance and permeated discussion not only with families but also with children.

The lakes and Yarriambiack creek in the municipality were highlighted as pivotal in providing social connection with family and friends. This connection was noted across the Shire and was emphasized by children in particular. For them, these bodies of water were synonymous with pleasure and fun which included important people in their lives. Comments such as 'It makes me happy when we go to the Lake to ski' or 'My dad and I catch fish in the lake' were just a couple of the comments that were echoed over the Shire. Likewise, swimming pools were of great importance to children and their families.

The children's insightful comments were also often related to being able to ride bikes, play with each other in the parks, highlighting the importance of physical activity in their perception of wellbeing.

It is generally agreed that the Community is well served by many volunteers who provide introduction to many sports for young children. The contribution of these volunteers was highly valued and appreciated by all. However, some children and families also identified the need for recreational or leisure activities for children which were not directly related to sports and were suitable for children of all abilities. A few children were able to identify feelings of exclusion from some sports because of perceived lack of ability and thus were increasingly feeling isolated outside of the school environment. Parents also highlighted this and spoke of alternatives for children who found participation in sports too confronting. Suggestions such as a 'Lego' Club were offered as were opportunities for children to learn a musical instrument.

Organisations such as the Scout and Guide Groups are valued greatly as providing options for primary school aged children.

## COMMUNITY CONSULTATION AND FEEDBACK

### WORKING WELL

**Maternal and Child Health services** – great support, enhanced service and reminders provided for key age and stage consultations and immunization.

**Kindergarten services** – all highly valued throughout the Shire

**Primary School services**

**Waterways and lakes in the Shire:** highly valued as places of connection and wellbeing

**Occasional Care** in Warracknabeal and Murtoa - Excellent service, well attended especially in Warracknabeal.

**Mini Mallee Music** - Warracknabeal – excellent program which is highly regarded. Provision of music/pre literacy awareness for young children.

**Active Kids program** – Hopetoun

**WORDS Programs** - Warracknabeal. Increased awareness of literacy strategies for young children and families



## WORKING LESS WELL

**Playgroups** - All towns. Community run playgroups not working well. Families feel the need for facilitator.

**Three year old Kindergarten Programs** - Not available in Warracknabeal or Murtoa. Other Kindergartens provide combined three and four year old programs.

**Warracknabeal Library** - Not used to its greatest potential. Hours of operation require review. Would like to see more children's programs operating throughout the week at Library.

**Childcare** - Limited options available throughout the Shire

**School Bus access for three year old children.**

**Social Connectedness - Better communication between towns.** Would like to have network coordination so that families are made aware of programs operating across Shire and within towns. Suggested use of social media as a means of transferring information.

**Waiting times for services** - Access to specialist services is sometimes difficult. Waiting times are often very long and much of children's important learning time is spent in waiting to access supports- especially children with additional needs.

**Communication- Knowing how to access services and programs.** Development of Early Years Coordination /Wellbeing Role within Shire- important to future for children's and families service integration, coordination and provision. Development of a 'Welcome Pack' for new families to the towns would be of great assistance.

**What to do if you are not part of a sporting club?** Opportunities for connection other than through sporting clubs. 'Something for kids who don't play team sports.'

**Very few exercise opportunities for Mums with young with young children.-**

**Library** – Warracknabeal hours are not user friendly. No programs for children being provided currently. 'Want the Library to be a rocking place.'

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## Yarriambiack Shire Children's voices

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### **What is good about living in your town?:**

I can catch fish with my Dad in the lake.

I like to go to the pool when it's really hot. Sometimes Charlotte comes too. Then we get in the little pool.

It's good at the Show. I went with my family and we went on the 'Cha Cha.' I saw my friend there.

Sometimes there are fireworks. They are good fun but it's loud.

I love going on the swing at Kinder. I love it because I can go really high.

I love going to the new Apex Park. There's a new swing there. My Mum pushes me really high.

I like to go to the Community garden. Dad talks to people and Caleb and I like to look at the plants.

The skate park is good. My Dad takes me there. But there is lots of big kids there and they go too fast.

I like to kick the football with my Dad.

I love to go to the lake. My family go skiing there. I love the lake because I can go on the knee board.



I like it at the library when the music comes and there are stories.

At the creek is good. My brother and I can go on the donut and my Dad can ski. I'm going to ski like my Dad.

**What could make living in your town better?**

When I go to the skate park all the big kids are there. It would be better if there was a place for the little kids to go.

I'd like to have some more shops in town. I'd like an ice-cream shop and I could buy twelve scoops of ice-cream.

I like riding my bike, but sometimes the paths are bumpy. It's hard to ride on the grassy bits.

The skate park needs some little bumps for kids.

It would be good if we didn't have to go to school so much.

I'd like there to be a big toy shop. I can get lots of 'Star Wars' Lego then.

I'd like a big park with a slide that goes round and round.

We need some more ponds for the fish.

Can there be more places to ride my bike? There are not many places to go riding in Minyip.

We need some more jumps and more rails at the skate Park. But the other kids are there.

We need a zoo!

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## CHILDREN'S THOUGHTS IN SUMMARY

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The children's comments highlighted the importance of being with family and friends. Being active with others was very important and the waterways and lakes appeared to play a very important part of children's happy memories.

The local Show was a highlight in all Communities as were opportunities to gather as a community for special events such as New Year's Eve celebrations or family fun days.

Being together and being active.

## EARLY YEARS RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION PLAN

MEYP PRIORITY ONE:

How can YSC provide supportive and engaging services across the LGA for vulnerable children and families?

ISSUE	What Council will do in 2018-2021	When will this be delivered	By Whom?
Need to identify 'vulnerability' in families and trial different engagement strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with all communities to explore different ways of engaging and communicating with families.</li> <li>• Investigate a range of programs which enhance family participation for possible implementation.</li> <li>• Support volunteers and supporters to facilitate programs for vulnerable families which build skills and support family wellbeing and children's learning.</li> </ul>	•	•
Learning how to parent with confidence is difficult	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner with and advocate for funding to support existing programs which provide household management and budgeting</li> </ul>		

	<p>skills.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner with organisations who provide parenting support and skills for families.</li> </ul>		
<p>Anecdotal evidence of difficulty accessing services. Long waiting lists for early intervention for children, behaviour therapy (Autism), paediatricians</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Map the referral process and pathway for a range of specialist children's services.</li> <li>• Establish partnerships and participate in projects to enhance referral pathways and processes, especially for 'vulnerable' children who are not able to access them. ( ie children living with families who have mental illness, drug or alcohol dependencies)</li> <li>• Support and advocate for the provision of an Early Years Coordinator to assist families to access services and enhance coordination</li> </ul>		

MEYP PRIORITY TWO:

How can YSC continue to deliver a range of services across the Shire which meets the needs of all children and supports inclusion, health and wellbeing in our community?

ISSUE	What Council will do in 2018-2021	When will this be delivered	By Whom?
Community run Playgroups are not being attended. Families do not value current structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide facilitator to lead and conduct playgroup sessions across the Shire.</li> <li>• Investigate with Playgroup Victoria different structures for facilitated playgroups. May explore the idea of a mobile playgroup?</li> </ul>		
Obesity rates amongst children and families are very high in Shire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to partner with Deakin University and YCHANGe to enhance understanding of healthy eating options and the importance of physical activity to improve children's physical health and well-being.</li> <li>• Work with schools, Kindergartens and MCH services to embed YCHANGe processes and</li> </ul>		

	priorities into programs, policies and curriculum.		
ISSUE	What Council will do in 2018-2021	When will this be delivered	By Whom?
Accessing services to support children's health and wellbeing is difficult	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner with local Health Services to enhance coordination and service delivery of existing services to MCH, Playgroups, Kindergartens and Schools</li> <li>• Partner/Advocate with RNH and WORDS group for DET funding for projects which support enhanced access to, and coordination of service provision</li> <li>• Advocate for and partner with key stakeholders to provide regional services, extension of current services and visiting services for children with additional needs.</li> </ul>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• parents groups, visiting services )</li> </ul>		
Childcare options in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue and enhance partnership with current</li> </ul>		

Shire are limiting (access and affordability)	providers and explore feasibility for increased childcare operating hours		
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MEYP PRIORITY THREE:

How will YSC contribute to improved learning and development outcomes for young children in the municipality?

ISSUE	What Council will do in 2018-2021	When will this be delivered	By Whom?
Improve and enhance the provision of early years services to support children and families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to provide high-quality early childhood services/Kindergarten through an ongoing commitment to professional learning for Staff</li> <li>• Commit to employment of a Pedagogical Leader for Kindergarten Staff mentor and support.</li> <li>• Explore and advocate for a range of service provision for children between age 2-4 years of age which support learning, development and wellbeing outcomes</li> <li>• Explore the provision of three year old Kindergarten services in Warracknabeal and Murtoa.</li> <li>• Partner with all health services and DET (Early Years Reform Plan) to</li> </ul>		

	advocate for provision of screenings of children in Kindergartens. (Eg speech, podiatry)		
AEDC Data demonstrates high levels of vulnerability in children commencing school – in particular literacy, social and emotional development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate and partner with WRLC to provide increased Library opening hours. Also advocate for more literacy based sessions for children.</li> <li>• Enhance Library communication strategy to ensure families are aware of programs</li> <li>• Advocate with WORDS, RNH, other agencies and to DET to employ a Family Support coordinator to sustain existing literacy based programs and to investigate, source, extend, and develop ongoing programs which meet the changing needs of families across the Shire.</li> </ul>		

#### MEYP PRIORITY FOUR:

How will YSC improve connectedness for families in the Shire?

ISSUE	What Council will do in 2018-2021	When will this	By Whom?
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		be delivered	
Families feel a disconnect from other parts of the Shire. Would like to be able to access services if appropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance communication strategy for families. Ensure information about available services and programs is accessible through use of Shire website, social media contexts, and booklet form which can be circulated throughout the Shire.</li> <li>Develop a "Welcome" pack for new families in the Shire, which contains information about services and programs available in the Community.</li> <li>Develop an Early Years Network for Professionals working in the Early Years arena in the Shire</li> <li>Continue to advocate with DET to allow access for three year old Kindergarten students to travel on school buses.</li> </ul>		
Create opportunities for families to come together socially to enhance mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advocate for funding to facilitate special social events in the Shire for children and families.</li> </ul>		

and wellbeing of families			
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## CONCLUSION

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The Yarriambiack Shire Municipal Early years Plan 2018-2021 has been developed in consultation with a wide range of community members, stake holders, council and a comprehensive research and literature review.

The MEYP identifies a range of high quality services that are available to children and their families within the community, whilst also providing a structure for identifying areas which require strengthening.

The four guiding recommendations for the plan have been developed in line with outcomes which align with the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework

- Identity - Feeling safe and included in my family and community

- Health and Well-being – Keeping healthy, happy and well
- Learning and Development – Loving learning and growing
- Community and Connection - Having friends and groups to be a part of.

The recommendations that follow articulate and provide scope for Council response. It articulates the important role of partners in delivery of outcomes as well as determining an advocacy position.

Currently, and most particularly in the current political agenda, Yarriambiack Shire Council is being presented with significant opportunity to step out courageously and strategically in the Early Years field. Not only are there opportunities within State Government reforms to provide greater outcomes for children but also specifically through Rural and Regional Partnerships and partnering with the Community Health services, may well pave the way for the Shire to deliver best practice models of service delivery to others.

And delivery of the council vision of having.....

*'Happy, healthy protected children, having equal access to opportunities to strengthen their connectedness and enhance learning, health and well-being outcomes'*

..... Will be achieved.

nelia

Swings + slides  
in the park



William

Football Ground



**ACRONYMS:**

DET - Department of Education and Training

ACECQA – Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority

MOPS – Mothers of Preschoolers

DEEWR – Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations

WWHS – West Wimmera Health Services

RNH – Rural Northwest Health

AEDC – Australian Early Development Census

YSC – Yarriambiack Shire Council

MCH – Maternal Child Health

WRLC – Wimmera Regional Library Corporation

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**THANK YOU TO ALL CHILDREN WHO PROVIDED  
THEIR DRAWINGS!**

