

**Draft**

**Early Years  
Strategy**

**2018 to 2022**

## **Contents**

Introduction.....	2
Policy Context .....	2
Our Community .....	2
Our Priorities .....	3
Guiding Principles.....	4
Being all you can be .....	5
Objective .....	5
Strategies.....	5
Being safe.....	5
Objective .....	6
Strategies.....	6
Being connected .....	6
Objective .....	6
Strategies.....	6
Being healthy and active.....	6
Objectives .....	6
Strategies.....	7
Implementation and monitoring.....	7

## **Introduction**

Local Government is well placed to positively influence the lives of its community. Local Government has many roles, including service provider, advocate, facilitator, planner, facility provider and funder. Service providers together with our community have a collective responsibility to support and provide the right opportunities to children and their families to help them to thrive.

Surf Coast Shire's 2018 to 2023 Early Years Strategy for children aged 0 to 9 years and their families, is aligned to the Council Plan, which incorporates the Health and Wellbeing Plan. The Strategy provides a framework which supports the prevention and early intervention of key focus areas. The detail of how we will achieve these will be planned on an annual basis through the development of an action plan.

This Strategy sets a clear direction for Council in how we will support, collaborate and advocate for our community to ensure great outcomes for children and their families.

## **Policy Context**

There are numerous Council and Victorian Government frameworks, plans, strategies and policies that inform the work of early year's services and programs. Some of these key documents are:

- Roadmap to Reform
- Victorian Vulnerable Children: Our Shared Responsibility Strategy
- Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework
- Ten Year Early Childhood Compact
- Education State
- Early Childhood Reform Plan
- Starting Out Strong
- Child Safe Standards

## **Our Community**

The Surf Coast Shire consists of diverse communities, ranging from coastal towns and the hinterlands to rural communities. Population growth in the Shire has in part been driven by the increase in occupancy over the last twenty years

as holiday houses have been converted to permanent occupancy and as housing developments take off, particularly around Torquay North and Winchelsea. There is also a significant influx of tourists, particularly in summer, when the population can double in size.

In 2018, there were 4,272 children aged 0 to 9 years living in the municipality, representing just over 13% of the total population. This number is expected to increase over the next ten years to 4,999 by 2028.

Children and their families in the Surf Coast are generally tracking well. They are supported by their families and community to learn and develop. There are some families, often hidden, that are facing challenges that make them more vulnerable.

In these situations families need extra support that is accessible, timely and coordinated to ensure they can reach their full potential. Services such as Maternal and Child Health and quality education and care services are pivotal at these times, as the evidence tells us that early, quality support will help children achieve positive educational outcomes in education.

A large amount of brain development occurs in a child's first few years of life. They learn how to communicate, get along with others and control and adapt their behaviour, emotions and thinking. These skills and behaviours set up the foundations for life skills and future success<sup>1</sup>. Investing in the early years provides a return of 2 to 4 times the cost of the investment. This return can be even greater for children experiencing vulnerability.

### Our Priorities

In determining our priorities contained in the 2018 to 2022 Strategy, we have undertaken the following steps:

- Review of our 2015 to 2018 Early Years and Youth Strategy
- Review of statistics relating to the health, wellbeing and development of children aged 0 to 8 years and their families.
- Community consultations
- Reflected on the community consultation for the Council Plan 2017-2021.

This evidence has provided us with insight into some important issues affecting children and their families in the Shire. Some of these issues are complex and require a whole community approach, whilst others are emerging issues as a result of growth and change in our community.

---

<sup>1</sup> Lifting Our Game (2017)

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/research/LiftingOurGame.PDF>

We know that children and their families can experience vulnerability at any time and we want to ensure that the systems are in place and work, for when and how families need them.

We know that our families are strong and resilient and many are experiencing positive outcomes. Council has a key role in ensuring that Surf Coast is a great place for children and their families to live, work, learn, visit and play. A place where all of the community is included and differences are celebrated and supported.

The Early Years Strategy takes a long-term approach to making a difference in the lives of children and their families. The development of an annual action plan will allow for flexibility to respond to community needs, whilst influencing longer term outcomes.

The work that we do will be guided by a set of principles that will provide a lens when considering our planning, design, implementation and evaluation of our work. These align to the Council purpose and Our Approach (values).

Our vision statement for children and their families is:

*'Vision statement .....(to be developed through Children's week and other early years activities)'*

We will achieve this vision through our four priority areas:

- **BEING ALL YOU CAN BE**  
A community that supports the growth and development of children and their families to help them reach their full potential.
- **BEING SAFE**  
A community where all children feel safe, are resilient and their vulnerability does not determine their outcome.
- **BEING CONNECTED**  
A community where children and families are encourage and enabled to connect to each other and their culture.
- **BEING HEALTHY AND ACTIVE**  
A community where children and families lead healthy and active lives.

## **Guiding Principles**

We will ensure these principles underpin the planning, design, implementation and evaluation of our action plan activities:

- Evidence based activities that are affordable, relevant, contemporary and high quality.
- Access to information, advice and support.
- Voice of the child and family in the planning and decisions that affect them and the activities they receive.
- Place based approaches.
- Preventive approaches.
- Education of parents/carers and our workforce.
- Work in partnership with others to achieve outcomes.
- Advocate for children and their families.

### Being all you can be

Learning and development starts at birth and needs to be nurtured and encouraged for life. Parents and carers are a child's first teacher and they need to be supported to help their children achieve their full potential. Services such as Maternal and Child Health are vital for the development, health and wellbeing of parents and their children. Quality education and care also plays a key role in developing curious and resilient children that are ready to learn when they start school.

#### Objective

A community that supports the growth and development of children and their families to help them reach their full potential.

#### Strategies

1. Support children to maximise their potential through access to quality education and care programs.
2. Support key transition stages across early years programs.
3. Provide parenting programs and support to empower parents/carers to build skills, confidence and capacity.
4. Support a love of lifelong learning from birth.

### Being safe

Children and their families are happy, healthy and resilient when they feel safe in their community. The evidence tells us that children and families can move in and out of vulnerability over their lifetime, depending on individual circumstances. We also know that resilient children are more able to 'bounce back' and remain engaged and connected to their family, friendship networks, educational settings and community.

### **Objective**

A community where all children feel safe are resilient and their vulnerability does not determine their outcome.

### **Strategies**

1. Support children and families experiencing vulnerabilities to access additional support and services when needed.
2. Parents are supported to raise strong, resilient children.
3. To become a leader in child safe standards across the region.
4. To support workforce development in child and family safety.
5. Create environments that are car, pedestrian and cycle safe for children.
6. Contribute to, and provide leadership in the prevention of violence against women and children.

## **Being connected**

To have strong, resilient children and families they need to be physically, socially and digitally connected. Being able to safely and easily move around our communities is important in being able to access services, education and recreation facilities. Being able to connect and participate in local events and activities also helps to develop strong social skills which are important for the development and learning.

### **Objective**

A community where children and families are encouraged and enabled to connect to each other and their culture.

### **Strategies**

1. Advocate for the provision of infrastructure, transport and natural environments that are safe and accessible to children and their families.
2. Encourage and support participation in local early year's events and activities.
3. Support community connections through the provision of accessible services, facilities and information.

## **Being healthy and active**

Being healthy and active is important for all children as this is the time for laying the foundations for future health outcomes. Families, communities and services have a role to play in ensuring children have access to healthy food choices, environments that encourage active play and programs that support positive health outcomes.

### **Objectives**

A community where children and families lead healthy and active lives.

### Strategies

1. Develop partnerships and programs that enhance healthy eating and physical activity.
2. Parents are supported to raise healthy and active children.
3. Develop partnerships and programs that encourage the consumption of water.
4. Advocate for infrastructure that connects and increases the walkability of communities.

### Implementation and monitoring

The priorities, objectives and strategies have been identified as the key early year's focus areas for the next four years. These priority areas align with the Council Plan Strategic Objectives allowing for these strategic indicators to be applied to the Early Years Strategy, to measure its success.

An annual action plan will be developed for each of the four years. The action plan will identify specific actions that will be undertaken over that year, for each priority area. An annual report of the progress of the Early Years Strategy will also be developed and this will help to inform the following year's action plan.