



# Municipal Early Years Plan

## 2015 - 2018



Family  
& Children's  
Services





## A message from the Mayor

The Municipal Early Years Plan (MEYP) 2015-2018 is a valuable strategic plan with the exciting goals of making Ballarat a more child friendly city, and a better place for all children, young people, families and the whole community.

Consultation with local children, key stakeholders and the community was critical in the development of the MEYP 2015-2018. There has been a great response to our consultation with quality suggestions and ideas for Ballarat. With this detailed feedback and relevant statistical data, the City of Ballarat has identified a list of priorities for the early year's sector, which form an important part of the Plan.

In the City's previous two Municipal Early Years Plans, partnerships have been the key component to improving outcomes for children and their families in our community. Ballarat City Council is committed to working in partnership with existing and new stakeholders to create life-long benefits for all children, their families and the community. To continue the successful delivery of the plan over the next four years, partnership groups will be established, action plans developed and implementation principals applied.

Ballarat City Council is committed to ensuring that all children in our community have the best chance of enjoying a healthy, happy childhood. As a Council, we will achieve this by keeping informed on childhood development and leading the way in fostering communities with the capacity to properly care for, and support, our families.

As the Mayor of Ballarat, I look forward to being part of a Ballarat City Council that continues to work in partnership with the community and various stakeholders to ensure Ballarat continues in its role as a Child Friendly City.

**Cr John Philips**  
Mayor of the City of Ballarat





# A message from the Child Friendly Ballarat Community Advisory Committee

As a Ballarat City Councillor and Chairperson of the Child Friendly Ballarat Community Advisory Committee, it is with pleasure that I present the Municipal Early Years Plan 2015-2018.

The Municipal Early Years Plan 2015-2018 builds on the achievements of the City of Ballarat's two previous Municipal Early Years Plans. In particular, the City is proud of the successful partnerships that have been developed with all levels of government and local family and children's services stakeholders, and the resulting innovative and effective program delivery and resources. An example of this positive work is the award-winning Connecting Schools and Communities Initiative, developed in partnership with the Australian Catholic University (ACU) and Catholic Education. This project, with the support of ACU students, facilitates five playgroups in Ballarat schools.

Planning for early years services to meet the future needs of a growing Ballarat is a continuing focus of the new Municipal Early Years Plan. The City of Ballarat and Council are committed to understanding and meeting the demand for maternal and child health centres, kindergartens and schools with the provision of new and expanded services, particularly in growth communities.

Children's consultation was critical in the development of the Municipal Early Years Plan 2015-2018 and the City of Ballarat is committed to involving children in the decision-making processes in areas that impact on their lives. Working alongside children, treating them as equal stakeholders and valuing their knowledge and expertise is now considered best practice. The Family and Children's Services team continues to work closely with other City of Ballarat departments and the wider community to ensure continual improvement in children's consultation for the development of facilities and services relevant to children and their families.

The Municipal Early Years Plan 2015-2018 is an active, inclusive blueprint for the City of Ballarat to work in partnership with the Ballarat community and a diverse range of stakeholders to ensure we continue to create and develop as a Child Friendly City.

**Cr Belinda Coates**

City of Ballarat Councillor and Chairperson of the Child Friendly Ballarat Community Advisory Committee





## Introduction

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) encourages all local Councils to develop a Municipal Early Years Plan (MEYP). Producing a plan that specifically considers children and their families enables the City of Ballarat and Council to make informed decisions, and to develop and better evaluate early years services, activities and facilities delivered by local government. Implementing the Municipal Early Years Plan involves collaboration with City of Ballarat departments, and partnerships with all levels of government and community organisations, to ensure Ballarat continues to grow as a Child Friendly City, providing life-long benefits for all children, their families and our community.

The Municipal Early Years Plan 2015-2018 is the City of Ballarat's third MEYP. The Plan builds on the strengths and achievements of past plans and uses local evidence and consultation with stakeholders to guide decision-making and identify key priorities for the next four years.

### Best Start

The City of Ballarat has been a Best Start site since 2004. Fundamental to the development of the MEYP 2015–2018 has been the incorporation of the Best Start program and action planning. The strategic directions for Best Start have been combined into the MEYP 2015–2018 and are linked to the MEYP goals and strategies. Leadership and endorsement of this direction has been provided by the City of Ballarat MEYP Executive. The Best Start Action Plan will be reviewed annually by the MEYP Executive to ensure the priorities and activities continue to support the implementation of the MEYP 2015-2018. The key priorities of the Best Start Action Plan are identified in the MEYP Strategic Plan.





# A Child Friendly City

We believe in a city where what we do, and the spaces we provide, consider the needs of children. This may include installing seats at the right height for children, providing shade at playgrounds for protection from the sun and running early literacy programs, as well as listening to children and including them in our decision-making processes.

The City of Ballarat is officially recognised as a Child Friendly City. In 2007, the people of Ballarat identified their meaning of Child Friendly City and the following five points reflect the ideas of our community.

## A Child Friendly City:

1. Has a community that actively engages in fulfilling the right of every child and their family
2. Enables and ensures that children and families have access to, and receive, affordable services
3. Builds an environment which encourages active community life
4. Provides workplace environments that are flexible in meeting child and family needs
5. Is safe in all dimensions





# The role of the City of Ballarat:

As the level of government most closely connected to the community, local government has a significant impact on how we live. Through partnerships with the Ballarat community, Federal and State Governments, community organisations and businesses, the City of Ballarat delivers a wide range of services, maintains significant infrastructure, advocates on behalf of the community and provides local leadership.

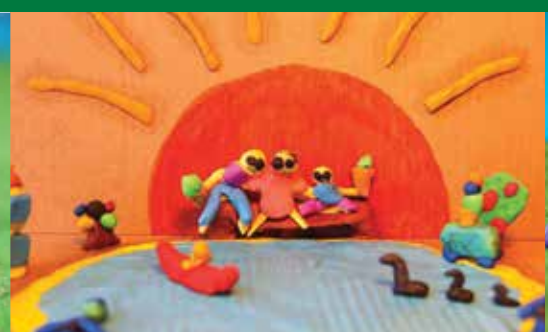
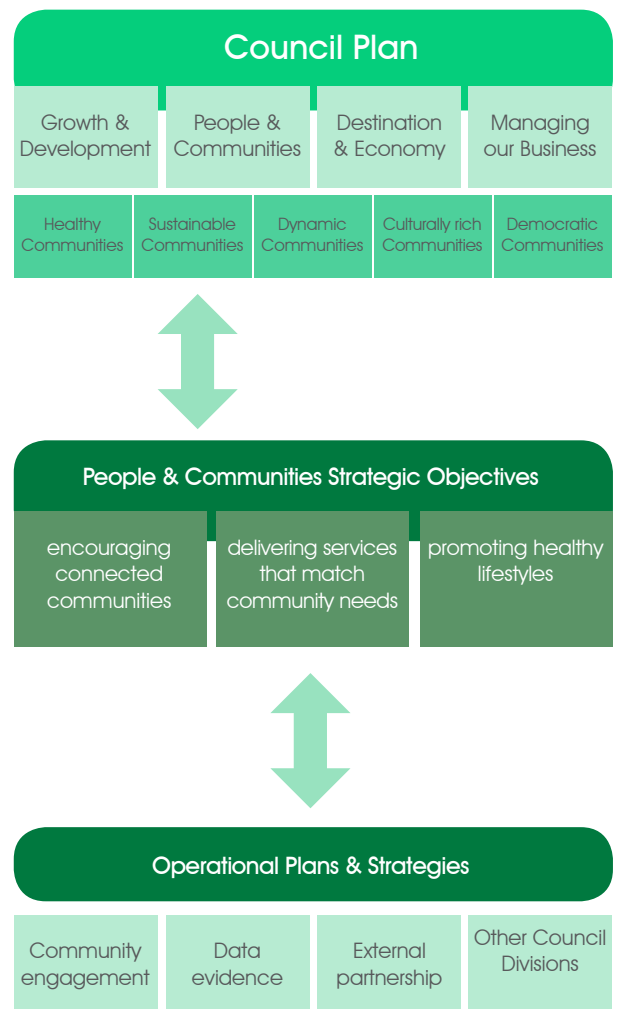
The strategic direction of the City of Ballarat is set out in the Council Plan. It includes the values and commitment of the Councillors and their service delivery promises to the community, and outlines how those projects and priorities will be delivered.

As part of the planning process - based on data as well as input from the community - the City of Ballarat has identified a list of priorities that fall within five health and wellbeing domains. For the first time, the City of Ballarat has incorporated these priorities into the Council Plan to ensure health and wellbeing is considered in the planning of all projects and services for the Ballarat community.

The vision for the City of Ballarat People and Communities division is:

*Ballarat is a safe and well-serviced city that provides equal access to opportunities for its citizens at all stages of life, has connected communities that participate actively in civic life, and offers diverse and accessible recreation, leisure and sporting opportunities that create healthy and active lifestyles.*

The People and Communities division produces several strategies and plans that work in partnership, providing a framework to guide decision-making and determine the role of the City of Ballarat in achieving this vision. Specifically, the Municipal Early Years Plan 2015-2018 ensures that the needs of children and families are thoughtfully considered by the City of Ballarat and our community.





# Investing in the early years

The City of Ballarat invests in early years' development to build strong foundations for the life-long health, learning and wellbeing of children and their families:

**Leading by example.** Providing family friendly work practices, encouraging local businesses to be family friendly.

**Planning** for the provision of social infrastructure. As the Ballarat population increases, many young families are relocating to new growth areas, impacting on the demand for services including maternal and child health, kindergartens and schools.

**Advocating** on behalf of children to ensure their opinions are valued and that they are engaged in decision-making that impacts on their lives.

**Informing** the community about the status of local children and their families; and providing information, support and advice to parents.

**Providing services** for children and their families including maternal and child health services, immunisation, family day care, occasional and long-day care, kindergarten, parent drop-in support and assistance for vulnerable families.

**Facilitating partnerships** with all levels of government and local stakeholders to run programs and services, and deliver events for children and their families.

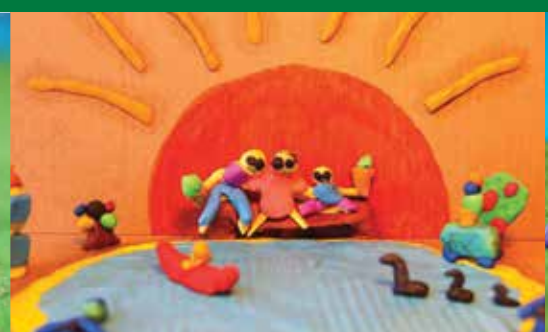




# Community Engagement and Consultation

## STAGE 1: Identifying early years priorities

Subject	Who was asked and how
<p><b>What children think about Ballarat:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you had a friend visiting Ballarat where would you take them? Why?</li> <li>• If you could change one thing in Ballarat what would it be?</li> </ul>	<p>Family and Children's Services staff worked with local schools, kindergartens, playgroups, day-care centres, family and children's services and other children's program co-ordinators.</p> <p>More than 1,000 responses were received from children aged 0 to 12 years.</p>
<p><b>Effectiveness of current service delivery:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriateness of information and services provided by Maternal and Child Health Services</li> <li>• Quality of Family Day Care services</li> </ul>	<p>Parents/carers attending Maternal and Child Health Centre were asked to complete an online survey. More than 60 responses were received.</p> <p>Parents/carers using Family Day Care services were asked to complete an online survey. More than 90 responses were received.</p>
<p><b>Success of the previous MEYP:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What has been achieved?</li> <li>• How successful was the partnership?</li> <li>• What actions should be continued as part of the new Plan?</li> </ul>	<p>Stakeholder online survey sent to all MEYP working group participants.</p>
<p><b>Identification of priorities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the priorities for the next four years (2015-2018)?</li> </ul>	<p>Data &amp; Evidence working group identified key indicators to form <b>The State of Ballarat's Children 2015: The Snapshot Report.</b></p> <p>Feedback from Family and Children's Services stakeholders undertaken as part of the Health and Wellbeing Plan Forum to inform the MEYP 2015-2018.</p> <p>Gap analysis of current service provision and support with key family and children's service sector stakeholders.</p> <p>Workshop with City of Ballarat Family and Children's Services leadership team and maternal and child health nurses.</p>
<p><b>Approval of the draft MEYP:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do the draft goals and strategic objectives accurately reflect family and children's service priorities for the next four years?</li> </ul>	<p>Draft Municipal Early Years Plan 2015-2018 presented to the MEYP Executive Partnership members for endorsement.</p>



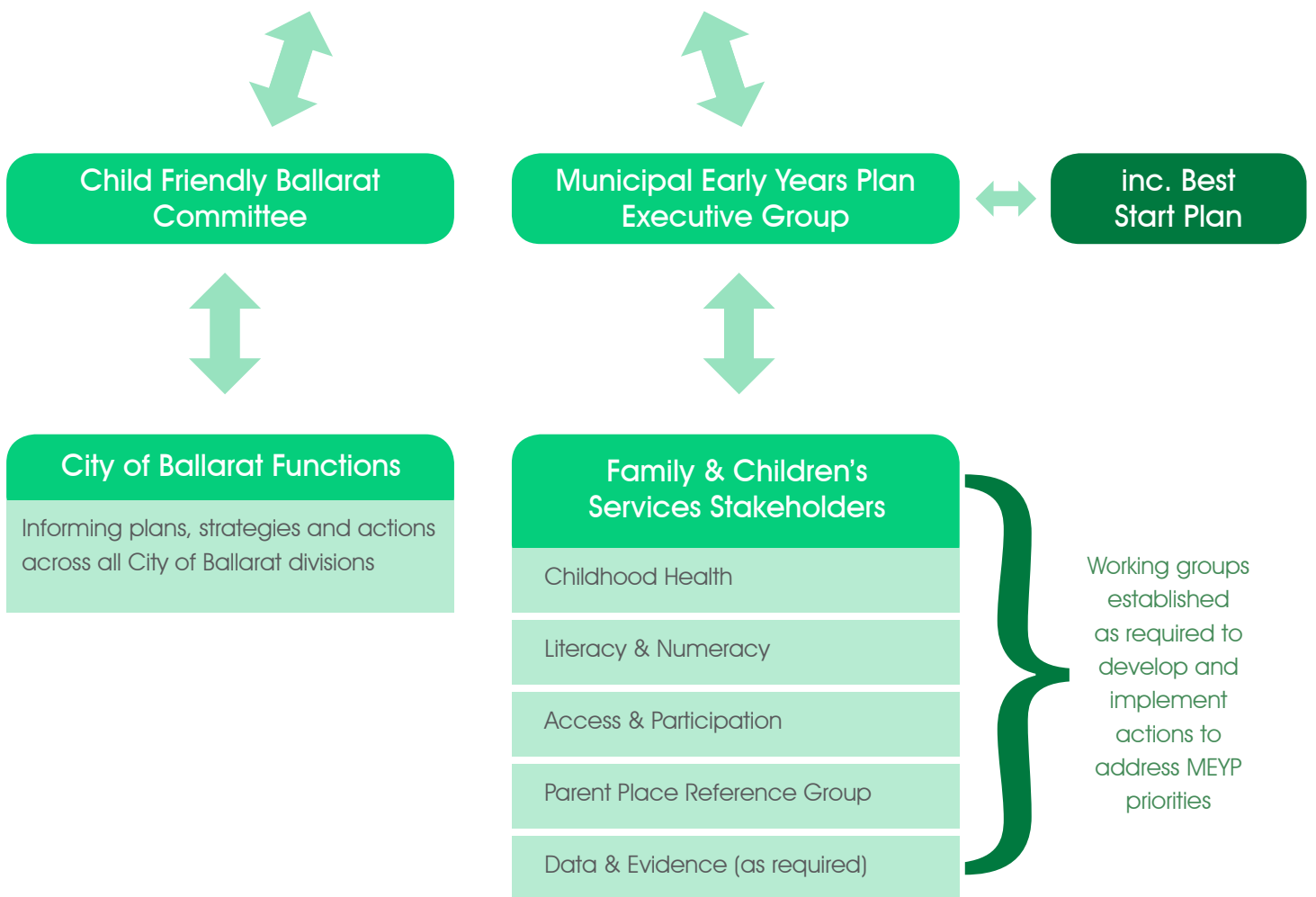




## STAGE 2: Developing an implementation plan

Following the finalisation of the goals and objectives of the Municipal Early Years Plan 2015-2018, the next stage involves the City of Ballarat's Family and Children's Services team working with internal departments and family and children's services stakeholders to lead the development of a Municipal Early Years Implementation Plan. Reviewed annually, this Plan will enable the City of Ballarat and partner organisations to put into practice programs and services to address the MEYP Strategic Planning Priorities.

### City of Ballarat Municipal Early Years Plan





# MEYP 2015-2018 Strategic Plan

## 1. Healthy children, thriving families

*Work in partnership to create a community where all families' physical, emotional and social wellbeing are cared for, enabling them to lead healthy, active lives.*

**[Best Start Key Objective: All children are healthy and develop well]**

- 1.1 Implement evidence-based health promotion programs to educate families and encourage healthy lifestyles.
- 1.2 Increase opportunities for children to be physically active.
- 1.3 Provide high quality support services that are accessible to all children and their families.
- 1.4 Promote, advocate for, and implement initiatives that keep children and families safe from injury and harm.

## 2. Life-long learning

*Work in partnership to create a community that provides learning and development opportunities for all children and their families.*

**[Best Start Key Objective: All children residing in Ballarat are confident learners]**

- 2.1 Provide high quality educational opportunities that are accessible to all children and their families.
- 2.2 Promote the importance of education and embed opportunities for early years literacy and numeracy across services and programs.

## 3. Positive leadership for a Child Friendly City

*Act as a role model for developing a city that actively engages in fulfilling the rights of every child and their family.*

- 3.1 Ensure Council-led plans and policies assert the rights of every child and value children as equal citizens.
- 3.2 Develop buildings and open spaces with children in mind so they can actively be part of social and community life.
- 3.3 Implement and promote strategies that create family friendly workplaces.





## 4. Information for and about families

*Be a leader in the provision of relevant, high quality information to both assist families to access services and support, and improve planning and program delivery.*

[Best Start Key Objective: To promote Ballarat as a Child and Family Friendly City]

- 4.1 Ensure that parenting advice and information about available services and support is provided to families in a form that is respectful, accessible, easily understood, relevant and timely.
- 4.2 Support the work of all family and children's service providers operating in our municipality via the collection, dissemination and interpretation of data about how children and families are faring now and in the future.

## 5. Planning for growth and change

*Ensure the supply and quality of child and family facilities and services accommodates demand now and into the future.*

- 5.1 Oversee the building, maintenance and management of City of Ballarat-owned facilities including maternal and child health, kindergarten and childcare centres.
- 5.2 Monitor, review and, where required, modify City of Ballarat service delivery to ensure accessibility for all families.
- 5.3 Advocate for community or private providers to fill service delivery gaps that cannot be met by City of Ballarat.

# Evaluation framework

The Municipal Early Years Plan 2015-2018 will be monitored and evaluated by collecting reliable and consistent data from a variety of sources contained in **The State of Ballarat's Children 2015: The Snapshot Report**. For example, consistently monitoring service and support participation rates; in particular, monitoring changes in behaviours that impact on the health and wellbeing of children, such as breastfeeding rates and incidence of tooth decay. Where possible, this data will be used to monitor movement of outcomes over the period of the MEYP.

In addition, the *Vichealth Partnership Analysis Tool* will monitor and maximise the effectiveness of the MEYP Executive Partnership and working groups established to implement MEYP actions.





## Snapshot of our community

The health and wellbeing of children is significantly influenced by the services and support available to families, the neighbourhoods we live in and individual family circumstances. The City of Ballarat collects this important information from our community to identify our successes, and the areas in which we need to make improvements. This helps the City of Ballarat and local community organisations allocate the right resources to best support local children and their families, and to assess how this support makes a difference.

**The State of Ballarat's Children 2015: The Snapshot Report** uses the latest statistical evidence to inform Council, the City of Ballarat and local organisations about available resources to continue to grow as a Child Friendly City. For a full copy of The Snapshot Report, visit the City of Ballarat website: [www.ballarat.vic.gov.au](http://www.ballarat.vic.gov.au).

### About our families

- Our population is growing. In 2013, the population of the City of Ballarat was estimated at 97,983 including 16,476 children aged 12 years or younger. By 2031, Ballarat is forecast to grow to 142,000 people. The number of children aged 14 years and younger is predicted to increase to 27,976.
- Of our local households, 26% comprise couples with children and 12% are one-parent families.
- Of all babies born in the City of Ballarat municipality in 2012, 21% were born to mothers aged 14 to 24 years.
- Of all children in the municipality, 354 children aged 12 years or younger are Koorie, representing 2.25% of all children in the municipality in this age group.
- In couple or single parent families, 662 children aged 12 years and younger have both parents born overseas.

### Accessing services and support

The City of Ballarat has a very good participation rate for accessing services and support to help children become healthy and active community members.

- In the Grampians Region (which includes Ballarat) 93% of children were fully immunised at five years. This is among the highest rate of immunisation in Australia.
- Participation in maternal and child health assessments is strong. In particular, the rate of 3½-year-old assessments is significantly higher than the Victorian average (64%), with 72% of children from the City of Ballarat attending this visit.
- In 2012, 99% of eligible children in the City of Ballarat participated in four-year-old kindergarten.





## Improving our health

A child's physical, social and emotional development has immediate and long-term impacts on their health and wellbeing. Areas of concern in the City of Ballarat include:

- Dental conditions are the most common cause of potentially preventable hospitalisation in Victorians aged 0 to 19 years. The predominant cause of dental hospital admissions in children is tooth decay. Between 2007/08 and 2011/12, the admission rate for dental conditions in children aged 0 to 4 years in Ballarat was 12.6 per 1,000 children, more than double the Victorian average of 4.9 per 1,000 children.
- Getting ready for school: In 2012, almost 20% of Ballarat children starting school were considered developmentally vulnerable (lowest 10% in the state) in at least one of five areas tested: physical health, social competence, emotional maturity, language skills and communication skills.

## Connected healthy communities

It is increasingly recognised that a person's health and wellbeing may be affected by where they live, and how connected they feel to their community.

- Overall, the number of Ballarat residents who feel connected to their community is slightly higher than the Australian average at 73%.
- 96% of people living in Ballarat reported they could definitely get help from friends, family or neighbours when they needed it, compared to 92.2% in the region.
- Living in a regional centre, Ballarat families generally live in clean neighbourhoods without high levels of traffic and good access to services, community spaces and recreation.

## Not all children are safe and secure

- The rates of family violence in Ballarat are alarmingly high at 52% greater than the state average. In 2013/14, there were 1697 incidents of family violence reported in 12 months and charges were laid in almost 40% of cases.
- From 2008 to 2009, there were almost 400 child protection reports in Ballarat for children aged zero to eight years. This rate is about 40% higher than the Victorian average. Approximately 25% of these reports are 'substantiated,' which means that following investigation, the child was found to be abused, neglected or otherwise harmed.





## Our partners

Since 2003, the City of Ballarat has worked with State Government, health service providers and community organisations to oversee the implementation of its Municipal Early Years Plan. Known as *The Ballarat Municipal Early Years Executive Partnership*, the group's vision is

**“to work in partnership to create lifelong benefits for all children, their families and community.”**

Current Executive partners are:

- Australian Catholic Education Office
- Ballarat and District Aboriginal Cooperative
- Ballarat Community Health Centre
- Ballarat Health Services
- Ballarat YMCA
- CAFS Ballarat
- Centacare Catholic Diocese of Ballarat Inc.
- Department of Education and Training
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Eureka Community Kindergarten Association (ECKA)
- UnitingCare Ballarat
- Women's Health Grampians

During the life of the previous Municipal Early Years Plan (2010 – 2013), the City of Ballarat worked with more than 20 organisations across 9 working groups to implement actions stemming from the Plan. As part of the new Plan, the City of Ballarat will continue to work closely with local stakeholders to implement the partnership's vision.





## Victorian Charter for Child Friendly Cities and Communities

In October 2013, the Victorian Charter for Child Friendly Cities and Communities was launched. The Charter encourages local governments, organisations and individuals to make a commitment to include children in planning and decision-making. On 27 November 2013, Ballarat City Council resolved to endorse, and become signatories of, the Charter.

*Recognising the need for increased participation by children in decision-making forums and creating child friendly environments, we support the following principles:*

- *Freedom for children to experience environments that consider their needs.*
- *Respect and dignity for children to express their individual opinions, participate in, and contribute to, decisions about their communities and their wellbeing.*
- *Equitable access to supportive environments and services for children regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion or ability.*

During the life of the MEYP 2015-2018, it is hoped many local organisations will learn about, and commit to, the Child Friendly City.

### The Child Friendly Ballarat Community Advisory Committee

The Child Friendly Ballarat Community Advisory Committee was established to promote Ballarat as a Child Friendly City. As ambassadors, the Committee provides advice to ensure that policies, plans, services and events consider the needs of all children and their families. Membership includes a Ballarat City Councillor, City of Ballarat staff and members of the community.





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