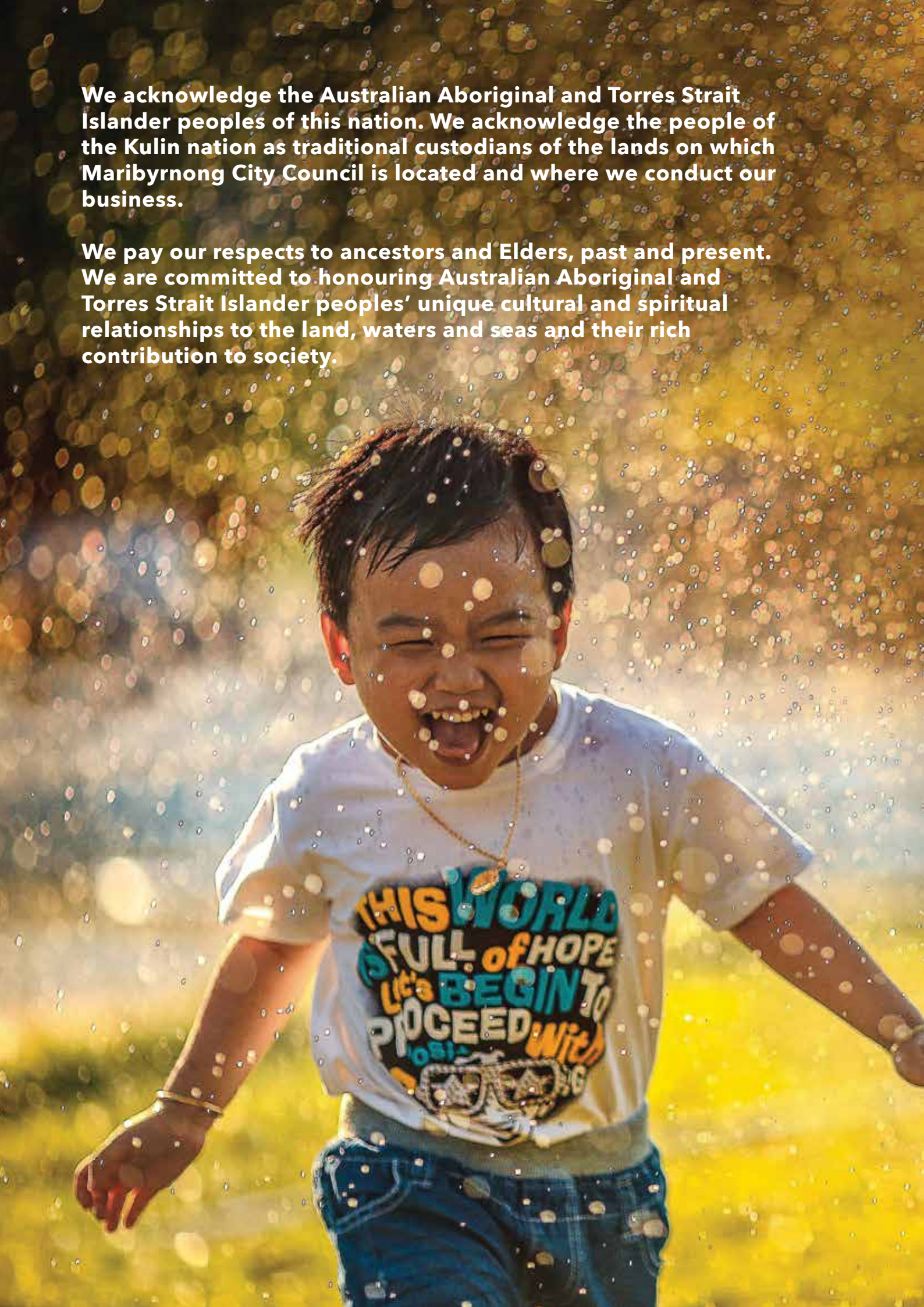
Strategy for Children, Young People and their Families 2030

Maribyrnong
CITY COUNCIL

We acknowledge the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this nation. We acknowledge the people of the Kulin nation as traditional custodians of the lands on which Maribyrnong City Council is located and where we conduct our business.

We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders, past and present. We are committed to honouring Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the land, waters and seas and their rich contribution to society.



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Achieving our strategic objectives

Our approach to achieving the objectives of this Strategy will incorporate underpinning principles to support the way we work for and with our community and a whole-of-council approach.

Principles underpinning our approach to working for and with children, young people and their families

Alongside our commitment to meaningful, ongoing participation, the following principles underpin the way in which we will work with and for children, young people and their families.

- respecting and promoting the rights of children and young people
- prevention, detection and early intervention
- child/young people/family centred practice
- targeted approaches to identify and reduce disadvantage
- services that reflect and respond to our diverse community
- community capacity building and service sector support
- high quality, professional service provision

We also commit to upholding the *Victorian Child Safe Standards* and as signatories to the *Victorian Charter for Child Friendly Cities and Communities*, we also uphold the principles of the Charter. In our work with young people we also commit to upholding the *Code of Ethical Practice: For the Victorian Youth Sector.*

Supporting Council policy, strategies and plans

The Strategy is underpinned by:

- *Council Plan 2017/21*, which includes *The Health and Wellbeing Plan*
- *Maribyrnong 2040: Community Plan*

The Strategy should be read in conjunction with the following Council documents:

- *Human Rights and Social Justice Framework*
- *Arts and Culture Strategy 2018/23*
- *Housing Strategy 2018*
- *Open Space Strategy*
- *Play Maribyrnong: Playground Improvement Plan 2016/26*
- *Disability Access and Inclusion Policy Statement 2019/20*
- *Early Years Infrastructure Plan 2018/38*
- *Intercultural Cities Framework*
- *Towards Gender Equity 2030*
- *Social Impact and Assessment Policy and Guidelines*

Enabling a whole-of-council approach

To support implementation of a whole-of-council approach we will establish a cross-departmental, collaborative leadership group.

The Children, Young People and their Families Strategy leadership group will monitor the implementation of the Strategy and support opportunities for cross-departmental effort in meeting the strategic objectives. The group will be established within the first six months of operation of this Strategy.

Periodic review and data updates

This Strategy will be reviewed every three years, including the utilisation of feedback from children, young people and their families, international and national research and local data and information.

Team level action plans will be developed and updated annually.

In 2029, the Strategy will be reviewed as a whole, and development of a new strategy will commence.

Our strategic approach

A strategic framework for children, young people and their families

This Strategy outlines a framework and strategic objectives to guide Council in working for, and with children and young people from birth through to 25 years and their families.

A life-course approach

Through a life-course approach, we recognise that the 'events in one phase of life both affect and are affected by events in other phases of life.'[1]

This approach also requires that we are mindful of the changing needs of children, young people and their families *along the life-course* – from birth, through the early years, younger childhood, the middle years, adolescence and young adulthood.

"Supporting parents is a powerful way to improve children's [and young people's] wellbeing, health and educational outcomes, and ultimately reduce social disadvantage."

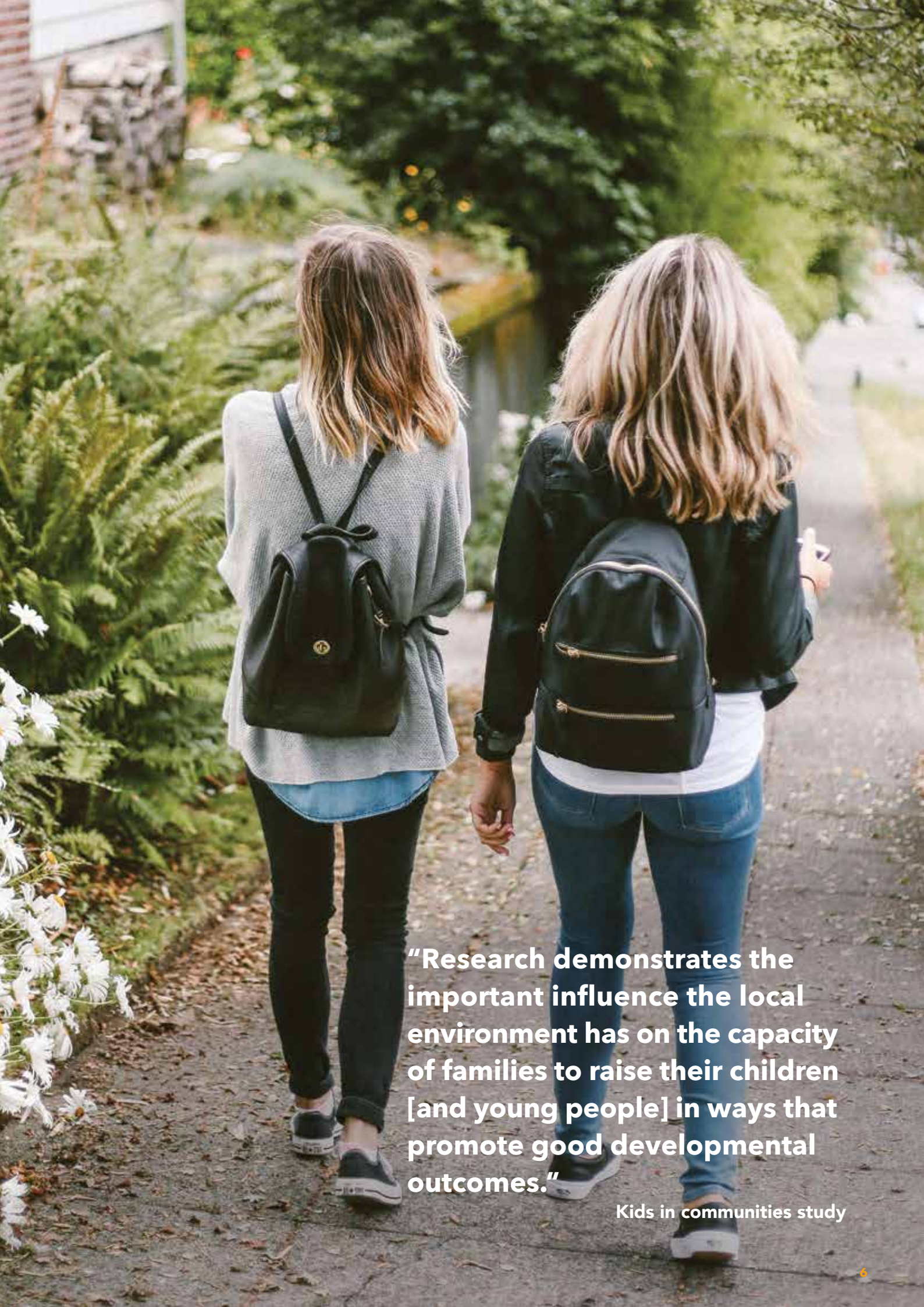
Parenting Resource Centre

An ecological approach

We also recognise that the wellbeing of children, young people and their families is influenced by their family and community context.

By taking an ecological approach, we can influence positive outcomes by placing a focus on strengthening families and on creating a community in which children, young people and their families can thrive.

Council is well placed to work with the community and other levels of government to enhance the liveability of Maribyrnong for children, young people and their families.



"Research demonstrates the important influence the local environment has on the capacity of families to raise their children [and young people] in ways that promote good developmental outcomes."

Kids in communities study

All stages of child and young people's development play a critical role in shaping longer-term outcomes

The first 1,000 days

There is significant evidence of the critical importance of the first 1,000 days of a child's development – 'the period from conception to the end of a child's second year' and 'the significance of environments and experiences during this period.' As such, '(r)educing inequities and ensuring the best start to life for everyone, irrespective of socioeconomic status, race, or gender, must be an ethical and economic imperative for all governments.'[2]

Laying the foundations in early childhood

Research tells us that '(t)he foundations for a child's long-term development are laid in early childhood. In these years, children develop crucial cognitive and emotional skills such as reasoning, problem solving and how to get along with others.'[3]

As is recognised by the Victorian Department of Education and Training within the Early Childhood Reform Plan:

'the early years matter. They matter because the right early childhood education experience will set the course for successful lifelong learning. And they matter because every child – no matter where they live, no matter what their circumstances – will thrive in a safe and supportive home environment.'[4]

The middle years – significant transitions and challenges and opportunities

Significant development continues to take place into the 'middle years' (age 8 to 14 years), which continues to be a key phase for early intervention in areas such as health and educational engagement.

As the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth tells us:

'The middle years is a period of extraordinary physical, emotional and intellectual growth. This key formative phase is replete with transitions: from childhood to adolescence; from primary to secondary school; from dependence to greater agency.'[5]

Adolescence and 'the second chance'

Adolescence provides a 'second chance' at shaping positive developmental outcomes. The World Health Organisation tells us that:

'The rapid biological and psychosocial changes that take place during the second decade affect every aspect of adolescents' lives. These changes make adolescence a unique period in the life-course in its own right, as well as an important time for laying the foundations of good health in adulthood.'[6]

Continued development and transition in young adulthood

Significant transition continues into young adulthood, which 'is a life stage characterized by changes in cognitive, emotional, physical, and social domains and the ultimate pathway achieved by the emerging adults during this stage is determined by the ongoing, dynamic, and reciprocal interactions between the individual and their environment.'[7]

This strategic framework is a tool we use to...

...take a whole-of-council approach to create a community context in which children, young people and their families can thrive. We have the ability to provide direct services and programs to children, young people and their families and to create opportunities, spaces and places that encourage children and young people's participation, development and wellbeing.

Through working collaboratively (both across Council and with the community) we can strengthen our ability to achieve positive outcomes for children, young people and their families.

...uphold and advocate for the rights of children and young people as they are outlined in the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, and the rights of children, young people and their families (along with all members of our community) as outlined in the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

...guide decision making and action for the next 10 years. This Strategy outlines guiding principles and strategic objectives to support decision making around program development and delivery, planning, partnerships and advocacy. It provides the overarching framework from which Maternal and Child Health, the Early Years and Youth Service Teams will develop their action plans.

In taking a longer-term view, we are recognising that achieving positive outcomes for children, young people and their families and developing a community context in which they can thrive is ongoing work, beyond the life cycle of a short-term strategy.

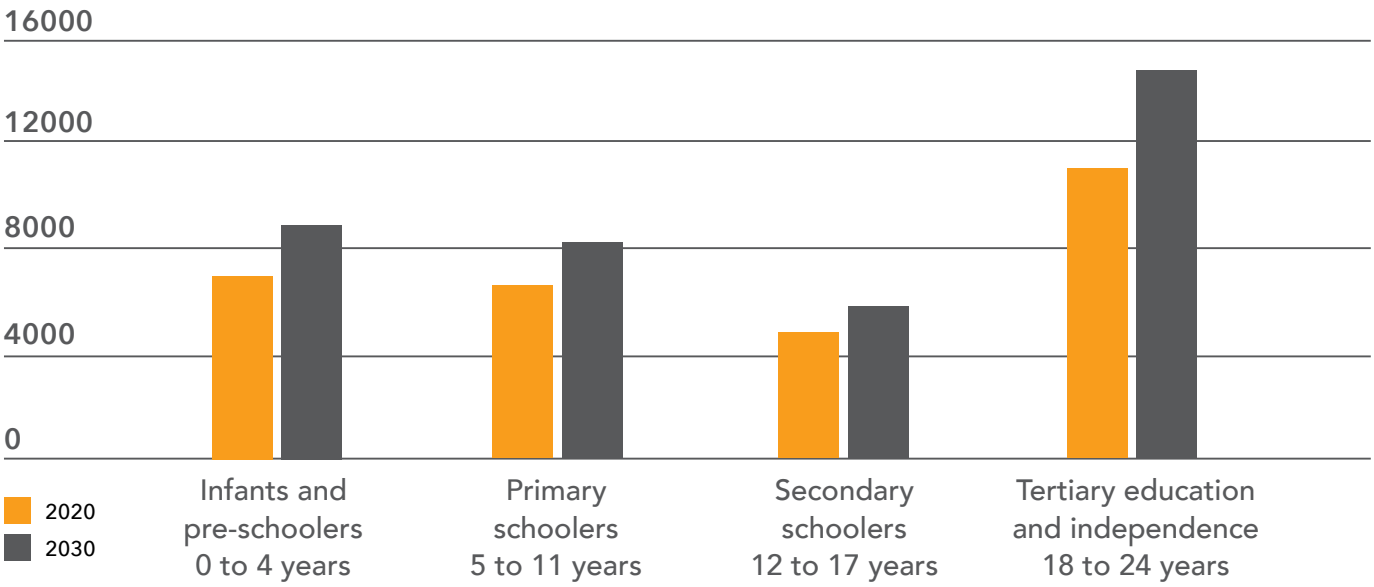
We will review this strategic framework every three years, ensuring it stays relevant. We will continue to focus our efforts on implementation and monitoring progress.

Demographic snapshot

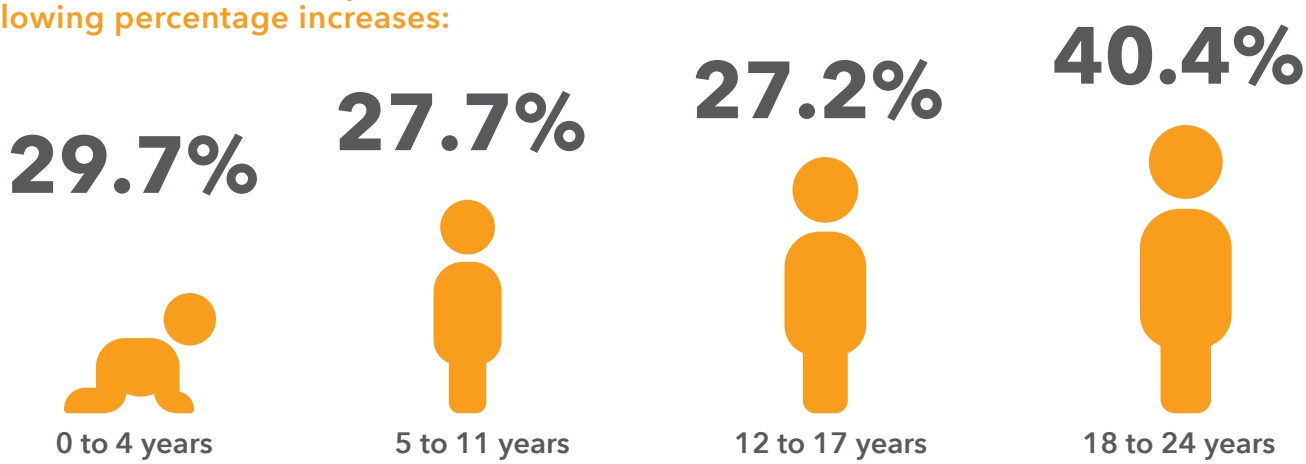
Maribyrnong has a relatively young population. Children and young people between the ages of 0 and 25 years are predicted to make up just below 30 percent of our population by 2020 and are expected to maintain this percentage share of the population at 2030.

The graph below illustrates the predicted number of children and young people within Maribyrnong at 2020 and 2030.

Forecast number of children and young people by service age group within City of Maribyrnong



Between 2020/30, we expect the following percentage increases:



Population and housing forecasts prepared by .id, the population experts, June 2018

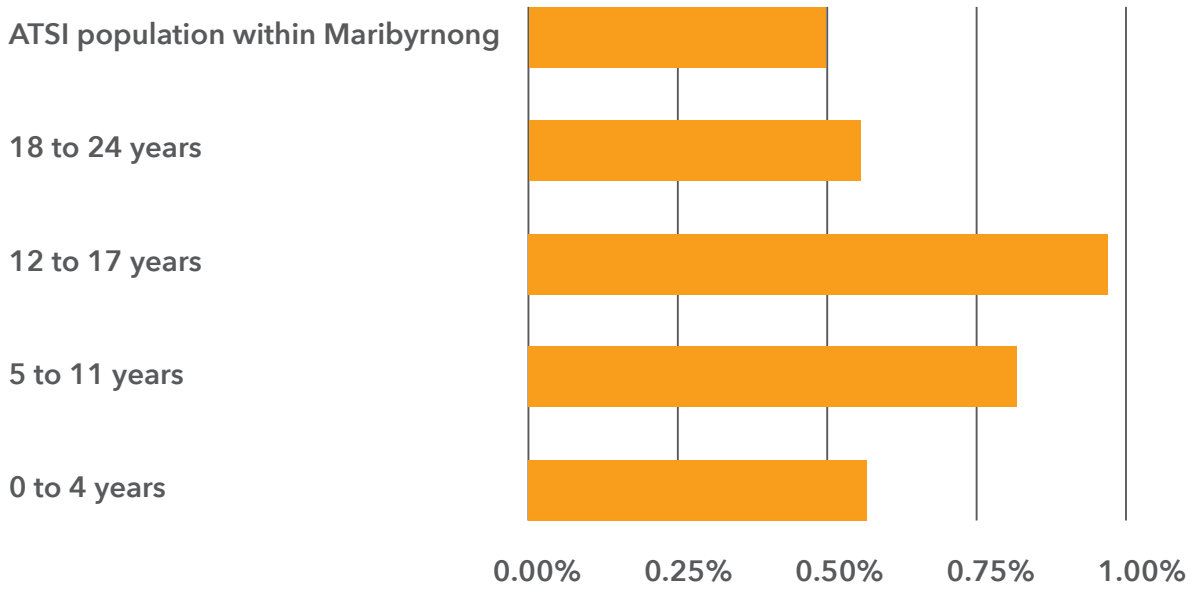
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders population structure is considerably younger than the non-Indigenous population.[8]

According to the 2016 Census (which may under report the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people[9]), 0.5 percent of the population of the City of Maribyrnong was Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

The population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people was higher as a proportion of the broader community within each of the service age groups, particularly in the 5 to 11, and 12 to 17 years age brackets.

Percentage of the City of Maribyrnong population who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander in total and by service group of children and young people



ABS, Census 2016

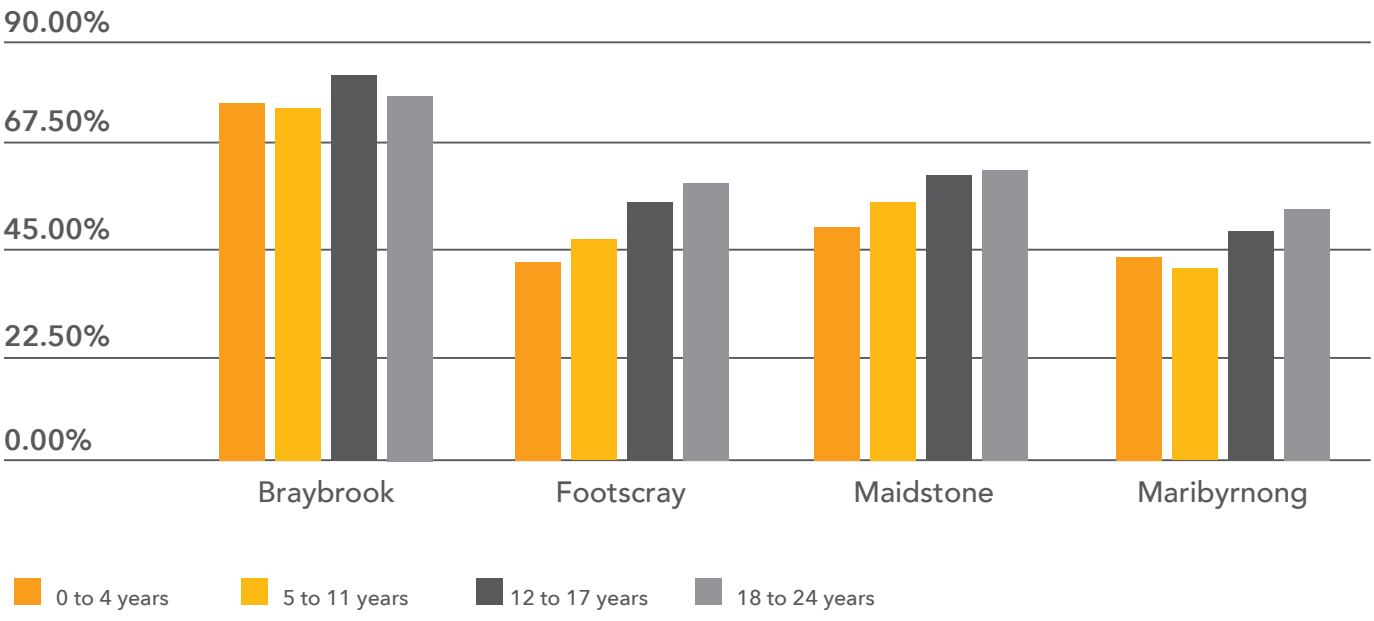
Children and young people with parents born overseas

The census tells us that 40 percent of the population of the City of Maribyrnong were born overseas.

According to a comparison between 2011 and 2016 census data, the largest changes in country of birth for residents were increases in populations born in Vietnam, India, New Zealand and the Philippines.

In some suburbs, the percentage of parents of children and young people with both parents born overseas is higher than 40 percent – significantly so in Braybrook, Footscray, Maidstone and Maribyrnong.

Suburbs with highest percentage of children and young people with both parents born overseas in 2016



ABS, Census 2016. Note: When counting numbers of children or young people with one parent born overseas, these figures increase.

Maribyrnong is a very culturally diverse community. In some areas this diversity is even more pronounced within our population of children and young people.

Socio-economic disadvantage

Within the City of Maribyrnong, we have communities that experience relatively high and low levels of socio-economic disadvantage.

The City of Maribyrnong Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) index of disadvantage 'measures the relative level of socio-economic disadvantage based on a range of Census characteristics' and gives a 'general view of the relative level of disadvantage in one area compared to others and is used to advocate for an area based on its level of disadvantage.'[10] A low rating indicates disadvantage.

City of Maribyrnong Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA)

Yarraville	Seddon	Maribyrnong
1068.9	1060	1052
86%	82%	77%
Kingsville	Greater Melbourne	West Footscray
1030.2	1021	995
69%	57%	43%
Maidstone	Footscray	Braybrook
973.7	961.7	828.2
31%	26%	4%

2016 National SEIFA Index
Percentile along the National SEIFA Index

Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2016. Compiled and presented in profile.id by .id , the population experts.

Low income households with children and young people

In 2016, there were approximately 1,025 low income households within the City of Maribyrnong with children and young people aged 15 years or younger, representing almost 9 percent of households within this age range.*

The highest number of low-income households with children and young people aged 15 years or younger were in Braybrook (23 percent) and Footscray (20 percent). Single parent households are significantly over-represented amongst low-income households.

They make up 25 percent of households with children and young people aged 15 years and younger, and 60 percent of low-income households with children or young people under the age of 15 years.[11]

* Low income is described here as between negative and $800 a week before tax.

Local 5 year old

Diversity as a strength of our community

The City of Maribyrnong is a proudly diverse community

Children, young people and their families within the City of Maribyrnong embody and experience this diversity in a multitude of forms – including ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual identity, living with disability and socio-economic status. We recognise that families with children or young people are also diverse in their make-up, values and traditions.

Through embracing diversity and working to strengthen inclusiveness and eliminate discrimination, we become a community in which children and young people can develop positive personal identities in a safe and supportive context.

The City of Maribyrnong has a strong commitment to:

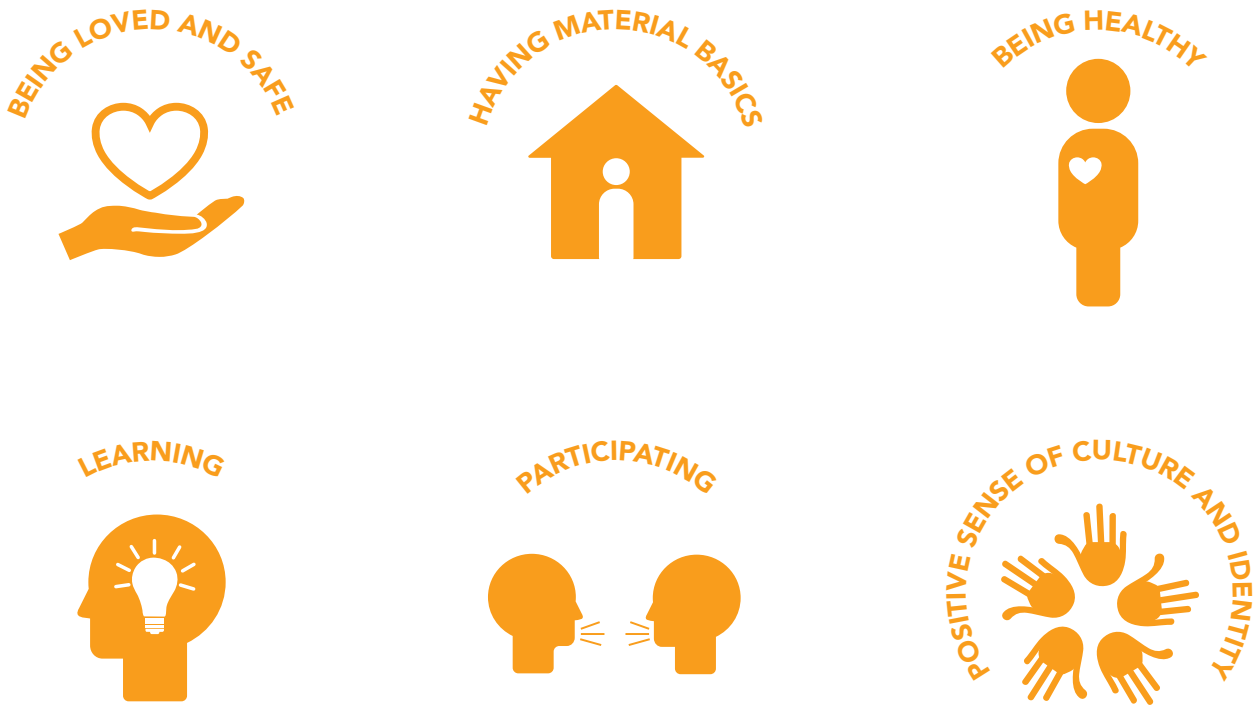
- acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrrung and Bunerong peoples of the Kulin Nation and recognises the unique status of First Nations people
- our development as a city that promotes inclusivity and diversity, as one of the most multicultural municipalities in Victoria
- using a rights-based approach to encourage and support the ongoing involvement of people with disability in programs and projects, and to advocate for their rights as residents of the municipality, and/or as members of staff
- build upon our strong record of inclusion, recognition, and pride in the diversity of our lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex people and allied (LGBTIQA+) communities

How we developed this strategic framework

The Strategy is based upon an evidence-based framework developed by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) – the Nest Agenda.

The Nest Agenda identifies six inter-related components of a child's life that need to be 'going well' in order for their opportunities and positive trajectories to be maximised.[12]

The six components of the Nest Agenda



We have built upon the successes of our previous strategies: *Maribyrnong Strategy for Children 2015/18*, the *Maribyrnong Strategy for Young People 2014/18* and the *Maribyrnong Family Strengthening Strategy 2015/18*.

We have also been informed by Maribyrnong specific, Victorian and national research.

We have undertaken community engagement activities to hear directly from children in the early years, the middle years, young people and parents in the following ways:

- through our Early Years Engagement Project, 244 children were consulted through early years learning and care services and playgroups

Local 4 year old

- we engaged 100 Story Building to undertake consultative workshops with 161 'middle years' children in Grades 5 and 6
- young people engaged with our survey (141 respondents) and participated in focus group discussions (25 young people)
- parents took the opportunity to feed into the Strategy through our survey (443 responses) and a further 60 parents engaged in focus groups
- we consulted local services through workshops and a survey tool (45 services)
- through the Maribyrnong City Council Children Young People and their Families Inter-Departmental Workshop, staff from across Council informed the development of this Strategy

Over 1,100 community voices contributed to our consultation process.

We are committed to continuing to undertake effective and meaningful participatory approaches to working with children, young people and their families throughout the roll-out of this Strategy.

We will be guided by the following principles of participation.

The Principles of Participation for Children and Young People*

- empowering: children and young people have greater control (power) over their lives through participation
- purposefully engaging: children and young people take on valued roles, addressing issues that are relevant to them and influencing real outcomes
- inclusive: ensuring all children and young people are able to participate, regardless of background, culture, where they live, their gender or sexuality and identity
- ongoing: Effective participation is an ongoing process – not an outcome. It requires ongoing focus and resourcing and should evolve and change in order to be responsive to community need

* These have been adapted from the Principles of Youth Participation developed by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (see https://www.yacvic.org.au/resources/youth-participation/)

The framework in practice

01
Being loved and safe

The ARACY Nest Agenda tells us that:

Being loved and safe embraces positive family relationships and connections with others, along with personal and community safety. Children and youth who are loved and safe are confident, have a strong sense of self-identity, and have high self-esteem. They form secure attachments, have pro-social peer connections, and positive adult role models or mentors are present in their life. Children and youth who are loved and safe are resilient: they can withstand life's challenges and respond constructively to setbacks and unanticipated events.

We also know that:

- the 'parent-child relationship is fundamental to child [and young people] outcomes, influencing a diverse range of child [and young people] outcomes from learning to substance abuse.'[13] While a 2017 Survey of 2,600 Victorian parents reported a range of ways they would like to strengthen their parenting[14]
- positive relationships with parents or kinship carers support children and young people to build secure attachments and the ability to maintain relationships, which are 'key components to being mentally healthy, and having a positive sense of wellbeing'[15]
- over 2017/18, 798 'family incidents' were recorded by police in Maribyrnong[16]
- a 'life-stages' approach to gender equity is a principle of the City of Maribyrnong *Towards Gender Equity 2030*, because 'women and children experience gender inequality and violence differently throughout the stages of their lives'[17]
- for this reason, the active pursuit of gender equity needs to be a focus in our work for, and with children and young people as well as families
- the Australian Early Development Census, reports an increase in the percentage of foundation level (prep) children within the City of Maribyrnong who are vulnerable in relation to 'social competence' and 'emotional maturity' from 2012 to 2018[18]
- a 2019 survey of 4,445 young people in Victoria revealed that young people most valued their friendships (other than family) (85.5 percent of respondents) and family relationships (83.5 percent of respondents)[19]
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have a right to cultural safety. The Victorian Code of Ethical Practice for Youth Workers tells us that 'Cultural Safety relies on the prevention of cultural abuse and is important to protect a person's emotional and psychological wellbeing

"I feel safe when I have people supporting me when I make choices."

Local young person

- when the culture of a person is ignored, denigrated or intentionally attacked, it is cultural abuse'[20]
- LGBTIQ+ young people report experiencing higher levels of violence and abuse than their non-LGBTIQ+ peers [21]
- the top issue identified by young people within the City of Maribyrnong through the 2019 Mission Australia Youth Survey was the environment (51.4 percent). [22] Further evidence tells us that climate change is having an impact on the mental health of young people, contributing to anxiety [23]

What the community has told us

Relationships and social connection are central to a sense of safety for children, young people and their families.

Children told us about their love and appreciation for parents and siblings and how much they enjoy spending time with family, sharing meals and doing activities together.

Parents told us that to help in their parenting, they would like to know more about supports and services: activities and events that are family friendly, supporting their child at school and in their learning, how to manage challenging behaviour and child development.

Children and young people in the 'middle years' told us that the strength of their relationships had more of an influence on their feelings of safety than their surroundings or specific activities.

Sense of safety was linked to positive feelings and emotions (and the absence of negative ones such as anxiety or feeling left-out) rather than simply physical safety. Young people told us that they felt safe in their local community when surrounded by people, and with family and friends.

Parents reported that their connection with others in the community, including neighbours, was the most important factor in making them feel a sense of safety in their local community.

Both young people and parents told us that fostering inclusiveness was important and that community events and activities strengthened their sense of safety and connection with others.

In terms of the physical environment, parents told us that traffic and pedestrian safety was a concern for them locally and that they valued safe parks and playgrounds for their children. Both young people and parents felt safer when public areas were well-lit.

Our strategic objectives

To support children and young people to be loved and safe, Council will strive to:

1.1 support children and young people to develop interpersonal skills required for healthy relationships within early learning settings and youth service programs

1.2 deliver programs that build parental confidence and skills to support children and young people's development and enable supportive family relationships

1.3 take a 'life-stages' approach to responding to gender inequity by delivering or supporting developmentally appropriate initiatives/ activities that foster gender equity for children, young people and families

1.4 build social connectedness (including inter-generational connection) through programs and initiatives that bring individuals, families and communities together

1.5 shape the built environment to encourage social connectedness and safety through urban design, public space and transport initiatives, including a focus on pedestrian safety

1.6 provide services or community spaces that are welcoming and personally safe for children, young people and their families

1.7 provide Council services that are culturally safe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families and support the service sector to build capacity in this area

1.8 provide inclusive Council services, programs and spaces for children, young people and their families in all their diversity, including cultural and linguistic diversity, diversity of ability, background, socio-economic status and identification as LGBTIQ+

1.9 maintain a highly skilled workforce able to maintain professional boundaries and respond effectively to children, young people and their families who have experienced family violence, trauma or have other complex needs

"These things make me and my family feel safe in our local area – knowing our neighbours, engaging in community events, my children being able to get around the suburb safely on their own."

Local parent

02 Having material basics

The ARACY Nest Agenda tells us that:

Children and youth who have material basics have access to the things they need to live a 'normal life'. They live in adequate and stable housing, with adequate clothing, healthy food, and clean water, and the materials they need to participate in education and training pathways.

We also know that:

- particular cohorts within the community face additional barriers to employment, including people with disability,[24] Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples[25] and young people

  young people are also disproportionately affected by underemployment, given high rates of casualisation in the sectors in which they often work[26]

- a shortfall in housing affordability means that more people are experiencing housing stress and taking on greater debt burdens, more people are renting and young people are being disproportionately affected by barriers to entry in the housing market.[27] This has implications for both young people and their families as young people live at home longer

- young people reliant on 'Youth Allowance are under significant financial stress, which impacts on their ability to focus on education, employment or other challenges they may be experiencing.'[28] They are vulnerable to homelessness, as Youth Allowance 'is set at a level to make independent living impossible'[29]

- research shows that 'the majority of those [in Australia] living in households whose reference person receives Youth Allowance (64 percent), Newstart Allowance (55 percent), or Parenting Payment (52 percent) fall below the poverty line'[30]

- approximately 20,000 young people aged 15 to 24 sought support from a homelessness agency in 2016/17, estimated at nearly a fifth of those experiencing or at risk of homelessness in Victoria[31]

- young people, families with young children and low-income families can experience transport disadvantage*, affecting their access to services and opportunities for participation [32]
- digital technology is increasingly regarded as an essential service and plays a particular role in the lives of young people and families. Low-income households have significantly lower levels of 'digital inclusion' in Victoria [33]

What the community has told us

Parents have told us about the key importance of public transport and safe, accessible walking paths to enable access to services and activities.

They have also told us that affordable or free, family friendly activities are important to ensure all children and young people can participate and families can enjoy activities together.

* 'Transport disadvantage' typically refers to difficulty accessing transport as a result of cost, availability of services or poor physical accessibility. It can also be extended to refer to difficulties associated with the maintenance of private transport.

Our strategic objectives

To support children, young people and their families to have the material basics they need, Council will strive to:

2.1 provide social and physical infrastructure required to ensure the material needs of children, young people and their families are met as our population grows and becomes more diverse

2.2 advocate for accessible public transport

2.3 provide safe, accessible and well maintained pedestrian and cycling pathways

2.4 advocate to both State and Federal Government to ensure the affordable housing needs of our families and young people are met

2.5 provide Council planning processes that address and protect the need for appropriate and affordable housing and adequate access to public transport for families and young people living independently in Maribyrnong

2.6 undertake economic development initiatives that stimulate local training and employment opportunities, with a focus on young people, newly arrived residents and women

2.7 work with our community to explore innovative approaches aimed at increasing children, young people and their families' access to healthy food

2.8 work with our community to understand and identify opportunities to address the needs of families with children and young people experiencing financial vulnerability

2.9 continue to provide children, young people and their families with opportunities to engage in life-long learning

2.10 continue to plan and invest in early years infrastructure that meets the needs of the community

2.11 continue to commit to maintain and build infrastructure in local neighbourhoods for families and young people

03 Being healthy

The ARACY Nest Agenda tells us that:

Healthy children and youth have their physical, developmental, psychosocial and mental health needs met. They achieve their optimal developmental trajectories. They have access to services to support their growth and development, and have access to preventative measures to redress any emerging health or development concerns.

We also know that:

- social connectedness is a key determinant of positive health and wellbeing [34] Children, young people and their parents benefit from opportunities to connect with peers and build local social networks
- equipping children and young people with the information and skills they need to make healthy choices and maintain a healthy lifestyle is an important preventative health measure
- the Australian Early Development Census reports a significant decline in the percentage of foundation level (prep) children who are vulnerable in terms of their physical health between 2009 and 2018 in Maribyrnong [35]
- a 2019 survey of 4,445 young people in Victoria found that the most commonly reported issues of concern for young people were 'coping with stress' (50.4 percent of respondents) and mental health (38.6 percent of respondents) [36]
- young people benefit from accessible, 'youth friendly' or 'youth specific' health service provision, particularly in the specialist realms of mental health, alcohol and other drug services. Generalist youth services have an important role to play in supporting young people's access to these services
- health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families are positively influenced by cultural connection and self-determination [37]
- the health needs of children, young people and their families from refugee backgrounds can be influenced by their experiences of 'forced migration, trauma, and disruption of health services – they may have multiple and complex physical and mental health issues arising from their pre-migration experiences, during their journey or after settlement in Australia' [38]

- positive health and wellbeing are linked to the health of our natural environment
- outdoor play is important for the physical health, development and confidence of children and young people

What the community has told us

Children told us about their love of outdoor play and spending time in nature as a way of feeling healthy in both body and mind.

Children and young people in the middle years and older also told us about the value of mindfulness, yoga and other activities to reduce stress and feel well. Many children and young people in the middle years told us about their involvement in sport and older young people also most commonly reported physical exercise as important to them to keep healthy.

Adolescents and young adults also talked about the importance of being able to exercise outdoors, such as bike riding or walking along the river. Spending time pursing interests and hobbies and listening to music also help children and young people to feel relaxed and happy.

For parents, the top priority in maintaining their families' health is having access to green, outdoor spaces. Opportunities to participate in more structured sports and having healthy, nutritious food as well as opportunities to socialise and connect with others were other key priorities.

"For mental and physical health I think we need to feel accepted by, connected to and contribute to community; feel safe; have good, supportive education opportunities from early childhood to adulthood; have safe, clean green spaces for recreation and fitness; access to quality affordable health services and to feel hope for the future in terms of our employment prospects and housing affordability."

Local parent

Our strategic objectives

To support children, young people and their families to be healthy, Council will strive to:

3.1 maintain a holistic focus on the health and wellbeing of children, young people and their families within urban, service and program planning and design, guided by a 'wider determinants of health' model as outlined in the *Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2019/23*[39]

3.2 provide access to safe, quality outdoor play and recreation spaces that meet the needs of children and young people along the age-continuum

3.3 continue to provide quality universal health services through the Immunisation and Maternal and Child Health Services, striving to engage with all families through the implementation of innovative models targeting those families within the community that face barriers to service access

3.4 support the development of a local service system which responds to the health and wellbeing needs of children, young people and their families

3.5 provide parents with the information and skills they need to support the physical, mental and psychosocial health of children and young people

3.6 provide children, young people and their families with engagement opportunities to build social connectedness

3.7 take proactive measures to support the participation of children, young people and their families who experience barriers to access health, recreation and wellbeing programs and facilities within the municipality. These barriers may relate to affordability, cultural appropriateness, gender, ability or transport disadvantage

3.8 continue to build the capacity of both Council services and the service sector to be welcoming, inclusive and responsive to the needs of LGBTIQ+ young people and Rainbow Families

3.9 work in partnership with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and services to continue to build the capacity of both Council services and the service sector to create welcoming, responsive, culturally competent services in order to improve service access, health and wellbeing

3.10 continue to strive for a clean, healthy city for people to access open spaces, cleaner air and water and respond to climate change[40]

3.11 work in partnerships with schools and early learning services to promote environmental initiatives

"To feel healthy I like to take a walk at Footscray park or head over to the swimming pool opposite Highpoint."

Local young person

04
Learning

The ARACY Nest Agenda tells us that:

Learning is a continuous process through life. Children and youth learn through a variety of formal and informal experiences within the classroom and more broadly in their home and in the community. Children and youth who are learning participate in and experience education that enables them to reach their full potential and maximise their life opportunities.

We also know that:

- the early years 'provide a key window of opportunity to support children to develop the foundations of cognitive, creative, emotional, literacy and language skills that they need for future success in education, work and life…The benefits of quality early childhood education are widely accepted internationally. The evidence is extensive and consistent'[41]
- the Australian Early Development Census reports a significant decrease in the percentage of foundation level (prep) children in the City of Maribyrnong who are vulnerable in relation to language and communication[42]
- while the middle years is a time of exciting transition for the majority of students, it is also a time of increased vulnerability to early onset mental health problems and disengagement from learning[43]
- a survey of 4,445 young people aged 15 to 19 years in Victoria found that while the majority of young people (67.5 percent) were satisfied with their studies, 'school or study problems' was a major concern for over one third (37.4 percent) of young people[44]
- the Victorian Government's *Marrong Aboriginal Education Plan 2016/26* 'promotes lifelong learning for Koorie Victorians by making services inclusive, responsive and respectful, and through supporting culturally safe environments and celebrating the cultural identity of Koorie learners'[45]
- participatory youth programs can provide important informal learning experiences for young people, through which they gain tangible skills, enhance their confidence as learners and further develop interpersonal skills

- participation in initiatives supported by Council can provide unique opportunities for learning for children and young people and can provide an opportunity to engage children and young people with diverse learning profiles and needs
- parks and playgrounds are a site of significant learning for children and young people and effective design can enhance their value as learning spaces
- while tertiary learning provides exciting opportunities for students, a significant proportion of tertiary students under the age of 25 years rate their mental health as 'poor' or 'fair' (67 percent) and students experience a range of stressors including 'academic and financial stress, and pressures associated with increased workload, leaving home, and the establishment of new social networks'[46]

What the community has told us

Children have told us that they enjoy a range of activities to support their learning, including play-based, creative, outdoor, experiential and physical learning opportunities.

Young people have told us that they also value informal learning opportunities and programs that enable them to follow personal interests and develop skills.

Parents have told us that, in order to support their child's learning they would like to know more about education services and styles (including both schools and early learning settings), extra-curricular and community-based learning activities, such as libraries, playgroups and child development programs.

Parents have also told us about the importance they place on access to quality, local education services.

"To support my child's learning, I would like to know more about parenting to build a well-adjusted child who knows how to play, is happy, is resilient, has friendships, enjoys school."

Local parent

Our strategic objectives

To support children and young people's learning, Council will strive to:

4.1 support new parents in enhancing their role as their child's first educator through access to Maternal and Child Health Services, community and supported playgroups

4.2 provide access to quality, child-centred early learning opportunities

4.3 provide quality, well maintained infrastructure for the provision of Early Years services

4.4 provide and support parenting educational opportunities

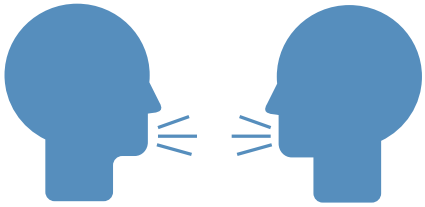
4.5 build upon the gains made in engaging culturally diverse families through the family strengthening program to continue supporting the engagement of culturally diverse families in early learning

4.6 build upon the gains made in engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families

4.7 enhance the opportunities for informal learning for children and young people through the design of public spaces, parks and playgrounds

4.8 provide young people with participatory engagement opportunities to undertake informal learning and develop skills that they value

05
Participating



The ARACY Nest Agenda tells us that:

Participating includes involvement with peers and the community, being able to have a voice and say on matters and, increasingly, access to technology for social connections. In practice, participating means children and youth are supported in expressing their views, their views are taken into account and they are involved in decision-making processes that affect them.

We also know that:

- of the three tiers of government, Local Government provide the most immediate experience of being part of a democratic process and provide opportunities for children and young people to participate in their communities through funding for early years services, youth workers and support for child and youth specific initiatives [47]
- the meaningful participation of children and young people in civic activities and decision-making, requires the recognition that they are typically disenfranchised by existing civic and decision-making structures and therefore require prioritisation and specialist support to enhance their engagement [48]
- participation in social and community networks is key to health and wellbeing.[49] Some children, young people and parents experience barriers to participation, for example children and young people with a disability
- some parents experience social isolation, commonly reported in the early stages of parenthood, or as children grow older and parent support networks (such as new parents' groups) are no longer available. Parents from non-English speaking backgrounds, report that language can be a barrier to their participation [50]
- evolving technologies are presenting new opportunities to enhance community engagement and can have particular relevance in supporting the participation of young people [51]

What the community has told us

In a survey of parents within Maribyrnong, just over 50 percent reported that they felt that their family have a say on the things that are important to them in their local community (including 20 percent who felt they had a say 'sometimes' or 'to a degree'). Just over 35 percent felt they did not and just over 5 percent were unsure.*

Similarly, a survey of young people within Maribyrnong found that just under 50 percent felt that they did have a say on the things that are important to them in their community, with just over 35 percent reporting they did not. Just under 5 percent were unsure.**

* 'The Survey of parents was conducted by the City of Maribyrnong in August and September 2019 and engaged 447 parents, with 350 answering this question.

** The Survey of Young People, conducted by the City of Maribyrnong, took place over August and September 2019 and engaged 141 young people, with 125 answering this question.

Our strategic objectives

To support the participation of children, young people and their families, Council will strive to:

5.1 implement emerging methods such as co-design, to enable meaningful opportunities for participation with children, young people and their families in Council decision-making that affects them

5.2 develop approaches and processes through which Council involves children and young people in quality participatory, decision-making processes, incorporating the Principles of Participation as outlined in this Strategy. This should incorporate the content expertise of relevant council staff in relation to age-appropriate participatory practice

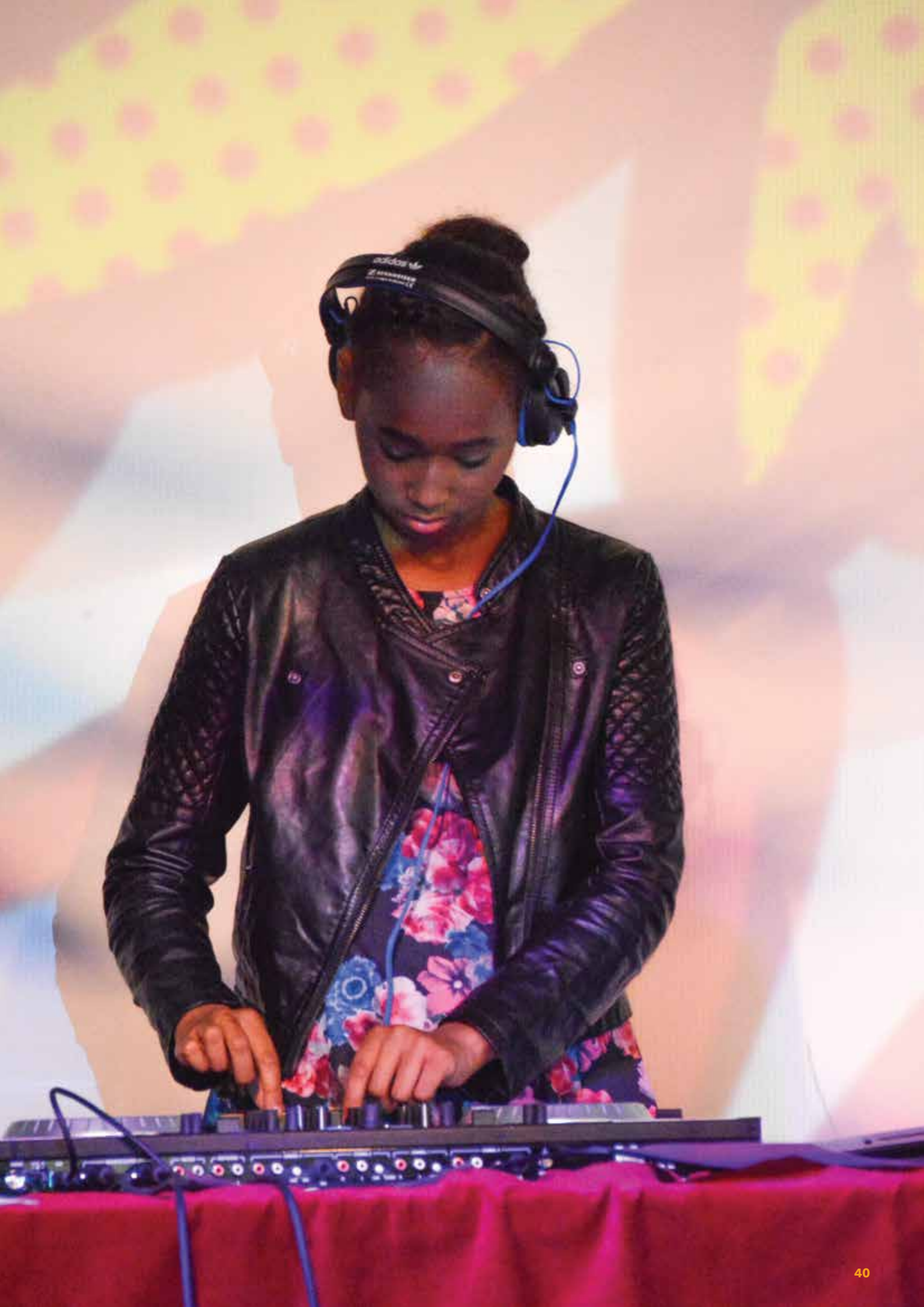
5.3 support and strengthen the structures developed by Council to enable the participation of children, young people and families

5.4 facilitate a municipal approach to children and young people's participation within Maribyrnong, encouraging high-quality participatory practice in the engagement of children and young people in services, organisations and local communities within Maribyrnong

5.5 enable youth-specific opportunities for technology-enhanced eParticipation and digital youth work to encourage greater civic participation of young people across the whole-of-council

5.6 continue to build a profile of the experiences and needs of children and young people along the age continuum, and their families, through participatory consultative and co-design mechanisms, to inform Council decision-making in meeting the strategic objectives of this Strategy

5.7 work with community partners to develop an understanding of, and respond to the needs of parents to develop and maintain social connectedness, including a focus on those experiencing vulnerability



06
Positive sense of culture and identity

The ARACY Nest Agenda tells us that:

Having a positive sense of culture and identity is central to the wellbeing of children and youth, and is particularly important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) children and youth. This outcome includes having a sense of spiritual wellbeing. It underpins and is fundamental to the other nest child and youth outcomes areas.

We also know that:

- identity formation is taking place through childhood, intensifying in adolescence and continuing into early adulthood. A range of societal and situational factors and the quality of personal relationships have a role in shaping identity and can act as risk or protective factors [52]
- identity is multifaceted and can be personal, social, cultural or relate to place. It also can involve the 'cross-over' of different components of identity, resulting in complex personal circumstances for young people which they may need support to navigate [53]
- cultural connectedness is a protective factor in the lives of children and young people, particularly those from minority cultural backgrounds.[54] Initiatives that build upon the strengths of those connections and foster cultural identity have positive wellbeing outcomes
- a survey of 249 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in Victoria, conducted by the Koorie Youth Council, found that young people saw culture as inextricably linked to identity and had a strong interest in cultural preservation and revival, building or strengthening their connection to country and celebrating, practicing and learning about culture (in schools and more broadly in the community) [55]

"Yes, I feel I'm able to be myself [in my local community], or starting to. This means being proud to be part of this community and walk around the area without fear or doubt."

Local young person

What the community has told us

Children have expressed the importance of their relationships with family and friends to support their sense of belonging and their growing sense of connection to place in Maribyrnong. This is nurtured through activities that involve spending shared time in public and community spaces with others.

Children and young people in the middle years shared the activities they like to do with important people in their lives in order to feel positively connected to them – sports, play, time outside, eating together, playing with pets and socialising.

When asked in a survey of young people in Maribyrnong if they felt able to be themselves in their local community, over 80 percent said yes. Just over 5 percent responded no. Some young people reported their concern that the community was not accepting of LGBTIQ+ people, as a reason they did not feel able to be themselves.*

Parents told us that they valued multicultural activities and initiatives, festivals and celebrations as a way of fostering a positive sense of culture and identity. They felt that it was important to have an inclusion focus on the activities of Council.

* The Survey of Young People, conducted by the City of Maribyrnong, took place over August and September 2019 and engaged 141 young people, with 123 answering this question.

Our strategic objectives

To support children, young people and their families to have a positive sense of culture and identity:

6.1 recognise the unique status of First Nations people, respecting cultural rights and connection to land and prioritising Indigenous knowledge and, in partnership with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations and members, develop culturally responsive programs

6.2 further develop Council's understanding of the identities of children, young people and their families within Maribyrnong. Ensure this profile informs the work of Council so that it is inclusive, responsive and reflective of that diversity

6.3 continue to build Council's capacity to deliver services and community spaces for children, young people and their families that are culturally safe, inclusive of diversity and accessible to all

6.4 continue to support the service sectors in Maribyrnong to build their capacity in responding to the diversity of children, young people and their families including LGBTIQ+, people living with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families

6.5 promote inclusive access for children, young people and their families to community spaces and amenities

6.6 create and support initiatives that celebrate and foster the diverse cultures and identities of children, young people and their families

"For our family to feel included and that our culture or identity is valued in the local community, it is important that our children can be out in the community breathing clean air and not having to deal with large numbers of trucks on the road – be free to ride and run and play and interact in open spaces to promote respect and a feeling of togetherness and community."

Local parent

Acknowledgements

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Thank you to the parents across the City of Maribyrnong who offered their ideas and insights through our survey tool as well as the focus groups.

Thank you to the Maribyrnong Youth Advisory Committee for sharing their valuable insights and knowledge of the issues facing young people.

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Thank you to Maribyrnong City Council staff for their contribution.

Local 5 year old

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