



Healthy and Well Children

Municipal Early Years Plan



2014 - 2017



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Introduction



Pyrenees Shire Council's (PSC) *Healthy and Well Children* is a Municipal Early Years Plan (MEYP) that outlines how early education, care, health services and activities are developed, maintained and coordinated for children 0-8 years of age, and their families living within the Pyrenees Shire.

A good environment in the early years is identified as one of the 10 aspects of the World Health Organisation's social determinants of health.

Council's *Healthy and Well Children MEYP* is located as a key subset of its *Healthy and Well Pyrenees – Our Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013 – 2017*.

PSC has had an MEYP for the last three years and has invested significantly in the development and coordination of new Children's Centre initiatives.

PSC is keen to build on these successes and this MEYP outlines, how Council, in partnership with many, will continue to improve practice and outcomes for children and families in our communities.

The MEYP is a strategic, evidence-based framework shaped by research, contemporary and benchmarked practices and underpinned by Federal and Victorian child and adolescent outcome frameworks.

Federal and State effort and resources have aimed to bring all professionals working across the birth to eight years age period together, to work in partnership with each other and families in advancing children's learning and development.

This plan recommends actions that are consistent with, reinforce and advance the broad directions arising from such work, with a particular reference to the *Early Years Outcome Framework for Victoria: 0-8 years* (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2014).

In addition to this policy and evidence led context, Pyrenees' MEYP has been informed by input from key service providers, professionals, community members, families and children.

The Pyrenees Shire Council *Healthy and Well Children Municipal Early Years Plan 2014-17* will address how consistent, coordinated service delivery and effective services can be delivered across all communities within the Pyrenees Shire, including how to further engage with and enhance services to vulnerable families.

A good environment in the early years is identified as one of the 10 aspects of the World Health Organisation's social determinants of health.



A playground - 4 years

Structure and Scope of this report

Approach

This project was undertaken as a joint consultancy between Pyrenees Shire Council and Ararat Rural City Council although the development of a separate MEYP document for each municipality reflects the unique demographic features, character and needs of each LGA.

Both Councils view the MEYP as a critical part of their integrated service delivery approach for families and children and agreed that three guiding priorities should shape the approach.

- How can we deliver consistent and effective services across the Pyrenees Shire Council (PSC) /Ararat Rural City Council (ARCC)?
- How can PSC/ARCC achieve coordinated service delivery into each LGA area?
- How can PSC/ARCC engage with and better deliver services to vulnerable families across both LGA areas?

A number of key issues linked to these priorities were identified during the research and consultation processes. They are used as the guiding framework within which recommendations are presented for the next 3-year period from 2014 - 2017.

The development of these plans has been informed by a comprehensive literature review and guided by a Steering Committee and collaboration with families, children, Council staff and service/program providers.

Whilst the MEYP is not a whole system view within the municipality, the plan reflects local circumstances, demographics and viewpoints and provides a robust starting point.

Structure

The PSC *Healthy and Well Children: MEYP 2014 - 2017* includes:

- Council's vision and the general strategic directions for Early Years in PSC
- A brief community profile of Pyrenees Shire, including key demographics. Further detail is available in the *Healthy and Well Pyrenees: Our Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013 – 2017*
- A snapshot of service profile, utilisation and views shared through the consultation about how Pyrenees' children are doing against the 4 inter-related outcome domains and indicators identified in the Early Years Outcomes Framework (DEECD, 2014)

The 4 related domains that provide the framework for report sections are:

- » Being Healthy
- » Building Wellbeing
- » Learning and Developing, and
- » Staying Safe
- A summary of feedback from the Community Consultation processes
- Key issues and defined recommendations for the Early Years in PSC to assist policy and decision makers within Council and external service providers in future planning directions and funding submissions for programs
- A brief impact summary of the achievements from the previous MEYP 2008-2011
- References.

Consultation processes

A range of consultation processes and primary and secondary data sources have informed this project.

1. A comprehensive Literature and Research Review is reflected in the Report's Reference List (see pp. 40-41). It includes:

- Key internal PSC documents and priorities to provide contextual data
- An extensive range of policy and project documents and reports published by all levels of government and peak bodies such as the Municipal Association of Victoria
- Benchmarked international and Australian literature and research pertaining to the Early Years (EY) field.

2. Stakeholder Consultations during November 2013 to April 2014 including:

- Face to face and/or telephone interviews, meetings and phone hook ups with key stakeholders across a range of EY services. The author and/or PSC Family Services staff conducted these
- The establishment of a Key Stakeholder Reference Group across both LGAs to provide input and guidance on the direction and comprehensiveness of the recommendations emerging from the consultations.

3. Community Consultation – opportunities for parents, children and interested individuals to provide inputs on their experiences of service provision and ways to make our community a better place for children.



A fairy playground – 4 years

Council's Vision and strategic directions for Early Years

The importance of the early years

Recent dramatic advances across science and economics continue to under-score just how important the first years of life really are (Center on the Developing Child, 2007; Cunha & Heckman, 2010; Shonkoff, 2007).

The early years (pregnancy to eight years) are a period of rapid cognitive, biological and social development. There is overwhelming evidence that life chances and lifelong health and learning is heavily influenced by what happens in the first years of life. Lost opportunities in this period are particularly difficult to recover.

'Virtually every aspect of early human development, from the brain's evolving circuitry to the child's capacity for empathy, is affected by the environments and experiences that are encountered in a cumulative fashion, beginning in the prenatal period and extending throughout the early years' (Shonkoff, 2007).

From an economic perspective, there is substantial evidence to show that investing in early childhood in a way that improves educational outcomes not only helps each individual, but is a vital driver of economic growth, productivity and social progress (DEECD, 2014).

Pyrenees Shire Council recognises the importance of the early years and has a strong commitment to the families and children that live and work within our communities.

Our Vision for children reflects the broader Council Vision to be a healthy, vibrant, prosperous and connected community and incorporates feedback from many of our key stakeholders.

It is closely aligned with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's (DEECD) vision for an Early Years system that delivers better services and supports for children and families, '...to provide children with a strong foundation for their future development through coordinated local services that are open, welcoming and responsive to the needs of their communities and the individual children and families within them' (DEECD, 2014: p. 12).

OUR VISION FOR CHILDREN in PSC

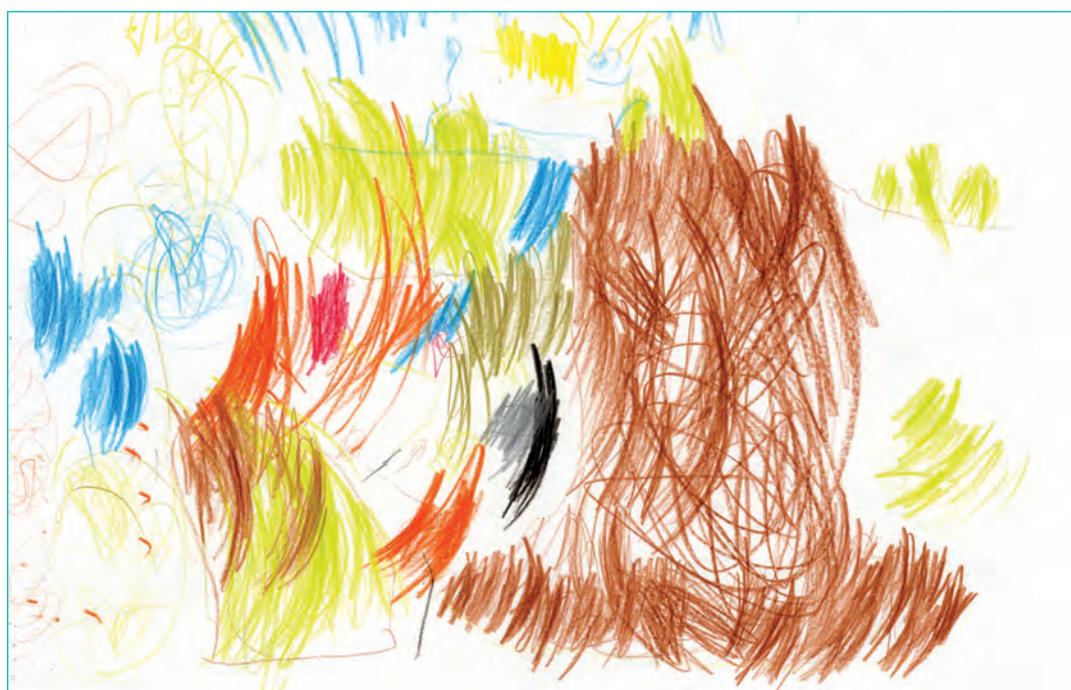
- That all children and their families across the communities of the Pyrenees Shire have equal access to a full range of high quality, affordable Early Years Programs and services that provide a strong foundation for their future development and give children the best start in life.
- To provide a socially inclusive and safe environment for children and families that supports their physical, emotional, social and cognitive development along a normal developmental path.

Strategic directions for the Early Years

In order to achieve its Vision for the Early Years, PSC will continue to:

- Exercise a number of key roles including an active role in service and infrastructure provision and planning across the universal, targeted and intensive service system
- Key early years services delivered by council include:
 - » Maternal and Child Health (MCH) services
 - » Provision and maintenance of buildings that support services and programs
 - » Immunisation programs
 - » Family Day Care
 - » Library and Mobile library services
 - » Playgrounds and Recreational facilities
- Work with key stakeholders to promote and enable community capacity building
- Partner and negotiate between other levels of government to strengthen community capacity and inform key decisions that maximise EY resources
- Investigate how to best provide equitable EY services to all of its residents and communities, especially 'vulnerable families' across the LGA
- Ensure that it stays abreast of Government frameworks/initiatives and progressive international thinking in the EY field, and incorporates findings into all of its EY planning and communication
- Demonstrate strong leadership in the EY field to strengthen the coordination of services and activities and optimise collaborative funding opportunities that enable better outcomes for children and their families.

It is Council's aim to continuously strive to create a Municipality that provides families and children with access to the full range of EY services along with cultural and sporting activities where there are opportunities for families and children to meet, play, and interact in safe environments that allow for learning, development and community connectedness/ cohesion.



More trees & motorbike jumps - 4 years

Community Profile of Pyrenees Shire

Pyrenees Shire is located in the Central West of Victoria, approximately 130 kilometres north west of Melbourne, with a population of 6727 residents.

Council administration is based in Beaufort, and a number of Council services also operate from the township of Avoca.

In addition to these two main townships, the Pyrenees Shire includes the smaller hamlets of Waubra, Amphitheatre, Lexton, Snake Valley, Moonambel, Landsborough, Natte Yallock, Evansford and Raglan.

Mapping the Pyrenees community

The Pyrenees Shire Council, *Healthy and Well Pyrenees: Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013-2017* provides a comprehensive profile and detailed demographics for the municipality. Our MEYP draws upon this and other key data sources to provide a brief synopsis of key factors that may particularly impact upon EY service decision makers and providers.

- Pyrenees is a mainly English speaking population with 90% of people from an Anglo-Saxon or Celtic background (Australian Bureau Statistics, 2012) and 1% of the population identifying as Aboriginal (Department of Health, 2012; ABS, 2011), less than the Victorian average of 2.5%

The MEYP does not specifically address the issue of EY services for CALD, LOTE and ATSI residents, given their low numbers in the municipality

- Pyrenees Shire Council has a SEIFA index of 939.9, which ranks it as the 8th most disadvantaged municipality in the State (ABS, 2013)
- The Pyrenees LGA has a considerably higher than average proportion of low-income individuals and households with 40.3% of households *earning less than* \$600 compared to 23.8% in Victoria and 23.7% in Australia (ABS, 2012)
- 6.8% of people are unemployed compared to the State average of 5.4%
- Food insecurity affects 11% of the Pyrenees population, compared to 6% across Victoria, (Department of Health 2012) with commercial outlets to purchase fresh produce, only available in the larger towns of Avoca and Beaufort
- In 2011, compared to regional Victoria a higher proportion of the PSC population were aged 45 years and over and Pyrenees is projected to have significantly less growth in all age groups, but particularly the 0-14 year age groups, compared to regional Victoria
- 33.8% of Pyrenees children are assessed as developmentally vulnerable on one or more of the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) domains that indicate readiness for school, compared to the Victorian figure of 19.5% (AEDI, 2013).

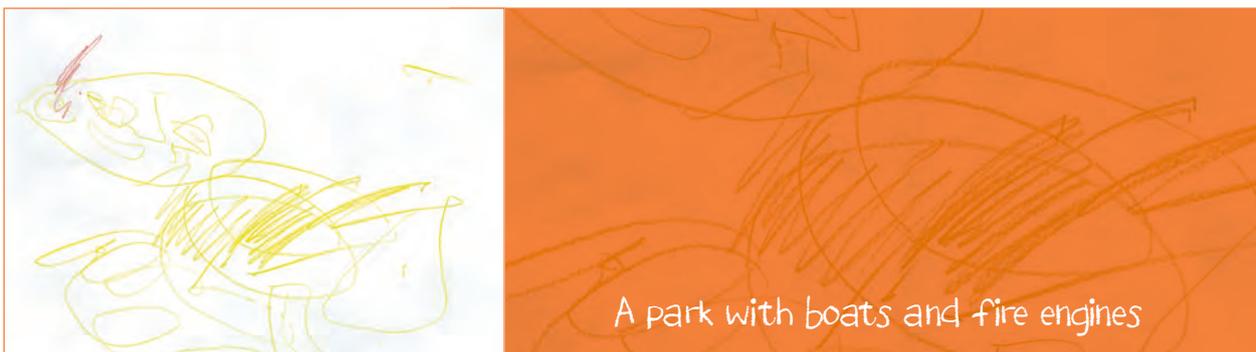


Table 1: How many 0-8 year olds live in the Pyrenees LGA?

Area	Total Population	0-4 year olds Nos. & % of population	5-9 year olds Nos. & % of population	0-9 year olds as % of total population
Pyrenees Shire Council	6727	344 (5.1%)	384 (5.7%)	10.8%
Victoria		351,951 (6.4%)	332,729 (6.1%)	12.5%
Australia		1,458,114 (6.6%)	1,387,634 (6.3%)	12.9%

NB: ABS figures do not present in the 0 - 8 year old format of this MEYP.

Source: Australian Bureau Statistics, 2012.

Table 1 indicates that the percentage of 0-9 year olds in the Pyrenees LGA is slightly lower than the State and National averages.

Table 2: Family Composition in Pyrenees LGA

Family Composition	Pyrenees %	Victoria %
Couple family with children	36.8	46
One parent family	13.7	15.5
Other family	1	1.8
Single Parents	Pyrenees %	Victoria %
Male	26.4	17.2
Female	73.6	82.8

Source: Australian Bureau Statistics, 2012.

Table 2 indicates that there is a lower than average number of families with children in PSC compared to Victorian and fewer one parent families. There are, however, a higher than average percentage of single-parent families headed by a male. This gender balance may be an important consideration for program designers who will need to use the more inclusive language of parent groups as opposed to mother's groups and consider how best to engage those fathers.

Pyrenees Shire Current Children's Services Profile

This section provides a snapshot of the PSC service profile, use and views shared through the consultation about how Pyrenees' children are doing.

It is organised using the 4 inter-related outcome domains and their corresponding service indicators, identified in the recently published *Early Years Outcome Framework for Victoria: 0-8 years* (DEECD, 2014). (See Appendix One, p.36).

The 4 domains are:

 <p>Being Healthy</p>	 <p>Building Wellbeing</p>
 <p>Learning and Developing</p>	 <p>Staying Safe</p>

Information from the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) is also interwoven through these four over-arching domains to highlight potential areas of concern for Pyrenees' children that service providers should consider.

The AEDI is a population measure of children's development as they enter school, collected through a teacher-completed checklist measuring five areas closely linked to predictors of adult health, education and social outcomes:

- Physical health and wellbeing
- Social competence
- Emotional maturity
- Language and cognitive skills (school-based)
- Communication skills and general knowledge (Brinkman et al, 2010).

In 2012, the AEDI was completed nationwide for the second time providing a comparative snapshot against the 2009, early childhood development outcomes of Australian children.

The value of this data is that it gives a sense of children's readiness and transition to school and enables early identification of critical child development concerns.

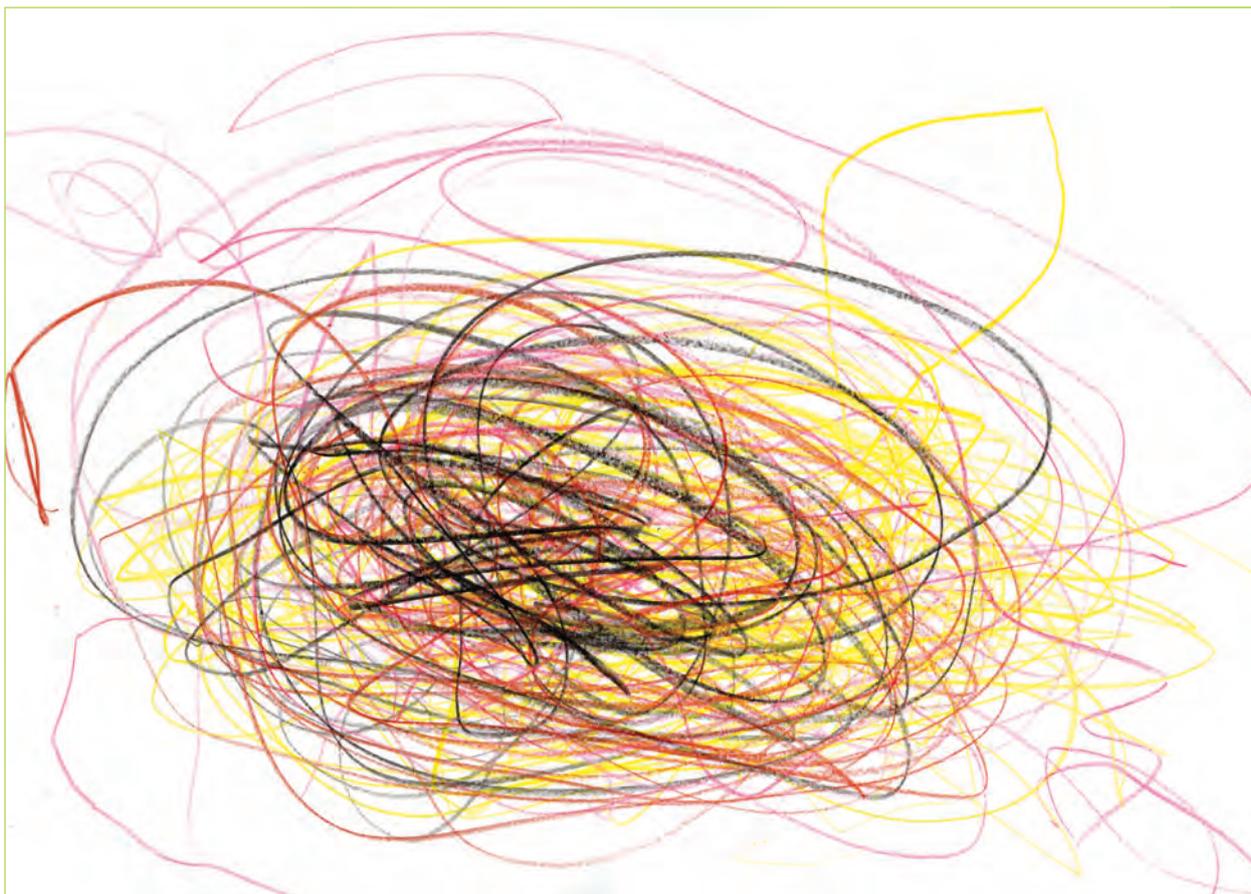
Whilst it is important to be cautious when interpreting data for small communities such as those in PSC, on face value the AEDI figures suggest that Pyrenees' children are developmentally more vulnerable, or at risk, in most areas than the Victorian average.

AEDI data is available for the following Local Communities within PSC:

- Avoca and surrounds (Amphitheatre, Evansford, Landsborough, Lexton, Moonambel, Natte Yallock, Percydale and Waubra)
- Beaufort and surrounds (Raglan, Snake Valley and Trawalla).

Data presented in this section is used to identify emergent issues and inform the recommendations that appear later in the MEYP.

It will assist policy and decision makers within Council, and external service providers, in future planning directions and funding submissions for programs.



A big curly slide – 4 years

Improving EY coordination across the Shire

Our EY services from antenatal to 8 years of age present a complex array of programs and opportunities across many professional disciplines, for parents, community members and service providers to navigate.

Obtaining accessible and up to date information about EY services and programs requires a significant amount of effort and skill to locate and understand, as well as technical proficiency and computer/internet access.

In order to optimise our children's early growth, learning and development in line with *The Early Years Outcomes Framework for Victoria 0-8 years* (DEECD, 2014) PSC can exercise its leadership role by:

- Publicising and consistently using *The Early Years (EY) Outcomes Framework for Victoria 0-8 years* as a cohering framework in all of its EY information, to enhance systemic thinking about children's needs and service provision
- Promoting a systems approach to EY approach, services and programs that illustrates and acknowledges who else is involved, who others might productively connect with, which of the areas individuals and groups might have control/influence over and how each contributes to children's wellbeing
- Developing its website and Resident's Welcoming pack to provide key and current EY information and linkages to other service/program information. An EY guide to provide information to the community about EY services and programs across the Shire will be considered
- Facilitating the establishment of a PSC EY network within the Shire that convenes regularly share information, identify service gaps, strengthen transition between services, share professional development opportunities and develop joint initiatives and strong partnerships to improve outcomes for families.

Being Healthy

All Victorian children are born and remain healthy, develop positive health behaviours and achieve optimal health.



Within this domain the *Early Years Outcomes Framework* recognises the key role that parents play as first and primary carers of children. Outcome indicators include those that target both parents and children.

Healthy parental behaviours around nutrition and exercise will impact a child's birth-weight and ongoing health as much as patterns of immunisation, breastfeeding and attendance at maternal and health visits.

Promoting health in early childhood

Parents play a key role in promoting the health and development of their children in early childhood, through infancy and into adolescence. For the majority of Victorian children, parental influence is positive. However, some parental health behaviours and family risk factors are shown to impact negatively on the wellbeing of children and young people.

- The Dietary Guidelines for Australian Adults recommend the consumption of two serves of fruit and five serves of vegetables daily in order to ensure a healthy diet

The proportion of Pyrenees residents who met neither guideline for fruit and vegetables consumption was 66.1%, significantly higher than the Victorian average of 51.1% (Department of Health 2013)

- Grampians region consistently has the highest rates of dental decay hospitalisations for children aged 0–4 and 5–9 years within Victoria

Possible explanations for the poorer oral health outcomes include the extent of water fluoridation, oral health behaviours (tooth brushing), poor dietary habits (including sugary drink consumption) and access to and use of dental services, including barriers associated with cost (DEECD, 2013b: pp. 40-43)

- Young people in the Grampians are the least likely to report brushing their teeth at least twice a day (63.3%) and more likely to visit a dentist for a dental problem rather than a check-up (2009 HOWRU) (DEECD, 2013a)
- In 2011/12, the Pyrenees' admission rate for dental conditions for children aged 0 – 4 years was almost four times the Victorian average (Dental Health Services Victoria 2013).

Table 3: Pyrenees Health Indicators

Health Indicator	Pyrenees	Victoria
Dental condition admission rates for children 0–4 years 2007–08 to 2011–12	16 per 1,000	4.9 per 1,000
Young people aged 5-17 years meeting neither guideline for fruit and vegetable intake	60.7% (Pyrenees North) 59.9% (Pyrenees South) 59.9% Ararat	63.1%
Daily consumption of soft drinks	19.6%	12.4%

Source: PHIDU, *Social Health Atlas of Australia: Data by Medicare Locals, January 2013 release*

It is critical to continue targeting improvements in parental health behaviours that role-model positive nutrition and physical activity associated with healthy weight in children (DEECD 2012).

Additionally it will be critical for all EY service providers to take an integrated approach to health educational services to strengthen the preventive focus.

The Health Promotion Officer, part of the Victorian government funded initiative Healthy Together Grampians and Goldfields (HTGG) team, is primarily based at PSC and works closely with Council and other key health providers to promote preventive health care programs that consistently address these areas across the Shire.

The HTGG team (working across the PSC, Ararat Rural City and Central Goldfields Council) additionally leads the way in supporting Pyrenees, local primary schools and early childhood services to implement preventive education and practices that create a healthier environment for children and their families through the Healthy Together Achievement Program initiative.

Once registered for this program, schools and early childhood services are supported by the Healthy Together Grampians Goldfields team with best practice case studies, data and evidence, guidance on embedding health and wellbeing into the curriculum, tips and tools on engaging staff, families and children, policies and template, links to health professionals, services and the wider community and resources and promotional activities to support their work.



A jumping pillow – 4 years

Local schools and early childhood services can also access the Healthy Eating Advisory Service to find out how they can best support children's nutrition.

Many of the EY services and schools have already registered and begun the journey towards improving the health of our children across the Shire.

Maternal and Child Health services

Maternal and Child Health services within the Pyrenees Shire provide information, guidance and support to families with young children on issues that include adjusting to parenthood, breastfeeding and nutrition, maternal health, parenting advice, child health, growth, behaviour and development, hearing and eye sight testing and immunisation.

MCH nurses also support parent and child emotional health during pregnancy and early parenthood as an important part of their role.

Universal MCH services are provided across the Shire by qualified and experienced nurses who are available for consultations on scheduled days at five locations across the municipality in Avoca, Snake Valley, Lexton, Waubra and Beaufort.

This service also includes home visits for families caring for newborn babies and an outreach service or an Enhanced Home Visiting service to improve access and opportunities for families with additional needs to obtain information, service and support.

Parenting support has become an increasing need, as many new parents have not had strong parenting role models. Parents' groups and playgroups supported via the MCH service are seen as significant in assisting the development of basic parenting skills through modeling and peer support.

Key Age and Stage (KAS) consultations

A thorough development screening assessment is performed at KAS visits to determine areas of need that may require early intervention, including emotional health. MCH nurses also refer parents to the Mental Health Services Peri-natal Emotional Health Program if warranted by particular concerns.

Table 4: Pyrenees participation rates for Key Age and Stage visits

Key Age and Stage	Participation rate %
Initial home visit	90%
2 week	75%
4 week	82%
8 week	84%
4 months	82%
8 months	84.8%
12 months	89%
18 months	76%
2 years	86%
3.5 years	73%

(Source: Maternal and Child Health 2012-2013 Annual Reports)

MCH nurses note that the period from 2 years to 3.5 years is a particularly important time for children's developmental, when any difficulties may need swift specialist attention prior to starting kinder or pre-school experiences. Failure to seek a referral until the 3.5 year-old KAS visit may result in children not being able to confidently manage the important life transition to school. The drop in participation rate for the 3.5 years KSA consultation is of particular concern, given other correlating data for Pyrenees that suggest a higher than average percentage of children are presenting as physically, socially and emotionally not ready for school. Supported and community playgroups can provide an important link to other EY services and support school readiness.

MCH nurses in both Pyrenees and Ararat LGAs highlighted the difficulties that families face in accessing a range of paediatric and EY specialist services.

Most speech therapists, for example, are centrally located in the large towns of Ballarat and Ararat (or in Melbourne) and there can be significant waiting periods of up to 6 months.

Accessing other specialist child and family services such as behavioural and/or physical assessments of children, assistance with parenting skills, budget management, financial/life skills, can involve delays of up to 12-18 months, given that services are also centred in the nearest large city and operate using a key worker and outreach model of service delivery, resulting in long waiting lists and limited service capacity. MyTime funding (for a facilitator and play helper to run a parent support group for families with children with a disability or chronic medical condition) may be a viable consideration here.

A MCH program initiative with potential to assist Pyrenees' families to access services, (especially more vulnerable families with multiple requirements and needs), is the Patchwork Program currently being piloted by the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) with five Victorian councils in relation to their MCH and youth programs.

The 'Patchwork' web application is designed to connect practitioners from different agencies working with common clients in a geographic area thus improving collaboration, integrated service delivery and delivering better outcomes for families, who no longer have to continuously repeat their history to different service providers.

If the pilot proves successful, the MAV may extend the program to all councils.

Breastfeeding Patterns

Breastfeeding has positive effects on the survival, development and growth of babies, including protection from disease through antibodies in the mothers' milk (DEECD, 2009b: p. 115; Amir et al. 2010). The World Health Organisation recommends that infants are exclusively breastfed until the age of 6 months (DEECD, 2013b: p. 108).

The data sets contained in the Maternal & Child Health Services Annual Report 2011/12 show that breastfeeding rates for babies within Pyrenees Shire steadily decline upon discharge from hospital. Upon discharge the data reveals that 78.2 % of babies are fully breastfed, and only declining to 76.4% at 2 weeks, 58.2% at 3 months to a low 40% at 6 months.

Despite these rates being better than the Victorian average, this decline is concerning and warrants attention given the proven value and link of breast milk to a child's positive health outcomes (especially physical health and well being).

Breastfeeding rates beyond discharge (particularly at the 2 weeks and 3 months mark) and up until the World Health Organisation (WHO) benchmark of 6 months could improve with additional support from a local lactation expert, enhanced maternal and child health support in the first two weeks, and ongoing breastfeeding support for the first three months by Australian Breastfeeding Association.

Immunisation participation rates

Immunisation is a key tool in lowering the risk of serious infectious diseases in the community, particularly for children. In the March 2012 quarter, compared to the Victorian average, Pyrenees had a lower percentage of children in the two and five year old age groups that were fully immunised. The latest immunisation rates for children show an overall increase in the percentage of children who are fully immunised in the Grampians region. Immunisation rates for children aged two and five years of age increased across the region, with rates for one year olds reducing slightly.

The report highlights that immunisation rates for two-year-olds have increased from 94.2 per cent to 94.5 per cent and for five-year-old children the rate has increased from 92.5 per cent to 93.1 per cent of children. Specific figures for Pyrenees are not reported due to numbers below the reporting threshold of 20 children (Grampians Medicare Local, 2014).

Improvements in immunisation participation rates, attest to the coordinated effort between EY service providers and General Practitioners in the Grampians region to provide consistent and accessible services and education in the community on the importance of parents ensuring their children are fully immunised.

In summary, this Section suggests that the physical health of Pyrenees' children (with the exception of their Oral Health) is substantially on track, with new initiatives being added to strengthen the preventive focus, There are improvements that can be made to parental health behaviours, the supports available to new parents and children and service accessibility, particularly to specialist services.

Exploring the potential to increase the participation of children at their 3.5 year MCH KAS visit, through integrated promotional programs through MCH services, HTGG, childcare and pre-school/ kinder services, may contribute to increased physical health, well being and school readiness of Pyrenees' children.



A fire park - 4 years

Building Wellbeing

All Victorian children develop socially and emotionally, are resilient and have a strong sense of identity and wellbeing.



Within this domain the *Early Years Outcome Framework* recognises the transitions that children undergo as they move between their supportive family environments and the broader world of services such as playgroups, parks and playgrounds where they learn to develop positive relationships with other children and adults.

Outcome indicators in this domain are similar to those that enable a child's optimum physical health but additionally focus on how they are tracking socially, emotionally and mentally.

Playgroup services

Play is recognised as a major means through which children develop socially and emotionally, contributing to resilience and a strong sense of identity and wellbeing.

Play paves the way for learning, providing babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers with an opportunity to socialise together as they learn about their own capabilities and skills, and grow and develop in a range of areas' (DEECD, 2009b: p.14).

Playgroup experiences also act as a major vehicle to support parents in strengthening their parenting skills and knowledge, and encouraging the formation of supportive relationships with other parents.

A recent mapping of playgroups identified five playgroups currently running in Pyrenees Shire at Avoca, Beaufort, Crossroads, Lexton and Snake Valley.

These five community playgroups are parent facilitated and controlled. The Beaufort Playgroup believes they are functioning well and have been successful in welcoming a much more diverse group of families from different social sets in Beaufort.

They are keen to build their services by trialling new things such as having the MCH nurse deliver oral health sessions into this group as part of the service's improvement plan.

There was comment about lack of access to a Rhyme-time activity, which is interesting given that previous attempts through the municipal library staff to offer this have been so poorly attended that the service is currently discontinued. (Baby Rhyme Time is an activity for newborn and lap-based babies up to 3 years that uses rhyme, rhythm and song sessions designed to help babies' language and literacy skills, as well as promote a love of books and reading.)

A Playgroup Development Consultant employed by Playgroups Victoria through the *Community Playgroups: Connecting Rural Families Locally* Project commenced work in the Grampians Region (which includes PSC) in October 2013.

This project initiative aims to grow the participation of 0-4 year olds and their families in community playgroups as a pathway to promote early learning in the home and to strengthen parenting skills and access to information and other EY services.

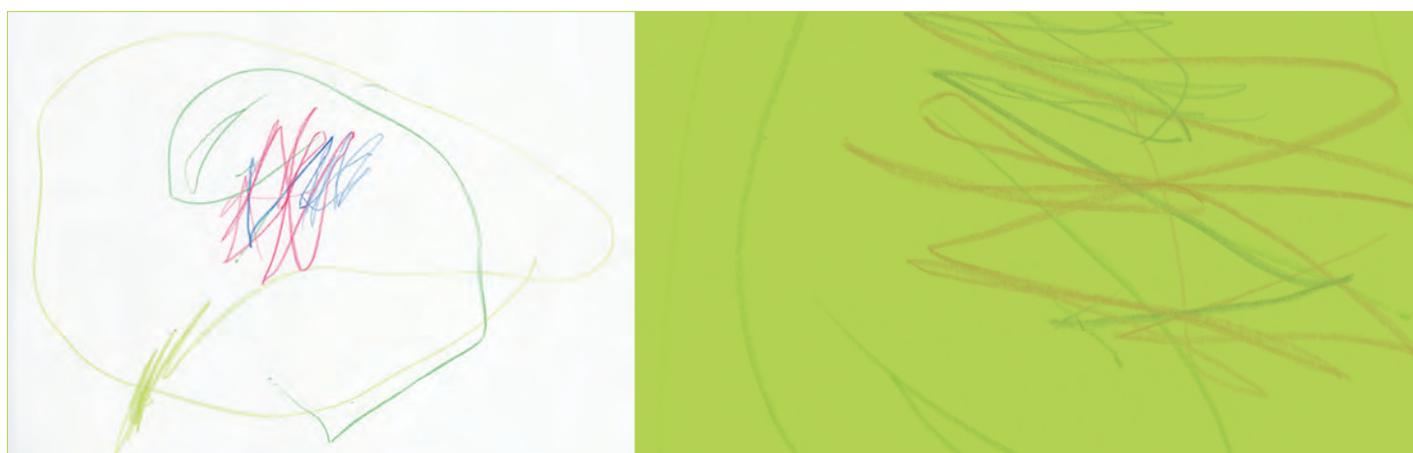
The Consultant offers resources such as support visits, training, and advice to playgroup leaders on management, governance and participation issues, good play and activity ideas, and promotional strategies in the local community.

Collaborative suggestions have already been contributed regarding a promotional event for PSC, similar to National Play Day that would bring together a number of local EY services later in 2014. The discussions that this potentially generates around coordinated effective service delivery and integrated resources are highly welcomed.

Playgroup details can change so rapidly, that it can be difficult for parents to keep track of up to date details if one department/service/agency does not have responsibility for this, as is the case in PSC.

EY professionals in PSC consistently identified a need for additional supports for parents who may lack parenting knowledge and skills.

Supported Playgroups and Facilitated Playgroups that are initiated and led by a paid facilitator, typically target more isolated and vulnerable families who need additional supports, for example, teenage parents, those from a CALD or indigenous background or who have a child or family member living with a disability, mental health or substance abuse issues.



A blue park – 4 years

Cost can be a significant barrier to participation of vulnerable children and families in community playgroups, and the Playgroup Development Consultant's advice around ways to share infrastructure such as venues, insurance and ongoing maintenance and equipment costs will be valuable.

Several models for funding and delivering Supported Playgroups within the Shires (e.g. Kinda Kinder and Australian Catholic University - Aquinas Ballarat Supported Playgroups models; a mobile Playgroup van; Mother Goose groups, etc) can be productively explored.

Partnering with agencies such as Child and Family Services may also enable application for funding through the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs' (FaHCSIA) Supported Playgroup Program, for a playgroup facilitator for 40 weeks.

Children's mental well-being

MCH nurses and other service providers reported a gradual increase in the number of complex and vulnerable families they are dealing with, where parents have not had effective parenting role models and struggle with establishing routines, setting limits and knowing how to interact and play with their children.

Feedback through this consulting project correlates with the findings of other recent scoping exercises and data sources and raises concern that there may be an increase in vulnerable families and more complex issues impacting on children's mental health and wellbeing in Pyrenees (Hall, 2013; AEDI 2013). Further work is necessary to quantify and confirm this.

Limited funding is available to run parenting and group programs across rural areas and providers consistently identify difficulty in meeting needs, engaging parents, accessing secondary consultation about behaviour and mental health issues.

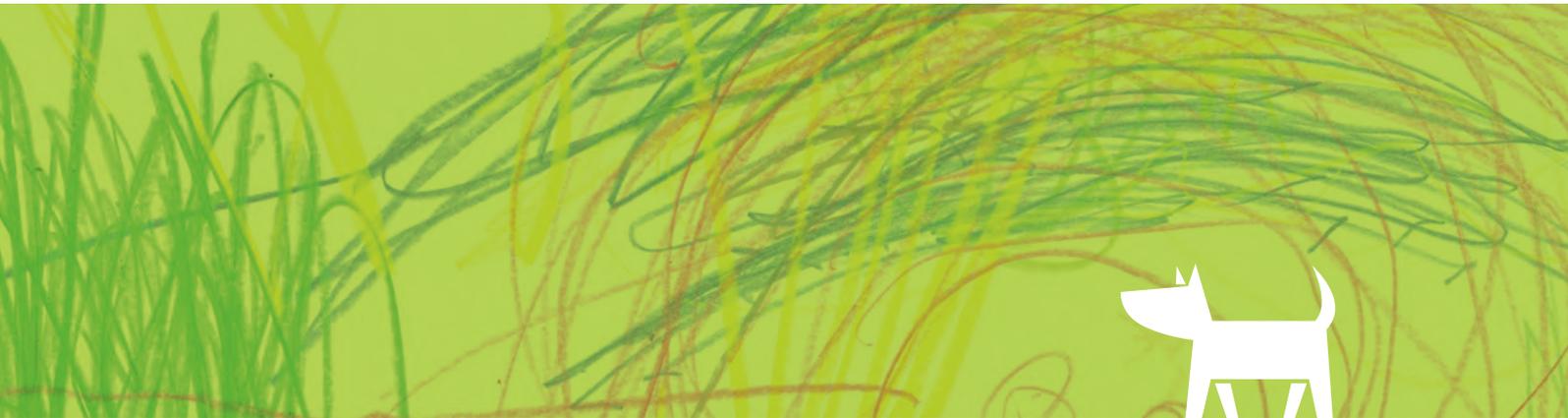
Various organisations across the Grampians-Pyrenees receive funding to deliver child and family services that provide early intervention for vulnerable children and families with complex needs. These include Grampians Community Health Centre (GCHC) and Child and Family Services (CAFS) from Ballarat to Ararat and incorporate a number of programs such as Child First, Family Services and Best Start.

Other programs, such as the *Bridges out of Poverty Training and Community Development* program operated through Ballarat based Highland Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN) specifically focus on better understanding the nature of vulnerability and the barriers to engagement.

Partnering with the LLEN would enable PSC and local service providers to better design and target EY services for vulnerable communities and families.

There is variation from town to town in both availability and accessibility of allied health services (funded services or private practitioners) for both pre-school and school age children. Towns often have few services based in them and rely heavily on visiting services, which can be fragmented, inconsistent and lacking in continuity of staff.

EY service providers report that there is a shortage of specialist paediatric allied health and mental health professionals in the region, such as child psychologists, autism assessment services, occupational therapy and speech pathology (Hall, 2013 p.24).



Most services use a key worker and outreach model of service delivery, with workers generally based in Ballarat and Ararat, resulting in long waiting lists and limited service capacity (Hall, 2013: p.28).

AEDI figures across the Pyrenees for both social competence and emotional maturity are close to double, or more than double, the Victorian State average and suggest that PSC children are either developmentally vulnerable or developmentally at risk. The biggest decline in children's development since 2009 is within the areas of social competence, emotional maturity and communication skills, and general knowledge.

EY practitioners expressed varying opinions regarding the AEDI data trends but most indicated that their observations would support the view of challenges to be overcome.

In summary, this Section shows that recent playgroup initiatives introduced to advance the wellbeing of Pyrenees' children are already demonstrating their contribution.

The need to better understand and support our most vulnerable families and children is consistently highlighted and further work to both understand the nature of vulnerability and to map the referral processes and pathways for a range of specialist EY services is needed.

Health promotion and community development programs to promote effective parenting strategies and programs, such as Supported Playgroups that will impact positively on children's wellbeing and mental health are needed.

A central information point for parents to keep track of up to date details regarding playgroups would also assist.

Learning and Developing



All Victorian children learn and develop through engagement in meaningful, high-quality care and educational experiences.

Within this domain the *Early Years Outcome Framework* identifies the quality educational opportunities that enable children to become confident, involved learners and develop foundation skills for life.

Outcome indicators in this domain include the proportion of children participating in quality Early Childhood Education and Care services and those who are read to by a family member every day. They are also closely informed by the AEDI domains (2012) that indicate the proportion of children on track with their speech, language, learning and cognitive development.

Library Services

PSC Community Resource/Visitor Information Centres and Libraries are located in Beaufort and Avoca. They offer a variety of services including Tourist Information, Bike Hire, Centrelink visits, Conference Room Hire, Public Internet Access, Library services and business services.

A range of library services are offered through the Resource Centres including:

- Annual events during Education Week, Children's Week, National Simultaneous Story-time, School Holiday Programs
- Regular Kindergarten visits, every 2-3 weeks
- Pre-School Story-time and Primary School visits on an occasional basis
- Mobile Library Services additionally operate for the rural townships and surrounding communities of Snake Valley, Lexton and Landsborough
- Library staff have previously offered playgroup visits, Baby Rhyme-time sessions and parent groups but these services do not currently operate due to lack of interest expressed from parents and playgroup organisers.



Staff have tried various approaches and programs to more fully engage parents and service providers in appreciating the value of library services for their children.

Marketing, word of mouth, face to face, and an annual on-line survey about user needs, have met with little success.

Lack of available transport for parents/ organisations to library branches or mobile services may be an issue, although the lack of a dedicated youth or children's librarian with relevant professional background knowledge and education is felt to be more significant.

In conjunction with parents, libraries play a pivotal role in introducing children to the world of books, reading and language.

From the age of 3 years on and particularly during the first years of school, the provision of a rich language environment every day is essential for a child's development.

When parents regularly read to their children they encourage positive associations with reading, greater understanding of language, improved listening skills and increased vocabulary skills, as well as improved school literacy.

In Pyrenees 71.2% of children are regularly read to and encouraged in their reading at home which is lower than the State average of 79.4% (AEDI, 2012: p.11).

It is critically important that PSC changes the overall perception of library services in the Shire so that parents appreciate and embrace the value of library services and their contribution to the development of their children, particularly during the early years.

Early Years Education and Care Services

Preschool and Kindergarten Services

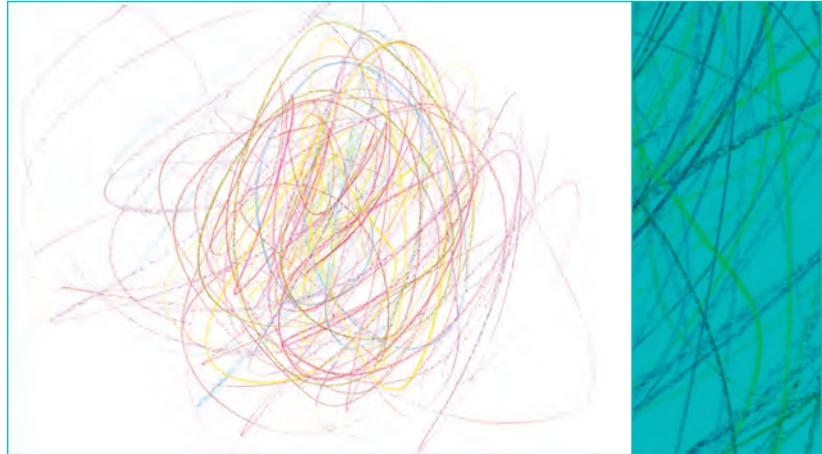
In the year before entering formal full-time school, 97.1% of Pyrenees children have had some form of non-parental early childhood education and/or care experiences and 95.6% attended some form of preschool - higher than the Victorian averages.

Research shows a high-quality early childhood education experience enhances overall development in children (AEDI, 2012: p. 8).

Pyrenees Shire offers kindergarten and preschool services within Avoca, Beaufort and Waubra through qualified and community minded professional groups.

All three services previously operated out of Council owned facilities, and were identified as needing improvement to meet community needs.

The facilities have all recently been rebuilt or upgraded and there are now three different cluster managers operating in PSC; Eureka Community Kindergarten Association (ECKA), Ballarat YMCA and Uniting Care Ballarat with each providing 3 year old and 4 year old group sessions.



A big rainbow park – 4 years

Cluster managers are actively engaged with their parent and local communities and are genuinely passionate about advancing children's potential. They are considered a key partner in optimising the educational and health outcomes of Pyrenees' children.

In response to discussions about the AEDI data trends, proactive suggestions were generated regarding putting in place additional supports to strengthen children's capacity in the vulnerable areas during their pre-school and kinder time and thus facilitate smoother and less stressful transitions to school.

This can be productively explored with Cluster Managers taking the lead.

Increased population forecasts for Snake Valley, resulting from sewerage connection to the town, will need to be monitored. If the number of families with young children increases, then planning for the development of an early childhood centre and lobbying for appropriate funding will be necessary.

Child Care Services

Family Day Care offers families the opportunity to engage their child in an early childhood education and care program, in a small group within a home based setting. This type of traditional Family Day Care has ceased in PSC, with current Family Day Care delivered as an in venue service through the Avoca Children's Centre and the Cross Roads CFA venue. There is also space available for a service in Beaufort at the Bendigo Community Bank Complex, but an Educator is yet to be located.

In addition the Beaufort Children Centre has been developed.

The Avoca and Beaufort Centres have replaced single-use buildings, and each facility houses a combination of kindergarten programs, playgroups, MCHS and child care (long and family day). Co-location of EY services has proven very successful and enabled a professionally coordinated and monitored childcare service, offering regulated care for children from birth to 12 years.

Care is charged on an hourly basis with fees based on services provided, and means-tested rebates available.

Council and the manager of the Beaufort Children's Centre need to continue their partnership discussions with services providers in the venue to develop and monitor a sustainable business case for the Centre past August 2014, when the Federal establishment grant expires. It is critical to ensure the Centre's sustainability past that date.

The demand for childcare services within PSC continues, given the need for many parents to commute to Melbourne and other destinations out of the Shire for work. This need extends to Long Day Care services, family day care educators and before school care.

Out of School Hours Care, After School & Vacation Care and Family Day Care Services are in short supply across the Pyrenees LGA, and especially difficult to access for people in smaller communities.

No Occasional Child Care services operate in PSC at this time.

A number of comments in the community feedback referred to the lack of FDC and childcare options, especially for working families.

Council continues to work towards developing other service models that could provide families with child care options.

In response to discussions about the AEDI data trends that identified areas of vulnerability for PSC children, proactive suggestions were generated about putting in place additional supports to strengthen children's capacity in those areas during their pre-school and kinder time and thus facilitate smoother and less stressful transitions to school.

School services within the Pyrenees Shire

Schools play a critical role in children's development and robust connections and transitions between the parental home, playgroups, child-care centres, pre-schools, kinders and schools enable and facilitate a child's learning and development.

There is a strong school system within Pyrenees Shire and 14 State primary schools service the Shire's major towns and smaller villages, providing extra curricular activities for children such as Active After School Communities Programs, Clubs, Vacation Programs, Performing Arts Programs, Gardening Programs and many others.

A school bus collects children from outlying areas around Avoca Primary School and delivers children to St Augustine's Catholic Primary School in Maryborough and Maryborough Education Centre for parents who require other educational opportunities.

Pyrenees' parents are actively involved in many ways as Parent Helpers, School Council members, Parents and Friends Club, and providing special food days, classroom programs, excursions, swimming, school sporting teams and library maintenance.

The Shire has well above the average Victorian percentage of parent(s)/caregiver(s) who are actively engaged with the school in supporting their child's learning (AEDI, 2012: p. 11).

A smooth transition between a child's before-school setting and the school environment increases the likelihood of continuous learning (AEDI, 2012: p.8). It is useful to consider how well children are prepared for and settling into the school environment and what may be influencing their transitions to school. 67.1% of PSC children are making good progress in adapting to the structure and learning environment of the school, much lower than the Victorian average of 78.8% (AEDI, 2012: p.11). Further work with the Playgroup Development Consultant and local playgroups may be helpful in considering how to further support the transition process e.g. establishing playgroups in schools.

AEDI Summary Data

Table 5: 2012 Comparative AEDI figures for Pyrenees LGA

Community and No of children	Proportion of children developmentally vulnerable %						
	Physical health & wellbeing	Social competence	Emotional maturity	Language & cognitive skills	Communication skills & general knowledge	Vulnerable on one or more of the domains	Vulnerable on two or more of the domains
Australia 289,973	9.3	9.3	7.6	6.8	9.0	22.0	10.8
Victoria 67,931	7.8	8.1	7.2	6.1	8.0	19.5	9.5
PSC 73	12.7	14.3	12.7	7.9	9.9	33.8	13.2

The red shaded area highlights vulnerability scores that are higher than the State average and suggests some areas of concern when it comes to children's readiness for school and their comparative developmental vulnerability or risk compared to the Victorian population.

- The proportion of Pyrenees' children deemed developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains was higher in 2012 than in 2009. **This change is significant**

This means that there has been an increase in the level of developmental vulnerability that is larger than the critical difference, taking into account a range of important factors including the size of the community

- The proportion of children deemed developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains was higher in 2012 than in 2009. **This change is not significant**, meaning that the change in the level of developmental vulnerability is smaller than the critical difference (AEDI, 2013).



A climbing and sliding – 4 years

Analysing this data further would be productive. Cross referencing to other available data about children's preparedness for school and their parent's awareness of this, may provide an indication of parents' assessment of their children's progress, and highlight the need for strengthening programs to assist children in pre-school settings and/or parenting skill interventions, which would be consistent with other findings during this consultation project.



Other readily available data includes:

- The Transition Learning and Development Statement (TLDS), recommended by DEECD as a valuable way to support a child's transition to the school experiences. This statement is completed from multiple perspectives by parents/carers, EY pre-school/ kinder/childcare experts and summarises the strengths of a child's learning and development as they enter school. Information helps Prep teachers to plan for each child's learning and development before they start classes
- The School Entrant Health Questionnaire (SEHQ) distributed to parents via the school once new enrollments are consolidated contains a range of questions about children's health history, wellbeing and family circumstances. Every Parent/carer receives a written report and/or verbal contact from the Grampians regional Primary school nurse, who covers PSC and ARCC LGAs. The SEHQ and nurse assessments are a major source of service integration and referrals for vision, hearing, oral, height/weight, speech, language, or additional assessments to assess a child's learning, development and skills in a broad range of areas, such as general knowledge, language development, body awareness and fine and gross motor skills
- Once they are at school NAPLAN trends over time constitute another data source for assessing children's achievement levels in Reading, Persuasive Writing, Language Conventions (Spelling, Grammar and Punctuation) and Numeracy. For example, an initial cross-check of the 2012 primary school year 3 cohort for Beaufort and surrounds, (which is the same group presented in the 2009 AEDI data) reveals that this cohort of children were below the State average for all areas, compared to schools serving students from statistically similar backgrounds, and substantially below the average when compared to the Australian schools average.

In summary, this Section describes how good quality services in EY care and education continue to support the majority of Pyrenees' children in their learning and development.

Some concerns are raised about the percentage of children who may need additional support to achieve their optimum speech, language, learning and cognitive development, although further work is needed to explore the nature of these issues. Increased parental awareness and skill in how to support their children's development may be the issue.

A review of the PSC Library services model and investigation of ongoing partnership service models that provide families with a greater range of affordable childcare options is also necessary.

Continued attention to partnership discussions with key service providers to monitor the ongoing success of the Beaufort Children's Centre, past August 2014 are critical.

Staying Safe

All Victorian children experience and grow up in safe environments and communities.



Within this domain the *Early Years Outcomes Framework* recognises the need for children's environments to be nurturing, safe and secure so that all children are protected from abuse and raised in economically secure circumstances.

Outcome indicators in this domain include the number of children living in a safe and secure environment, attending and having access to safe and secure services, and a decrease in exposure to family violence and economic insecurity. Parents should feel that they have someone to turn to when having problems.

Child and Family Support Services

Child and Family Support Services in Victoria aim to support the building of child, family and community capacity and resilience, and promote the safety, stability and wellbeing of vulnerable children, young people and their families.

The 2012 Inquiry into Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children notes that children in rural Victoria are much more likely to be placed in out-of-home care.

It also identifies that children are more at risk in areas where there is a higher proportion of children who are vulnerable on the AEDI (one or more domains) and higher socioeconomic disadvantage, as measured by SEIFA (DEECD, 2013b: p. 98).

Pyrenees' data suggests that it fits this profile, with the SEIFA index indicating that there are a number of families who are financially or socially vulnerable and higher than average rates of community unemployment.

Analysis of the health services and workforce data for the Pyrenees sub-region of the Grampians MLA (Medicare Local Area) identified several areas of concern: in particular, workforce shortages and capacity issues, particularly allied health professionals, including those tasked with providing EY early intervention and support.

There is evidence that **cost and transport** are key barriers to accessing a range of services, including EY services for children.

Transport difficulties, including access and cost, were identified by the community in their feedback comments, with the isolating effects of these difficulties recognised.

Concerns regarding technology and broadband availability were also voiced by service providers and in the community feedback comments, with the lack of coverage adversely affecting the ability to locate information about available services and programs.

Compared to the Victorian average, 35% fewer Pyrenees' residents believe that their area has good access to services and facilities.



The water where all the fish are in beaufort - 4 years

Table 6: LGA Indicators for Pyrenees

Indicator	Pyrenees	Victoria
Believe their area has good facilities and services	52%	87%
Have internet at home	75.6%	86.4%
Could definitely get help from friends, family or neighbours when needed	91.4%	91.7%
Experienced transport limitations in previous year	31.6%	23.7%
Number of GPs per 1,000 population	.66 per 1000	1.11 per 1000

(Source: *Community Indicators Victoria, 2013*).

Various organisations across the Grampians-Pyrenees receive funding to deliver child and family services that provide early intervention for vulnerable children and families with complex needs to reduce the likelihood of needing Child Protection involvement.

A recent investigation into the support service available in the Grampians region noted that:

- Service providers report difficulty in accessing outreach services for specialist family violence or drug and alcohol support. These services are generally based in Ballarat, Horsham, Stawell and Ararat. Additionally, Family Violence and Alcohol and Drug services are not funded to support the children of parents affected by drug or alcohol abuse. This leaves these children highly vulnerable in terms of safety and potential to go into care (Hall, 2013: p.28)
- Most support services for children living with illness or with a parent with illness are not for the younger age group or are based in capital cities
- All Early Childhood Intervention Services use a key worker and outreach model of service delivery, managing wide catchment areas, usually across a number of LGAs, e.g. Child FIRST, Child Protection, Family Services, Mental Health Services, FaPMI (Families where a Parent has a Mental Illness)
- There are long waiting lists and limited service capacity (Hall, 2013).

In summary, this Section supports other areas of the report and indicates sufficient evidence from service providers and correlating data sources to raise concern about the safety of a number of Pyrenees' children.

The need to better understand and support our most vulnerable families and children is consistently highlighted and further work to both understand the nature of that vulnerability and to map the referral processes and pathways for a range of specialist EY services is needed.

An Early Years Network facilitated initially by key stakeholders with Council's involvement and support may provide the impetus to coordinate this effort.

Community Consultation and Feedback

The three main channels of community consultation used in the development of the PSC's MEYP were:

1. A Community flyer distributed with the annual rates notice and through a range of children's services/ primary schools, where additional drop boxes were provided. This did not achieve a high response rate.
2. A limited number of direct consultations with children through pre-school and kindergartens, and
3. A review of comments in Community Action Plans, updated in January 2013.

Feedback is limited but examples of the EY services accessed and service gaps that were identified included the following.

Working well

Maternal and child health services – support and friendly reminders of key age and stage consultations.

Preschool services at Beaufort, Avoca.

Playgroups, Primary School.

Crossroads Family Day Care.

We use the park in Lawrence Street. Have also used the walk / exercise track around the Beaufort Lake. They attend table tennis at the shire hall.

Kinder and long day care services at Beaufort.

Country living-friendly people.

Working less well

Services are not offered in all townships within the Shire - Parents' groups, Playgroups, library, pool, and family day care are services I'd like to use but we don't have them.

Library and pool inaccessibility due to distance from our home.

No kinder program in Landsborough – not enough demand – low birth numbers. Many children do not attend due to cost of travel to Stawell / Ararat / Avoca / Beaufort.

Transport is an ongoing issue – limited school bus services to major townships within the Shire; limited transport can lead to greater social isolation.

No opportunity for parents to come together in some areas of the Shire due to poor public transport linkages cost of petrol and lack of community meeting places to foster and develop new and old friendships.

No indoor space for children and families to come together during wet weather periods.

No directory of children's services for the Shire.

Working less well

No / or limited Footpaths for walking, bike riding and pushing prams.

More places / days for family day care are required in the region.

Childcare – limited options locally.

Limited extra curricular activities provided locally.

Evansford - No services here, so no central regular meeting place where people can just 'bump' into each other e.g. primary school, Post Office.

Trying to keep a sense of community – so many new people in the area, so difficult to meet people, many weekenders, not many come to community events.

- The Beaufort Pool requires more shade seating and disabled ramps
- The Lawrence St Park requires more shade over the play area. There are many days when you can't use it, as it is too sunny
- Upgrade the Ampitheatre recreational Reserve
- Council funding and planning to make areas safer and more inclusive – parents and friends for support of the project and operation.

Mobile phone - no coverage from Telstra.

People who live in this fire prone area need better coverage from Telstra.

- More access to the Internet & children's activities after school also a gym or sports program for parents during school hours
- Holiday services, workshops, open meeting space. Walking path from the township
- YMCA, sporting groups, music/ dance opportunities, drama, youth club 5-8 years 9-12 years, art projects – school holidays after school
- AN "Active after schools" program – a variety of activities for wide range of years 0 – 12. Pyrenees Music Festival – children's event – choir, art displays, learning from professionals
- Swimming lessons for all children. We live in a rural community with dams / lakes most families travel 50kms to get this opportunity.

- Bus for weekend/holidays
- Playgroup for preschool children.

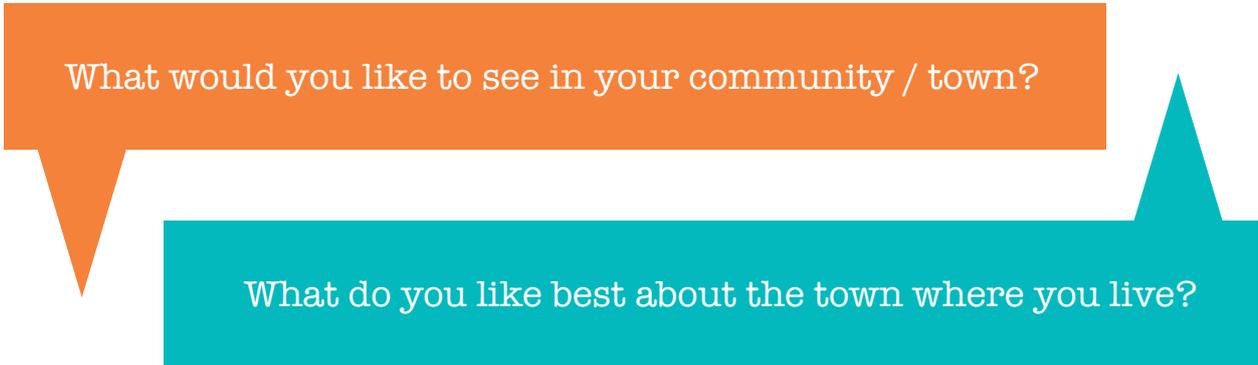
- A local Kindergarten - older kids need a play space – something like a skate park; have programs for school holidays swimming programs at the pool, outdoor gymnastics, music or art and engage families through school / kinder
- A kinder that's close.

- Using community members with diverse ideas to implement a different game / sport / movies etc with the leader having help from the committee
- Lots of retired people are willing to tell their story when asked – my grand children like it a lot.

- A few additional comments relating to other PSC community issues have not been included.

Voices of Pyrenees’s Children

A small number of kindergarten and pre-school children in Avoca and Beaufort shared their views on two questions:



What I like	What I’d like to have
IGA	More trees and motorbike jumps
Swimming Pool	A Rainbow Park
Shearing Sheep and the shearing shed	A fire Park
The Shops	A kite
Footy Oval	A motorbike track
Skate Park	A water tanker
Kindergarten	A jumping pillow
Dogs	A playground
The park and the River	A blue park
Riding our bikes over the little bridge.	A big rainbow park
The water where all the fish are in Beaufort	A big curly slide
	A police park
	A merry go round
	A fairy playground
	A climbing and sliding park
	A park with boats and fire engines



Most children’s comments and the drawings received, related to doing active, fun, imaginative things with friends and family in local settings.

Conclusion



The development of PSC's *Healthy and Well Children* Municipal Early Years Plan 2014-2017 has been informed by a comprehensive literature and policy review, collaboration with families, children, Council staff and service/program providers.

It demonstrates Council's strong and continuing commitment to children 0-8 years of age, and their families living within the Pyrenees Shire.

The MEYP identifies the range of high quality community services and new initiatives in EY care and education that continue to support the majority of Pyrenees' children in being healthy, building wellbeing, learning and developing and staying safe.

The Report also identifies areas in which the coordination and provision of information, services and activities can be strengthened, and collaborative opportunities to progress and enable better outcomes for children can be advanced.

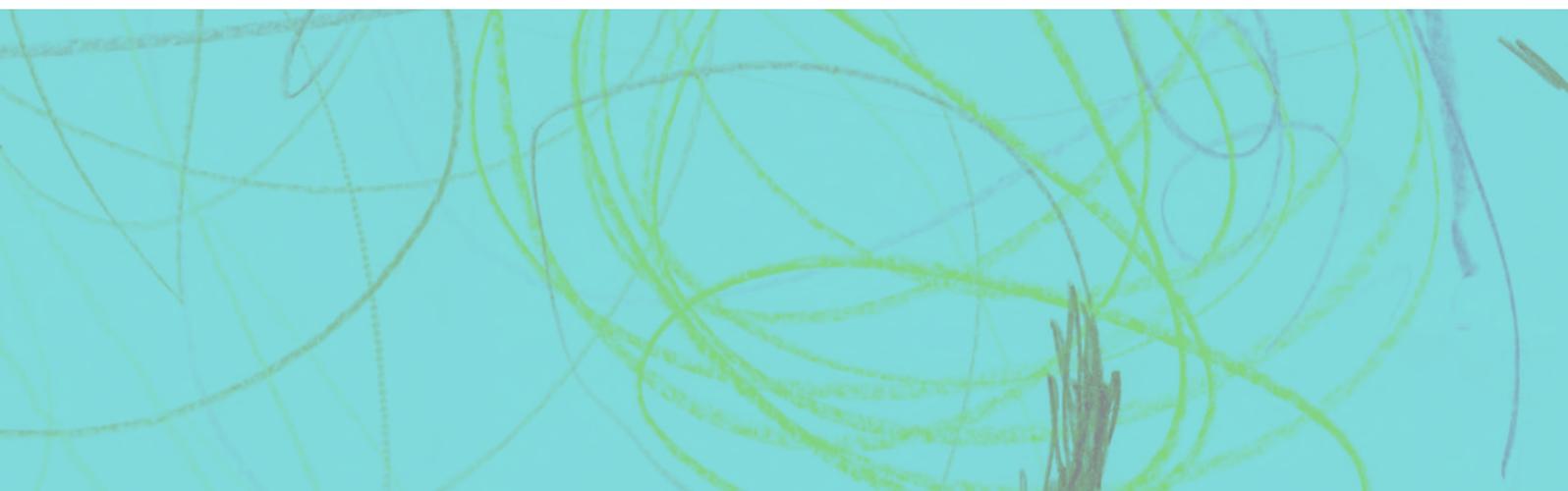
The Recommendations and Action Plan that follow have been developed in response to these issues and are presented in line with the three guiding priorities that shaped the approach.

- How can we deliver consistent and effective services across the Pyrenees Shire Council (PSC) /Ararat Rural City Council (ARCC)?
- How can PSC/ARCC achieve coordinated service delivery into each LGA area?
- How can PSC/ARCC engage with and better deliver services to vulnerable families across both LGA areas?

Council's role and scope is articulated in the following recommendations and actions along with the valued and valuable role that other partners in the EY field play in advancing the interests of our children. The EY field is an active one where new programs and funding sources continue to emerge and it is noted that the range of responses and actions available to the PSC community is not limited to those outlined in these recommendations.

The background information, contemporary research and experiences shared through this project give rise to the following recommendations that will guide Council's direction in pursuit of its vision for children in PSC:

- *That all children and their families across the communities of the Pyrenees Shire have equal access to a full range of high quality, affordable Early Years Programs and services that provide a strong foundation for their future development and give children the best start in life*
- *To provide a socially inclusive and safe environment for children and families that supports their physical, emotional, social and cognitive development along a normal developmental path.*



Early Years Recommendations and Action Plan

MEYP Priority One:

How can we deliver consistent and effective services across the Pyrenees Shire Council (PSC)?

Issue	What Council will do in 2013–17
<p>1. Our EY services lack a systemic approach – ante-natal to 8 years needed to optimise our children's early Growth, Learning & Development in line with The Early Years (EY) Outcomes Framework for Victoria 0-8 years (2014)</p> 	<p>1. Demonstrate Council's leadership role in Early Years by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing the Municipal Early Years Plan 2014- 2017 • Placing a copy of the one page Early Years (EY) Outcomes Framework for Victoria 0-8 years on the PSC website to illustrate the systemic approach to children's needs/service provision that Council follows and encourages.
<p>2. Obtaining accessible information for parents, service providers and the community about Early Years services and programs is challenging.</p> 	<p>2. Improve/create means of obtaining information about EY services and programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include information on EY services and activities in Council's <i>New Residents' pack</i> • Develop an EY guide that provides information to the community about EY services and programs in Pyrenees Shire • Expand the range of information available on the Council's Homepage e.g. Profile EY as a service, provide regular contributions regarding EY through Pyrenees <i>In Focus-What's On</i> • Expand the range of information available for dissemination through service points via an Early Years Network and directed Working Party to strengthen partnerships with existing partners • Ensure linkages are strengthened between relevant Council plans and strategies as they relate to children, through a regular review process.
<p>3. Access to good quality EY services is difficult for many families.</p> 	<p>3. Investigate opportunities to increase access to childcare services within the Shire including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and promote the continuation/development of community hubs where child care facilities / regular specialist services sessions and opportunities for parents to meet and communicate in one venue are created • Partner with key service providers in the development of Beaufort Children's Centre business case and the planning and design process for its ongoing viability • Continue to promote and lobby for grant and funding opportunities for essential family and children services and resources for Pyrenees Shire • Establish and work with a PSC EY network group to investigate alternative service provision models • Work with Playgroups Victoria, to seek further funding and enhance the provision of Community Playgroups and Supported Playgroups within the Shire, including its smaller communities e.g. mobile playgroup?

MEYP Priority One:

How can we deliver consistent and effective services across the Pyrenees Shire Council (PSC)?

4. Attracting and retaining high quality professional staff to regions.



4. Consider how to build services so that professionals will come to regions and stay

- Council to continue to promote and consider ways to attract new families via the Economic Development project Regional Victorian Living Expo
- Ensure EY services / professional groups are engaged in the Regional Victorian Living Expo and associated sub projects/ strategies to attract families to the PSC
- Council to advocate, in partnership with key stakeholders in the EY network, for community capacity building projects that scope options to address the shortage of paediatric specialists – for example, telehealth, secondary consultation partnerships, potential for extending the use of some existing visiting services.

A motorbike track – 4 years



MEYP Priority Two:

How can PSC achieve coordinated service delivery across the LGA?

Issue	What Council will do in 2013–17
<p>1. Community and service providers in each LGA not yet strongly coordinated/ networked groups.</p> 	<p>1. Council to facilitate the establishment of an early years network within the Shire</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Years Professional Network to convene at least quarterly each year to share information, identify service gaps, strengthen transition between services, share professional development opportunities and develop joint initiatives to improve outcomes for families • Report annually to Council on the progress of the MEYP recommendations • Investigate membership of any community of practice programs e.g. <i>Linking Learning Projects Birth – 12 Years</i> so that the learning about early childhood issues and projects can be shared • Investigate possibility of Patchwork service in PSC/ARRC to enhance service collaboration through the MAV, once pilot program has concluded.

A water tanker – 4 years



MEYP Priority Two:

How can PSC achieve coordinated service delivery across the LGA?

<p>2. Knowledge of funding sources limited, how to access and economies of scale for funds re physical resources, professional development, venues etc.</p> 	<p>2. Investigate further funding possibilities for additional children's services including viable options for good quality affordable childcare, early intervention services and parenting support programs.</p>
<p>3. Continue to strengthen the range of existing programs and linkages</p> 	<p>3. Enhance the planning and delivery of a range of preventive EY health programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to work with the HTGG team and partners to actively promote, maintain and extend the focus and standards on improving children's physical health - adequate nutrition and F & V consumption; immunisation, dental, healthy weight, exercise and physical activity, safe from injury and harm • Partner with professionals from MCH, HTGG, pre-school and school education programs to investigate available funding sources and coordinate planning for range of prevention strategies e.g.; <i>Healthy Families, Healthy Smiles – Early Intervention Oral Hygiene and Health Program; mobile dental units, parent education campaigns, such as Healthy Eating, Smiles 4 Miles etc.</i>
<p>4. Seek ways to close identified service gaps e.g. affordable childcare</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor PSC townships / villages / hamlets to assess the feasibility of child care options • Explore the viability of further 'In Venue' Care settings in the Shire in areas where no other FDC options are possible • Investigate the feasibility of long day childcare places in Avoca.
<p>5. Improve and enhance the provision, promotion and management of infrastructure and services to support children and families.</p> 	<p>5a. Review Council public indoor and outdoor spaces to ensure that each township has accessible space/s that are child and family friendly to accommodate EY education, care and group activities including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate baby / child changing and feeding places • Playgrounds and playground equipment appropriate for early years • Areas suitable for wet weather activities with children • Footpaths within the shire, that are well maintained i.e. in a state that encourages children to ride their bike or for families to walk with prams • Footpaths and connectivity in key children-related sites – walking paths, etc. <p>5b. Strengthen and target the promotion of the existing EY spaces within key venues, such as the Community Resource Centres that are able to accommodate a range of services/programs that attract families and children to gather and chat e.g. Toy Library, parents' groups, MCH visiting services etc.</p> <p>5c. Consider new ways to activate spaces within the CRCs, such as a variety of staffing models/ skills and presenters/ facilitators.</p>

MEYP Priority Three:

How can PSC engage with and better deliver services to vulnerable families across the LGA?

Issue	What Council will do in 2013–17
<p>1. Need to better identify 'vulnerable families' across the LGA area so we can better target service delivery, trial different engagement approaches.</p> 	<p>1. Explore ways of engaging and communicating with vulnerable families about programs and services e.g. what has been tried/has not been tried?</p> <p>Increase understanding of 'vulnerable families' in PSC through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting understanding of the diverse range of families /children across the PSC via the EY network Promoting training opportunities for EY service providers that better assist them to understand their client base and address disadvantage thus improving EY service delivery e.g. the <i>Bridges out of Poverty Training</i> program.
<p>2. Parents lack understanding and/or confidence of how to parent</p> 	<p>2. Source funds and means to build on existing parent education, information and programs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate additional funding and support services through DEECD to enhance Council parent education programs Investigate funding through National programs e.g. liaise with KidsMatter Primary School coordinator for the Grampians region where parenting support and education are a core program component for families with mental health issues Investigate volunteer capacity for parenting education and support and provision of information and programs; e.g. <i>Jack Shonkoff video clips through MCH, pre-school parent education etc</i> Work with Playgroups Victoria, to assist existing Community Playgroups to improve and seek ways of funding and delivering Supported Playgroups within the Shires (e.g. <i>Research Kinda Kinder and Aquinas Supported Playgroups models and viability for our Shires; a mobile Playgroup van; Mother Goose groups, etc</i>) Investigate how to better market services to young parents e.g. increased cross marketing through MCH, use of social media etc Explore flexible options to expand the MCH service, specifically targeting the 2 yo – 3.5 yo service gap Continue to explore and find ways for families and preschool children to come together socially Ensure that each township has a 'space' that is child and family friendly to accommodate early years education, care and group .
<p>3. Anecdotal evidence of unmet need and long waiting lists for services such as mental health (behavioural issues), specialist, speech therapy, and paediatricians.</p> 	<p>3. Map referral processes and pathways for range of specialist children's services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with responsible agencies to collate data on waiting lists, times and service levels Work with the responsible agencies to establish the required and actual service levels from outreach workers to the municipality (GPPCP / HTGG) Establish partnerships and projects to explore ways to streamline referral processes, especially for vulnerable children not receiving appropriate services e.g. children living with mental illness or with a parent/family member with mental illness, children of parents affected by drug or alcohol abuse.

MEYP Priority Three:

How can PSC engage with and better deliver services to vulnerable families across the LGA?

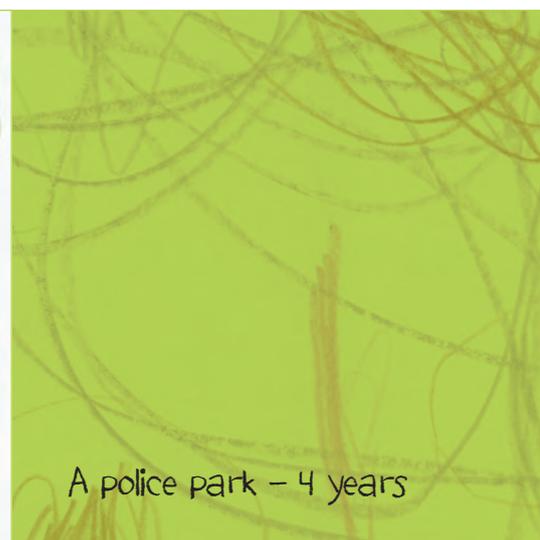
4. Australian Early Development Index - Children categorised as vulnerable on one or more, or two or more, of the 5 AEDI domains considered at particularly high risk developmentally.

- *Pyrenees:* Children vulnerable on one or more domains higher in 2012 than in 2009, especially Beaufort and surrounds. This change is significant.
- *Two or more domains:* Higher in 2012 than 2009 although change is not significant.



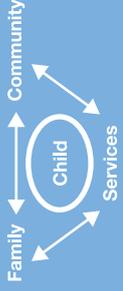
4. Further explore the AEDI data e.g. cross reference to NAPLAN data; liaise with HWTGG team and maternal and child and health nurses re the Key Ages and Stages visiting data, benchmarked best practice for the 2-3.5 year age group? Is there a need for additional contact in this time frame? Is this something we locally test and source funding for.

- Use existing programs to improve outcomes on each of the domains e.g.:
 - a. *Improve the physical health and well being of our children as they enter school*
 - Explore the potential to increase the participation of children at their 3.5-year MCH KAS visit, through integrated promotional programs through MCH services, HTGG, childcare and pre-school/kinder services
 - Develop community child friendly infrastructure that promotes physical activity such as footpaths, walking tracks and playgrounds
 - Support the delivery of additional physical activity and nutrition programs across the Shire.
 - b. *Improve children's social competence as they enter school through providing more opportunities to socially connect within the Shire.*
 - Review library services and promote library programs as they relate to the early years
 - Explore other programs that promote early childhood development including *Let's Read, Mother Goose program – Parenting programs etc*
 - Continue to explore and promote opportunities for families and preschool children to come together socially.
 - c. *Improve the communication skills and general knowledge of children as they enter school*
 - Advance early year's literacy by promoting reading to children from birth to 5 years through MCH, Playgroups, Library etc; seeking funding for specific programs such as Let's Read or equivalent
 - Ensure that EY is a key focus in a review of PSC Library services (location, profile, range of programs, parents' groups etc) and communication strategy.



A police park – 4 years

Appendix One: Early Years Outcomes Framework

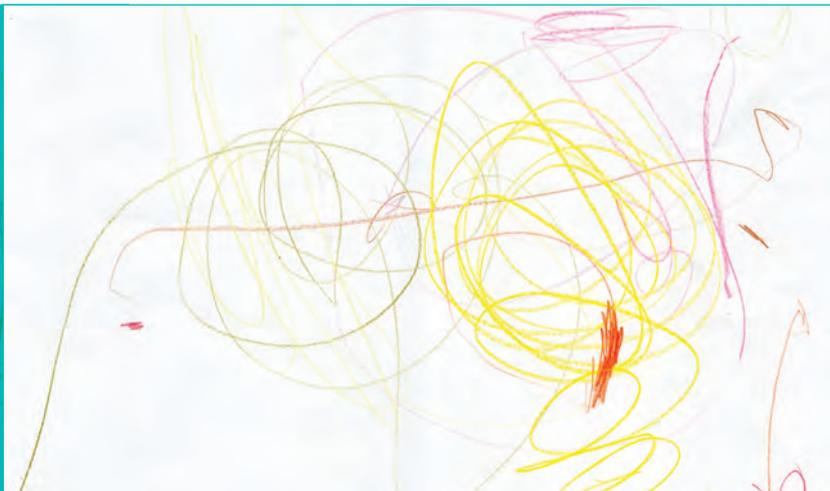
<p>Strong Children Strong Families Strong Partnerships</p>	<p>EARLY YEARS OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK FOR VICTORIA: 0 – 8 YEARS To promote understanding of, and a focus on, children's development, and to support services' own planning, improvement and accountability</p>				
<p>Four inter-related domains</p>					
<p>CHILD</p>	<p>BEING HEALTHY All Victorian children are born and remain healthy, develop positive health behaviours and achieve optimal health</p>	<p>BUILDING WELLBEING All Victorian children develop socially and emotionally, are resilient and have a strong sense of identity and wellbeing</p>	<p>LEARNING AND DEVELOPING All Victorian children learn and develop through engagement in meaningful, high quality educational experiences.</p>	<p>STAYING SAFE All Victorian children experience and grow up in safe environments and communities</p>	
<p>OUTCOMES</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children are born healthy Children receive the nutrition, care, play and rest they need for healthy growth and development Children begin to understand their own health and physical development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children are connected to their world and socially included Children develop and sustain positive relationships Children develop resilience and experience positive mental health Children develop a strong sense of culture and identity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children are confident and involved learners Children develop foundation skills for life and learning Children engage with and benefit from quality educational opportunities and achieve positive outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children's environments are nurturing, safe and secure Children are protected from abuse, neglect, harm and exploitation Children are raised in economically secure environments. 	
<p>INDICATORS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in the proportion of infants who are breastfed Decrease in the proportion of low birth weight babies Increase in the proportion of children who are fully immunised Increase in the proportion of children who eat healthily and get the recommended amount of exercise Decrease in the proportion of children who are overweight and obese Increase in the proportion of children attending Maternal and Child Health Key Ages and Stages visits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in the proportion of children on track socially and emotionally Increase in the proportion of children living in supportive family environments Increase in the proportion of children attending services that promote positive relationships with children and adults Increase in the proportion of families who believe their community is an accepting place for people from diverse cultures and backgrounds Increase in the proportion of children living in neighbourhoods with good access to playgroups, parks and playgrounds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in the proportion of children on track for speech and language Increase in the proportion of children on track for learning and cognitive development Increase in proportion of children who are read to by a family member every day Increase in the proportion of students achieving national minimum standards in NAPLAN Increase in the proportion of children participating in quality Early Childhood Education and Care services Increase in average rates of student attendance at primary school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in the number of children living in a safe and secure environment Increase in the proportion of children attending safe and secure services Decrease in proportion of children exposed to family violence incidents Increase in the number of families who are economically secure Increase in the proportion of parents who have someone to turn to for advice when having problems. 	
<p>Families and communities are strong in their support for each other and create safe environments in which children grow, learn and live well</p>			<p>Optimal outcomes for children are achieved through a quality, effective services approach that is responsive, seamless, cohesive and collaborative</p>		

Appendix Two: Achievements of the Previous Municipal Early Years Plan 2008- 2011

What we said we'd do	What we did
Goal: Planning Together	
Work with other levels of Government to ensure the future development of sustainable EY services in the Shire	<p>Council regularly briefs State and Federal Government representatives on Early Childhood services needs, service gaps and issues and development priorities.</p> <p>Council has identified funding opportunities and submitted funding applications to implement key components of the Early Years Plan.</p>
Actively involve local communities in planning and developing early childhood services in the Shire	Partnered with Eureka Community Kindergarten Association (ECKA) and Federal government to put in place a model and structure around long day care at the Beaufort Children's Centre. Federal grant ceases in Aug 2014 – sustainability needs to be assured after that.
Goal: Promoting Early Childhood Health	
Work with key service providers to ensure effective delivery of Health Promotion programs to families with young children.	<p>The Health Promotion Officer, part of the Victorian government funded initiative Healthy Together Grampians and Goldfields (HTGG) team, is primarily based at PSC and works closely with Council to promote key health services and programs across the Shire.</p> <p>Council continues to build strategic partnerships with EY service providers to assist with better service co-ordination: e.g. ECKA, Uniting Care and YMCA all collaborate closely.</p>
Work with communities and Playgroups Vic to ensure effective support for local Playgroups.	Significant achievements in this area have been achieved and are planned. PSC has three functioning playgroups with a fourth to restart shortly. In the past 6 months one has restarted. The focus is now on other spaces – Waubra / Lexton to start.
Develop the range of information available to families regarding Early Childhood Services.	Council's website and Resident's Welcoming pack includes provision of some key EY information, although there is much work still to do here.
Goal: Improving the Quality of Early Childhood Services Provision in the Shire	
Examine opportunities to co-locate early childhood services in the Shire	Single-use buildings have been replaced by community hubs with the development of Beaufort and Avoca Early Childhood and Family Centres and the Waubra Community Hub. These facilities house a range of pre school, playgroups, MCHS and child care (long and family day)
Enhance the planning and delivery of Family Day Care	All traditional Family Day Care has ceased with the current 2 FDC operating an in venue service. A third Beaufort FDC will also be in venue. There are 2 FDC educators in the PSC located at Avoca and Cross Roads. Beaufort is trying to establish another program with ECKA's support.
Maternal & Child Health Services	Maternal and Child Health Services now sit within Avoca and Beaufort Centres and the Waubra Primary School (the Waubra Community Hub was unsuitable). MCH sits alone at Snake Valley and Lexton. Beyond this home visits apply.

What we said we'd do	What we did
Goal: Improving the Quality of Early Childhood Services Provision in the Shire (cont.)	
Investigate the feasibility of delivering Ongoing Occasional Child Care	No Occasional Child Care services operate in PSC at this time. Council continues to work towards developing other service models that could provide families with child care options. PSC has long day care and FDC at this time.
Examine before and after school care Options	There is no long day care available in Avoca due to non-viable numbers.
Ensure effective coordination and delivery of immunisation services in accordance with the Australian Standards	<p>Immunisation is controlled by the Environmental Health Officer and MCH nurses assist in service delivery.</p> <p>Latest immunisation reports have recorded an increase across the Grampians Medicare Local Area, which includes the Pyrenees sub-region.</p>
Support the effective management of preschool services	<p>All 3 Pre-School/Kindergarten services previously operated out of Council owned facilities, and were identified as needing improvement to meet community needs.</p> <p>All three facilities have been rebuilt or upgraded.</p> <p>There are now three different cluster managers operating in PSC at ECKA, YMCA and Uniting Care.</p>
Goal: Ensuring effective planning, development and management of Early Childhood Service Infrastructure	
Plan, construct and implement a new childcare centre in Beaufort.	Single-use buildings have been replaced by community hubs with the development of Beaufort and Avoca Early Childhood and Family Centres and the Waubra Community Hub. These facilities house pre school, playgroups, MCHS and child care (long and family day)
Maintain or improve the quality of the MCH setting across the Shire.	<p>All centre-based services are delivered from settings that meet standards and provide easy access for families. This is regularly monitored against the appropriate quality standards.</p> <p>All centre-based Maternal and Child Health Services are now located within settings that meet standards and provide easy access for families.</p>

A merry-go-round – 3 years



Appendix Three: Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ARCC	Ararat Rural City Council
ATSI	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
CaFS	Child and Family Services
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
DEECD	Department of Early Childhood Education and Development
EY	Early Years
FaHCSIA	Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
FDC	Family Day Care
HTGG	Healthy Together Grampians and Goldfields
LGA	Local Government Area
LOTE	Language Other than English
MAV	Municipal Association of Victoria
MEYP	Municipal Early Years Plan
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
PSC	Pyrenees Shire Council
SEIFA	Social and Economic Index for Areas
SEHQ	School Entrant Health Questionnaire
TLDS	Transition Learning and Development Statement

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Rainbow park - 4 years





All illustrations in this document taken from 'Beaufort Our Community, by 3 & 4 year old Beaufort children.



PYRENEES
— S H I R E —



Healthy and Well Children