

GANNAWARRA SHIRE Children & Youth STRATEGY 2016-2020

Supporting our children and young people to be the very best they can be through strong connections to the communities they live in.



GANNAWARRA SHIRE
YOUTH COUNCIL




GANNAWARRA
Shire Council

“ Young people should never be seen as a burden on any society, but as its most precious asset....”

(KOFI ANNAN, FORMER SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS)



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 'Children & Youth Strategy' 2016-2020 focuses on guiding Council's role in supporting better outcomes for children and young people. It is a vital document which captures the goals, aspirations and challenges for our children and young people aged 9-18 years and articulates Council's future role in supporting children, young people and their families.

The Gannawarra Shire Children & Youth Strategy is not intended to be a plan for the whole 'service system' within the Shire; instead it articulates Council's role in service and infrastructure provision, planning, advocacy and community development for young people aged 9-18 years and opportunities for partnership with key stakeholders.

It is recommended that the activities in the Gannawarra Shire Children & Youth Strategy be strongly led by young people alongside support from Council and relevant key stakeholders.

Kirby (2004) identifies some of the advantages of including young people in research:

- Young people may identify research opportunities that professionals may miss
- They are likely to ensure that research tools are worded in ways understandable to peers
- They may have different perspectives
- Their informal approach may put respondents at ease
- They are likely to have a better understanding of issues faced by young people
- They are actively involved in issues that affect them; and
- The process recognises the contribution of young people.

Young People's Voices

Gannawarra Shire Council values its children and young citizens and wants to better understand their strengths, challenges and aspirations for the future. To gain greater insight into young people's needs and future goals Gannawarra Shire Council together with Gannawarra Shire Youth Council developed and administered a youth survey, focus groups and age appropriate consultation tools to engage the middle years (children aged 9-11 years). The survey and consultation questions were designed with young people so that they were both relevant and child and youth friendly.

Overall, a total of 637 community members provided input into the development of the Gannawarra Shire Children & Youth Strategy:

- 396 young people completed a youth survey;
- 54 young people attended a small discussion group;
- 76 primary school aged children completed a writing activity;
- 57 service providers completed a survey or attended a focus group;
- 9 Council staff members attended a focus group; and
- 45 members of the wider community attended a focus group or completed a survey.

The dedication of the Youth Council researchers resulted in a remarkable response rate from youth:

- A 44% response rate from a total population of 1011 young people aged 12-18 years across the municipality (Source: ABS Census 2011).
- An 18% response rate from children aged 9-11 years across the municipality (based on ABS Census data 2011).

The children and youth focussed research suggests five key focus areas: health and wellbeing; recreational activities and events; education, careers and employment; leadership, volunteering and civic engagement and effective services and supports.



OUR VISION, VALUES & PRINCIPLES

Our Vision:

We want to grow our young people into resilient, independent, respectful adults, sure of their place in the world.

We Value:

- Young people's diversity and uniqueness.
- Young people's fresh perspective and new ideas.
- Young people's willingness to problem solve, share their ideas and work towards solutions.
- Young people's interest and passion for contributing to change in their communities.
- Young people's concern about the future and their interest in a wide range of issues-not just 'youth issues'.
- Young people's capacity to work respectfully with a diverse range of community members.
- Young people's endeavour to be treated equally as valued community citizens.

Our Youth Participation Principles:

In 2014 Gannawarra Shire Council developed a Youth Charter to affirm its commitment to young people. Young people told us that they want to:

- Have a variety of things to do
- Understand the work that Council and Youth Council does
- Be involved in important community decisions
- Know where they can put their ideas forward
- Have regular access to information on events, activities and supports
- Be actively involved in community projects and events; and
- Be invited to have a say in matters that affect their communities.

Adding to this commitment, Gannawarra Shire Council have adopted the following principles for youth participation developed by Office for Youth and Youth Affairs Council of Victoria:

Principles:

Empowerment: young people having greater control over their lives through participation.

Purposeful engagement: young people taking on valued roles, addressing issues that are relevant to them, and influencing real outcomes.

Inclusiveness: ensuring that all young people are able to participate.



OUR COMMUNITY PROFILE

Our Community



10,366

people lived in Gannawarra at the last census in 2011.

- The Gannawarra Shire covers an area of 3,732.4 square kilometres.
- There are two main townships Kerang (population 3,780) and Cohuna (population 1,893).
- Rural townships are Koondrook (population 802), Leitchville (population 271), Quambatook (population 253) and Lalbert, Murrabit, Mystic Park and Lake Charm, each with a population of less than 250.



Kerang

is on the Melbourne to Swan Hill train line.

- Larger regional centres: Echuca is located 60 minutes to the east, Bendigo about 90 minutes to the south and Swan Hill about 40 minutes to the north.

Our Demographics



Gannawarra Shire's population is ageing with **24% aged 65**

and over in 2011 compared to the Victorian average of 14%.

- The median age is 47 years, compared to median age for Australia of 37 years.
- Gannawarra Shire is home to 1,410 families with children.



The birth rate was 165 in 1999. This has reduced to

112 in 2015/16.

- 89.54% of residents were born in Australia and 94.1% speak only English in the home.
- 1.6% of the population identify as aboriginal (165 people). This is higher than the state average of 1.3%.
- 23.9% of employment is in agriculture, 14.6% manufacturing and construction and 10.5% in health care and social assistance.
- Gannawarra residents were more disadvantaged than the state average as at 2011, with an index of relative socio-economic disadvantage of 959, compared to the Victorian score of 1009.6 – based on income, education, unemployment, skill levels (SEIFA Index of Disadvantage).



27% of households live on less than \$500 per week.

- Low income families with children was 2.9% compared to 1.8% for Victoria.
- 12.9% of families are single parent families with 80.2% of these parents being female.



- Levels of social housing are higher than other areas, 14.1% compared to 11.4% for Victoria.
- 13.9% of adults are at risk of short term harm from alcohol 2012 compared to 10.2% for Victoria.
- 48 children aged 0-17 witnessed family violence incidents in 2011/12.
- In 2008/09, there were 30 substantiated cases of child abuse representing a rate of 23.8 per 1000 children aged 0 to 8 years, compared to 7.0 per 1000 children across Victoria.
- Pre-school attendance the year before starting school is high at 93%, compared to 69.4% in 2009.
- Australian Education and Development Census (AEDC) 2015 showed that 28.7% of prep children surveyed at Gannawarra were vulnerable on one or more domains and 12.8% were vulnerable on two or more domains.
- 85% of children feel connected to their schools in Years 5-9.



Completion of years 8, 9, 10 and 11 is much higher than the Victorian and Australian averages indicating that it is more common for students within the Gannawarra Shire to leave school after completing year 11 to seek employment opportunities or begin a traineeship or apprenticeship.

- In 2014, the number of young people aged 15-19 year olds not participating in education, training or the labour force was 4.6% (31 young people) not in the labour force, another 2.4% (16 young people) not in the labour force and unemployed.
- There is a much lower percentage of people living in the Gannawarra Shire who have completed year 12 or an equivalent (24.3%) compared to averages of Victoria (51.7%) and Australia (49.2%). Given the ageing population, this may suggest that many of the older residents of the shire left school at a younger age.
- 16.4% of people living in Gannawarra Shire have attained a bachelor degree or higher compared to 37.1% in Victoria and 33.7% nationally.
- 43.5% of people living in Gannawarra Shire have attained a Certificate. This is higher than the state average (29.2%) and the national average (32.3%).



In 2008, the rate of births to females between 15-19 years of age in Gannawarra was 25.1 per 1000 teenage females. This rate was higher than the rate in the Loddon Mallee region (19.1 per 1000 teenage women) and more than double the Victorian rate (Vic = 10.6 per 1000 teenage females).

Source: Adolescent Community Profile – Shire of Gannawarra 2010 – Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

COUNCIL'S ROLE IN CHILDREN & YOUTH SERVICE DELIVERY

Gannawarra Shire Council is currently committed to the provision of youth development support through its **Youth Development Officer** role. The growing importance of the 'middle years' (ages 9-11) has resulted in Gannawarra Shire Council extending its youth support program to include this pre-teen age group, wherever possible, in relevant activities, programs and events.

Council's Youth Development role focusses on a range of activities, programs and events with the aim of connecting young people to community, strengthening civic engagement, developing youth leadership, embracing and growing diversity and advocating for young people on matters of importance.

Achievements and Aspirations:

Gannawarra Shire Council has met these desired aims through the following activities, events, programs and networks:

Gannawarra Shire Youth Council - Youth Council commenced in 2006 offering young people who live work or study in the Gannawarra municipality opportunities to build their civic engagement and make a difference to the communities that they live in. Youth Council works closely with secondary schools and Gannawarra Shire Councillors to provide young people opportunities for community connection and personal growth and leadership.

Planning & Advocacy - Gannawarra Shire Council plans and advocates for children and young people through active membership on:

- Mallee Children and Youth Area Partnership which has a strong focus on prevention and early intervention for vulnerable children and families
- Youthworks- a youth service provider network
- Regular Principal Network Meetings
- School Focussed Youth Service
- GLAM- Gannawarra Local Agency Meeting; and
- Southern Mallee Primary Care Partnership

In addition Gannawarra Shire Council is also a key partner in the development of a combined Sub-Regional Youth Strategy for Gannawarra, Swan Hill and Buloke Shires (2016-2020).

Key achievements to date include:

- Guiding the development of the 2010-2014 Gannawarra Shire Youth Strategy
- Guiding the development of the Gannawarra Shire Youth Charter
- Development of the Gannawarra Youth Council Induction Kit
- Advocacy for youth activities and events, e.g. Free skate workshops delivered by SBA, FreeZA Program, National Youth Week
- Participation in the YMCA Youth Parliament Program
- Advocacy for infrastructure development projects for youth spaces, e.g. Kerang Skate Park redevelopment
- Building networks with local and state representatives of Parliament
- Attendance at the Annual Halogen Young Leaders Conference
- Participation in Meals on Wheels Program



FIVE WAYS TO WELLBEING

The **Five Ways to Wellbeing** underpin the health and wellbeing directive of the Gannawarra Shire, they provide a foundation for considering how to support, engage and develop children and young people living in the Shire. The five philosophies are: **Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning and Give.** These five ways to wellbeing also underpin the Youth Strategy objectives and activities.

The Five Ways to Wellbeing were developed by New Economics Foundation from evidence gathered in the UK government's Foresight Project on Mental Capital and Wellbeing.

CONNECT... with the people around you. With family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. At home, work, school or in your local community. Think of these as the cornerstones of your life and invest time in developing them. Building these connections will support and enrich you every day.

BE ACTIVE... Go for a walk or run. Step outside. Cycle. Play a game. Garden. Dance. Exercising makes you feel good. Most importantly, discover a physical activity you enjoy and one that suits your level of mobility and fitness.

TAKE NOTICE... Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Remark on the unusual. Notice the changing seasons. Savour the moment, whether you are walking to work, eating lunch or talking to friends. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.

KEEP LEARNING... Try something new. Rediscover an old interest. Sign up for that course. Take on a different responsibility at work. Fix a bike. Learn to play an instrument or how to cook your favourite food. Set a challenge you will enjoy achieving. Learning new things will make you more confident as well as being fun.

GIVE... Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger. Thank someone. Smile. Volunteer your time. Join a community group. Look out, as well as in. Seeing yourself, and your happiness, linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and creates connections with the people around you.

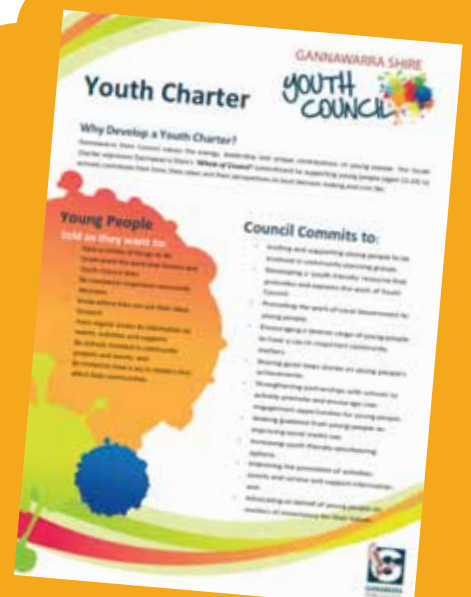
GANNAWARRA SHIRE COUNCIL YOUTH CHARTER

In 2014 Gannawarra Shire Youth Council invited over one hundred young people's voices into the development of a Youth Charter to guide Gannawarra Shire Council's 'whole of Council' commitment to young people.

The Youth Charter articulates Council's ongoing commitment to young people:

Council Commits to:

- Inviting and supporting young people to be involved in community planning groups.
- Developing a 'youth friendly' resource that promotes and explains the work of Youth Council.
- Promoting the work of Local Government to young people.
- Encouraging a diverse range of young people to have a say on important community matters.
- Sharing good news stories on young people's achievements.
- Strengthening partnerships with schools to actively promote and encourage civic engagement opportunities for young people.
- Seeking guidance from young people on improving social media use.
- Increasing youth friendly volunteering options.
- Improving the promotion of activities, events and service and support information; and
- Advocating for young people on matters of importance.



KEY FOCUS AREAS



1. HEALTH & WELL BEING



2. RECREATION, ACTIVITIES & EVENTS



3. EDUCATION, CAREERS & EMPLOYMENT



4. LEADERSHIP, VOLUNTEERING & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT



5. EFFECTIVE SERVICES & SUPPORTS





1. HEALTH & WELLBEING

Health and wellbeing is of great importance to children, young people and their families. Young people want healthy relationships, safe and welcoming communities and good physical and mental health.

Mental Health

Young people surveyed were twice as concerned about mental health (31%) as they were in 2010 (15%).

Body Image

Females were almost four times more concerned about body image (49%) than males and five times more concerned about eating disorders (26%) than males.

Community Connections

33% (125 young people) surveyed were either neutral, disagreed or strongly disagreed that they regularly got involved in community activities

Drug & Alcohol

In the 16-18 year old age group 78% of those surveyed had used alcohol, 27% had smoked cigarettes and 14% had tried marijuana.

Physical Activity

82% of young people were engaged in sport, an increase of 8% when compared to the 2010 Gannawarra Youth Survey.

Supports

85% of young people surveyed had trusted adults in their lives and 86% had close friends they could rely on. A greater number of young people (18%) said they would use the internet to seek support and advice compared to a lesser 5% in 2010.

Priority actions for Council:

- Support providers to promote available services and supports for young people (and their families) to organisations, schools, parents, young people and the wider community.
- Involve young people in exploring ways to improve social inclusion and acceptance of diversity/culture amongst youth and the broader community.
- Engage Youth Council, schools, Northern District Community Health Service and relevant service providers to create youth led campaigns to tackle health and wellbeing concerns (e.g. drugs/ alcohol/smoking, safe partying, mental health, body image and bullying).
- Work closely with Headspace to optimise their future support of Gannawarra Shire youth.
- Continue to build on the development of community gyms or parks/outdoor spaces with exercise equipment.
- Advocate for improved and local access to health and wellbeing supports for children, young people and their families.
- Continue to work closely with the Mallee Children & Youth Area Partnership to improve outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and their families.
- Work in partnership to continue to strengthen sexual health information, services and resources and encourage respectful relationships between young people.
- Strengthen education around underage smoking and regulation to prevent sale of cigarettes to young people.
- Support young people to develop social connections and build resilience to enhance ability to cope with, adapt to and bounce back from change and challenges they experience in their lives.

"I would make sure underage young people are not drinking early or smoking."



2. RECREATION, ACTIVITIES & EVENTS

Children and young people told us that they want a range of things to do: weekend, night-time and school holiday activities and events, arts and cultural activities and events and a broad range of sporting activities

Arts/Culture

The need for more arts/cultural activities was highlighted by young people who took part in the consultation phase.

Parks & Playgrounds

24% of children surveyed mentioned that playgrounds and parks were what they liked best about where they lived.

Pools

28% of children mentioned swimming as a favorite activity and 29% suggested pool upgrades were needed.

Boredom

Boredom/not having much to do is the top thing that young people didn't like about where they lived. 34% of young people surveyed suggested that having more things to do would make Gannawarra Shire a better place for young people.

Sports Facilities

82% of young people surveyed were engaged in sport. The importance of dynamic sporting facilities to support cricket, basketball, swimming and other favoured sports were highlighted by children and young people.

Community Involvement

33% (125 young people) surveyed were either neutral, disagreed or strongly disagreed that they regularly got involved in community activities.

Priority actions for Council:

- Plan together with key stakeholders, children and young people to offer a greater number of arts and cultural activities and events (including learning about and celebrating Aboriginal culture).
- Partner with Northern District Community Health Service, FREEZA and stakeholders to hold events during school holidays and on weekends.
- Involve young people and key stakeholders in planning for the upkeep and improvement of recreational facilities across the municipality.
- Plan together with children, young people and their families to assure continued maintenance and upgrading of playgrounds and parks across the municipality.
- Explore the use of the library to offer book clubs, social activities, video game events and space for study and homework.
- Continue to develop and build on arts and cultural activities for young people.
- Continue to improve safety and connections within communities to support active transport by children, young people and their families.

"I like when there are activities on, which gets us out and socialising".



3. EDUCATION, CAREERS & EMPLOYMENT

Young people care about their educational opportunities and transitions and their career and employment opportunities for the future.

Working

69% of young people aged 16-18 who were surveyed were engaged in either part time or casual work.

Study Pressures

Not keeping up with school work (36%) remains a top five concern for young people who were surveyed.

University

53% of young people surveyed were planning on attending university; this is up 15% from 2010 youth survey figures.

Youth Retention

Four times more males (16%) than females were planning to stay in the area after finishing school.

Hopes, Dreams & Goals

83% of young people agreed or strongly agreed that their family had helped them to explore their hopes, dreams, and goals for the future.

Limited Work/Career Options

23% of young people surveyed in the 12-18 year old age group were looking for work. Limited choices for the variety of work young people could apply for was also an issue- e.g. plenty of hospitality, retail work but not many options outside of that. The lack of career opportunities was also flagged as a concern.

Priority actions for Council:

- Develop a partnership agreement between schools and the community sector that articulates principles and a shared platform for working together.
- Explore youth social enterprise project opportunities with key stakeholders and young people and seek resources/ support to implement the desired project(s).
- Promote local career and training opportunities for young people (including Council specific career and training opportunities, cadetships and work experience programs).
- Offer support to key stakeholders wishing to start or who are coordinating homework support programs.
- Work together with schools and key stakeholders to support key educational transitions for children and young people especially young people leaving their communities to engage in education and training opportunities.
- Advocate for additional youth specific employment and training opportunities for young people living in the Gannawarra Shire.
- Support projects within Gannawarra schools that build a culture that emphasises the importance of mental wellbeing for young people.

"Young people need more opportunities to establish a promising career".



4. LEADERSHIP, VOLUNTEERING & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Having a say on matters of importance, building personal leadership skills and gaining experiences and connections through volunteering is important for young people in Gannawarra Shire.

Volunteering

13% of young people who were surveyed were volunteering during their spare time.

Boredom

Boredom/not having much to do is the top thing that young people didn't like about where they lived.

Social Media

Social media (62%) is the second favoured activity that young people were engaged in during their spare time.

Council Facebook Page

Only 8% of young people surveyed were connected to and regularly reading Gannawarra Shire Council's Youth Council page posts.

Youth Retention

24% of young people surveyed were planning on staying in Gannawarra Shire or leaving for study/travel etc. then returning.

Connections

72% of respondents knew their neighbours and got along with them well, 68% regularly got involved in community activities, 70% felt connected and welcome at school, 85% had trusted adults in their lives that they could depend on and 86% said they had close friends in their lives that they could rely on.

Priority actions for Council:

- Celebrate children and young people and encourage them to be the very best they can be through strong connections to the communities they live in. Value our young people as active participants in our community.
- Review Youth Council's Social Media presence and explore ways to better connect with and hear from a broader range of young people.
- Work with council directorates, community organisations, service clubs and businesses to build their capacity to offer well supported and diverse 'youth friendly' volunteer opportunities.
- Partner with schools to offer a dynamic annual Youth Council experience for young people.
- Encourage and support young people to take part in the Loddon Murray Youth Leadership Pilot Program.
- Promote and implement the principles of the Gannawarra Shire Council Youth Charter.
- Encourage and support a diverse range of young people to get involved in a wide range of community projects and advisory groups (not just youth specific projects) so that they can build and broaden their leadership skills.

"There are many more opportunities than city students to work, volunteer and contribute to our community".



5. EFFECTIVE SERVICES & SUPPORTS

Having a range of supportive, accessible and effective services and supports on hand is vital for supporting improved outcomes for children, young people and their families.

Online Supports

A greater number of young people (18%) said they would use the internet to seek support and advice compared to a lesser 5% in 2010.

Family & Friends

Young people were most comfortable in going to their parent(s) (75%) and friends (72%) for advice and support about their most concerning issues.

Transport

20% of young people surveyed identified access to transport as an issue.

Access to transport was also identified as an important issue in focus groups and during the think tank.

Geographic Isolation

Geographic isolation was identified as an issue for children, young people and families by 50% of parents/ community members and service providers who were surveyed.

Service Accessibility

29% of parents/ community members identified access to services and supports as an issue of concern.

50% of service providers surveyed also flagged service accessibility as a major issue of concern.

Service Accessibility

20% of parents who completed a survey shared that they had needed support for their children or family in the past 12 months but had not been able to access it.

39% of parents flagged the availability of Services for children and young people with additional needs as an issue.

Priority actions for Council:

- Strengthen partnerships with schools and key organisations providing support to children, young people and their families.
- Promote and support the L2P program across the Gannawarra Shire.
- Work together with Mallee Children and Youth Area Partnership and other key stakeholders to enhance service collaboration and integration particularly for vulnerable children, young people and their families.
- Advocate for children, young people and their families around service gaps and lack of resources, alongside local partners, including YACVIC.
- Advocate for improved internet and mobile phone reception across Gannawarra Shire.
- Work together with School Focussed Youth Service, Swan Hill Rural City Council and Buloke Shire Council to develop a sub-regional youth strategy to guide joined up activities and advocacy.
- Exploring the 5 Megatrends developed by VicHealth and CSIRO with our young people and preparing them for future realities.

"I'd like Council to focus on developing sound relationships with schools and community agencies which are based on respect and mutual goals".

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