

# Greater Shepparton BEST START EARLY YEARS PLAN 2020-2025



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#### Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

We, Greater Shepparton City Council, acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land which now comprises Greater Shepparton. We pay respect to their tribal Elders, we celebrate their continuing culture and we acknowledge the memory of their ancestors.

## Message from the Mayor

As the Mayor of Greater Shepparton and Chair of the Best Start Early Years Partnership, I am very pleased to present the Greater Shepparton Best Start Early Years Plan 2020-2025.



Greater Shepparton is a culturally rich and diverse community, boasting a population in excess of 65,000 and home to the largest Indigenous population outside of Melbourne. We are a family friendly municipality and pride ourselves on the wonderful facilities, attractions, services, education and employment opportunities that make our city a great place for families to live.

While we celebrate the many assets and strengths of our community, we also acknowledge the challenges and barriers some families experience. We understand the need to respond and act to support families, services and community so children have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

This new plan outlines five priority areas and a number of key outcomes of where our community needs to take action if we are to improve outcomes for our children. This will be achieved with the support of local service providers, community members and most importantly a child's family.

The extensive research around the importance of investment in the early years is now unquestionable – we must invest as a community, as a society, if we are to make long term change.

I would like to thank and congratulate all who have been involved in the development of this new plan. The Best Start program has now been in operation since 2003 and this is our fifth combined strategic plan (Best Start and Municipal Early Years Plan).

We are excited about the way forward with this new plan and continuing to prioritise and advocate for our most precious asset - our children.

**Cr Seema Abdullah,**

**Chair of the Greater Shepparton Best Start  
Early Years Partnership**

**Mayor of Greater Shepparton**

## Introduction

Greater Shepparton is committed to ensuring every child within the municipality is provided the optimal opportunity to thrive. As the ARACY (Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth) Nest vision for children highlights, this means:

'All young people are loved and safe, have material basics, are healthy, are learning and participating, and have a positive sense of identity and culture.'

Greater Shepparton City Council plays a critical role in the investment and delivery of services and recreational opportunities in our municipality. By working in partnership with the community, families, children and key stakeholders, Council will provide high quality, responsive and innovative services and programs that support children to thrive.

### There are three major ways of achieving this:

- Council's Direct Delivery of Early Years Services such as Maternal and Child Health, playgroups, kindergartens and childcare.<sup>1</sup>
- Council involvement in other facilities/activities/ programs for children such as playgrounds, walking and bike tracks, Children's Week and Activities in the Park.

- Council's lead role in coordinating planning and service development in the interests of children through its Best Start Program and the Best Start Early Years Plan.
- Council's ongoing collaboration and partnership with lead agencies in Greater Shepparton to help deliver programs for families.

This new Best Start Early Years Plan 2020-2025, hereinafter referred to as the Plan, has been created through consideration of what we know – what expert research and evidence says about the needs of children, what we know about how children are faring here in Greater Shepparton, and what our local experts say we can be doing into the future to assist and support all children to thrive.

While the Plan covers children aged 0 to 6 years, there is a particular focus on the ages of 0 to 3 when brain development and growth is at its most rapid and the foundations for future skill acquisition are laid.

Actions to achieve what we hope for the future are built around the 5 themes of PLAY, LEARN, THRIVE, VOICE and SHARE.

<sup>1</sup>Please note Greater Shepparton City Council is not the only provider of playgroups, childcare and kindergartens



## WHAT WE KNOW

### The Importance of the Early Years – The First Thousand Days

The First Thousand Days – the period from conception to the end of a child's second year – is the period of the greatest developmental plasticity, and what happens during this time can have life-long consequences for health and wellbeing.

The Centre for Community Child Health developed an evidence paper summary in September 2017 titled 'The First Thousand Days' which examined the impact of early experiences on all aspects of development and functioning; including health and wellbeing, mental health, social functioning, and cognitive development. The paper acknowledged that the Australian public's understanding of the significance of the first 1000 days is limited, despite the growing focus and evidence on the importance of this period of a child's life, and that it should be a key issue for all levels of Government.

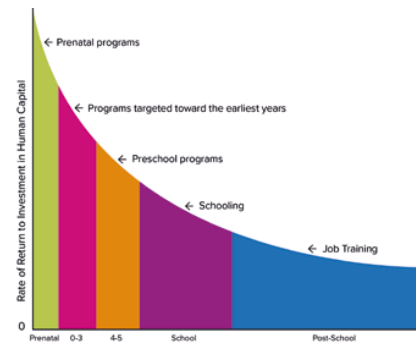
To ensure this remains our core focus the BSEYP 2020-2025 will use 'The First Thousand Days' document as its guiding framework. We believe it is part of our role to increase the knowledge and understanding of this critical growth period amongst parents, carers, service providers and community.

A number of key messages were highlighted in the summary paper, one of the most powerful being, 'what is undisputed is that reversing early adverse adaptations or inheritances gets progressively harder after the first 1000 days. While it is never too late to make changes, the first and best opportunity we have to build strong foundations for optimal development is during the first 1000 days'.<sup>2</sup>

### Investment in the Early Years is critical

#### EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IS A SMART INVESTMENT

The earlier the investment, the greater the return



Source: James Heckman, Nobel Laureate in Economics

This graphic shows that the highest rate of economic returns comes from the earliest investments in children, providing an eye-opening understanding that society invests too much money on later development when it is often too late to provide great value. It shows the economic benefits of investing early and building skill upon skill to provide greater success to more children and greater productivity and reduce social spending for society.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Centre for Community Child Health, The First Thousand Days: A evidence paper summary, September 2017

<sup>3</sup> Heckman Equation – <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/the-heckman-curve/>



## The Greater Shepparton Demographic and Community Profile

### In 2016 in Greater Shepparton : <sup>4</sup>

- 4218 residents were aged 0 to 4 years (6.6% of the population)
- 4377 residents were aged 5 to 9 years (6.9% of the population)
- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander census population was 2180, of which 249 were children aged 0 to 4 years
- 9503 people were born overseas
- 14.6% of people spoke a language other than English at home
- 27.8% of households were made up of couples with children
- 26,978 people were employed, of which 60% worked full-time and 37% part-time
- The unemployment rate was 6.4%
- Our SEIFA index was 948

### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population

Greater Shepparton is proud to have a strong Aboriginal heritage. Around 1.6 percent of people in our municipality identified as Aboriginal in the 2016 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census. However, as documented in the Greater Shepparton Public Health and Wellbeing Strategic Plan 2018-2028, anecdotal evidence suggests that this is very under-represented, and the actual Aboriginal population for Greater Shepparton is nearly three times this, with a population of nearly 6,000. <sup>5</sup>

### Cultural diversity

Shepparton has one of the largest rural settlement populations in Victoria. We are also proud of Shepparton's long migration history dating back to World War 1 which has resulted in a rich diverse community made up of over 30 nationalities from diverse cultural backgrounds including humanitarian entrants, family stream

migrants, dependants of skilled migrants and prospective marriage and provisional partner visa holders and their dependants. More than 50 languages are spoken in the region. Almost 1,300 new arrivals from multicultural backgrounds settled in Greater Shepparton between 2013 and 2017. <sup>6</sup> The municipality's population is anticipated to 75,700 persons by 2030. A significant number of residents are anticipated to be from culturally diverse backgrounds (Greater Shepparton Council, 2018).

Multicultural organisations in Greater Shepparton that work closely with the various communities are committed to promoting cultural diversity in our region and strengthen the sustainability and culture of communities which reside in the area.

### SEIFA

Greater Shepparton had a SEIFA score of 948 in 2016 and ranks in the bottom 20% of municipalities in Victoria in terms of disadvantage for families. <sup>7</sup>

SEIFA, developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, ranks areas in Australia according to relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage. The average for Australia is a score of 1000. SEIFA scores are expressed on a scale where lower numbers always mean more disadvantage and less advantage, while higher numbers mean less disadvantage and more advantage.

### Australian Early Development Census

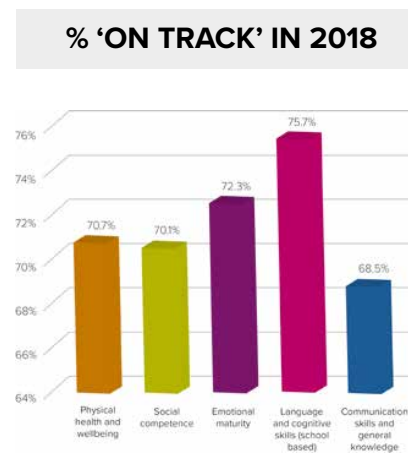
Greater Shepparton now has five sets of AEDC data (2008, 2009, 2012, 2015 and 2018), including a specific Aboriginal Community profile (2008 and 2018) and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Community Profile (2018). The AEDC is a measure of how well a community has supported the development of children prior to school entry.

In the 2018 data collection, 904 children were assessed in their first year of formal schooling. Of these, 30.8% of children were considered developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains, and 19.4% were considered vulnerable on two or more domains (a 'significant increase' from the 2015 results).

This is concerning data for Greater Shepparton.

Over a 10 year period our municipality has seen an increase in the number and percentage of children considered developmentally vulnerable. Recent forums and workshops have identified the need for a whole of community response to these results. This Plan aims to respond to our most recent results and aims to increase the percentage of children 'on track' by the 2024 collection. <sup>8</sup>

The graph below shows the percentage of children 'on track' in each of the five domains for 2018, and is our baseline measurement for this Plan.



### Families

Families are diverse. Often when we think of families, the traditional nuclear and extended family may come to mind. But the meaning of family is multifaceted, and can have more to do with relationships, emotional bonds, connections and values than it does with people who we are biologically related to.

For the purpose of this Plan, we identify a family unit to be made up of anyone a person considers to be 'their family.'

<sup>4</sup> 2016 ABS demographic data for Greater Shepparton

<sup>5</sup> Greater Shepparton Public Health and Wellbeing Strategic Plan 2018-2028

<sup>6</sup> Department of Social Services 2018

<sup>7</sup> City of Greater Shepparton Community Profile. Profile.id

<sup>8</sup> Greater Shepparton AEDC Community Profile 2018



## Community Consultation

To assist in the development of this Plan we have drawn on consultation undertaken by Communities for Children and the Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project.

The '1000 Conversations' conducted in 2018 by The Lighthouse Project was the second round of consultation with community members. Key insights and feedback from people included the need for:

- Parents and carers who are actively involved and whom feel supported and empowered to provide the best care and support they can
- Meaningful educational experiences with educators who genuinely care, tailored learning approaches and a space free from bullying
- A safe and stable environment with access to shelter, healthy food, hygiene and medical assistance
- Access to extracurricular activities that build social connection

Communities for Children consulted with the local aboriginal community to better understand some of the barriers and enablers experienced by families when accessing or utilising early years services. Transport, days and times of operation, feeling welcomed by staff and valuing culture was some of the feedback obtained.

## Learnings from the BSEYP 2015-2019

- Strong interagency relationships are the core of progressing initiatives and achieving change
- Communication and information sharing between universal, secondary and tertiary services to support vulnerable children and families has improved but there is still much work to be done
- There is an urgent need to collectively respond to the AEDC 2018 results
- More concentrated effort in micro communities has been beneficial to trial or test strategies before scaling up across services

## The State of Greater Shepparton's Children Report 2019

The State of Greater Shepparton's Children Report was first developed in 2014, bringing together a broad range of publicly available data related to the key health indicators of health, education, development and wellbeing of children in our community aged 0 to 18 years. The report is a partnership between Best Start, Communities for Children and The Lighthouse Project.

The second edition looks at the same data sets (where available), and presents the data in a way that shows whether Greater Shepparton is doing better or worse in relation to Victorian key indicators. This report is a most valuable resource for key stakeholders and our community to better understand how our children are developing and faring in a number of different areas.

## Progressive Universalism

### Progressive Universalism – a continuum of child needs and service integration



Original concept: [www.everychildmatters.gov.au](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.au) – now archived  
Adapted by Greater Shepparton Best Start Team November 2014

Acknowledged in the previous plan as a way to foster a more integrated service continuum between universal, secondary and tertiary services, the progressive universalism concept highlights the importance of having a focus on all children. This notion has been reinforced and supported by the Partnership after review of our most current AEDC results. While greater resources and more intensive support is required for those children and families with complex needs and a higher level of vulnerability, it is critical we do not lose sight of those currently 'on track' within the universal service system, and support these children and families to continue to thrive

## State and National Policy Context

A number of key policy and research documents have been considered in the development of the Greater Shepparton Best Start Early Years Plan 2020-2025. These include:

- Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework 2016 (revised)
- Belonging, Being and Becoming – The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia 2010
- Early Childhood Reform Plan 2017
- Roadmap for Reform Strong Families Safe Children
- Victoria's Vulnerable Children Our Shared Responsibility 2013-2022
- Supporting Children and Families in the Early Years – A Compact between DET, DHHS and Local Government 2017-2027
- The First Thousand Days – Centre for Community Child Health
- National Quality Standards (NQS)



## WHAT WE WILL DO

The outcomes included in this Plan are guided by what expert evidence says about the needs of children, what we know about how children are faring here in Greater Shepparton, and what our local experts say we can be doing in the future to assist all children to thrive. They are set out under five key themes of PLAY, LEARN, THRIVE, VOICE AND SHARE.

It is important to acknowledge the good and promising work already happening in Greater Shepparton, the strength of the early years service system, the many wonderful child and family friendly facilities and activities available and the professional partnerships that exist between service providers. It is also imperative to recognise the need for change. Our AEDC data tells us that we need to think differently and critically about early years development, investment and partnerships if we are to achieve improvement.

The BSEYP 2020-2025 will be underpinned by an Early Years Action Plan which will be developed through consultation with the community and key stakeholders to determine the best ways to achieve the outcomes set out under Play, Learn, Thrive, Voice and Share. The Early Years Action Plan will be a living document, giving the Partnership and workgroups the ability to respond to the current and emerging issues that impact on the lives of our children, families and service system.



# THEME 1: PLAY

*‘Children need the freedom and time to play. Play is not a luxury. Play is a necessity’*

*Kay Redfield Jamison*

**Outcome 1.1** – Children and families engage and participate in playgroups

**Outcome 1.2** – Children and families are active and playing together

#### Measures of Success

- A minimum increase of 3% for children 'on track' in the Physical Health and Wellbeing AEDC domain by 2024
- A minimum increase of 3% for children 'on track' in the Social Competence AEDC domain by 2024
- Increased number of children meeting the daily physical activity requirements





## THEME 2: **LEARN**

*'The goal of early childhood education should be to activate the child's own natural desire to learn*

*Maria Montessori*

**Outcome 2.1** – Children engage and participate in early childhood education (Best Start outcome)

**Outcome 2.2** – Families are supported to have the knowledge, skills and confidence to be their child's first educator

**Outcome 2.3** – Children have access to the supports they need to ensure active engagement in learning

### Measures of Success

- 100% of children have a kindergarten year before they attend primary school
- A reduction in the percentage of children identified as vulnerable in their kindergarten year
- A minimum increase of 3% for children 'on track' in the Language and Cognitive skills AEDC domain by 2024
- A minimum increase of 3% for children 'on track' in the Communication Skills and General Knowledge AEDC domain by 2024



## THEME 3: THRIVE

*'A child's life is like a piece of paper on which every person leaves a mark'*

*Robert A. Heinlein*

**Outcome 3.1** – Children and families actively engage with Maternal and Child Health services, attending key ages and stages visits (Best Start outcome)

**Outcome 3.2** – Our community is supported to fully understand the critical importance of the First Thousand Days

#### Measures of Success:

- Maintain and increase the percentage of completed MCH key age and stage visits
- Closing the Gap - a reduction in the gap between MCH attendance rates for Aboriginal children and non Aboriginal children
- Staff have the knowledge and skills to identify and respond to vulnerability factors
- A minimum increase of 3% for children 'on track' in the Emotional Maturity AEDC domain by 2024



## THEME 4: VOICE

*'If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales'*

*Albert Einstein*

**Outcome 4.1** – Children have the language skills required for optimal learning

**Outcome 4.2** – Consultation and feedback is sought from families and children to inform early years planning and development

**Measures of Success:**

- A minimum increase of 3% for children 'on track' in the AEDC Language and Cognitive skills domain by 2024
- A minimum increase of 3% for children 'on track' in the AEDC Communication Skills and General Knowledge domain by 2024



## THEME 4: SHARE

*Children are human beings to whom respect is due, superior to us by reason of their innocence and of the greater possibilities of their future'*

*Maria Montessori*

**Outcome 5.1** – Further community engagement and response to the AEDC

**Outcome 5.2** – Our community has a shared responsibility for its children

**Measures of Success:**

- 100% of primary schools with Foundation students participate in the 2021 and 2024 AEDC data collection
- A reduction in the percentage of children developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains by 2024



# WHO WILL LEAD THE WAY?

## The Greater Shepparton Best Start Early Years Partnership

The Greater Shepparton Best Start Early Years Partnership is recognised as the local 'expert' early years body and is responsible for the overall governance of the Plan. Greater Shepparton City Council remains responsible for the endorsement of the Plan and is the fund holder for the Best Start program. Advocacy is a key role of the Partnership, bringing to the table a number of major issues that impact on our community.

The Partnership is supported by a number of workgroups and reference groups. The expertise, knowledge and skills of members provides significant influence and provides a voice for our early years. Membership includes parents, community members, service, education, health, government and Council representatives and collectively they drive the work of the Best Start Early Years Plan to make Greater Shepparton a great place for children and families to have a voice, play, learn, share and thrive.

## Council's role in the early years

Greater Shepparton City Council plays a critical role in the planning and delivery of early years services for our community. Under the Local Government Act Victoria (1989), a Council's role is to:

- Facilitate the involvement of community members and council staff in the development, improvement and coordination of Local Government
- Coordinate with other public bodies to ensure that services and facilities are provided and resources used effectively
- Ensure adequate planning for the future of its community in the municipal district
- Represent and promote the interests of the community and to be responsive to the needs of the community

## Early Years Services managed and offered by Greater Shepparton City Council include:

- Maternal and Child Health
- Kindergarten – Year Before School and Pre Kinder
- Kindergarten Central Registration
- Early Start to Kindergarten
- Long Day Care
- Occasional Care
- Family Day Care
- Supported Playgroups

## Other programs, services and facilities for families provided or managed by Council include:

- Library services
- Playgrounds
- Bike and walking tracks
- Aquamoves
- Activities in the Park program

This level of investment in service provision is considerable, given other Local Governments have limited involvement in the direct service delivery of family and children's services. It also places Greater Shepparton City Council in a prime position to influence and drive positive change in the way universal services operate, collaborate, communicate and deliver programs to best meet the cultural and diverse needs of the community.

There is also opportunity to partner or work with some of the other great programs and initiatives happening in Greater Shepparton to progress the work of the Plan.

## Evaluation Framework

### How will we know if we have achieved what we have set out to achieve?

There will be regular reflection, adaptation (if necessary) and reporting undertaken by the Partnership and relevant workgroups to track progress against the strategies and actions set out in the Early Years Action Plan, and the Measures of Success documented under the five themes of the BSEYP. Annual reporting to Council and the community will also occur. The availability of service and community data will be pivotal to evaluation, with the acknowledgement that while some determinates of success will be accessible yearly, others are only available every three to four years (e.g. AEDC).

The Best Start program uses the Model for Improvement framework, consisting of an annual Program Logic and Plan Do Study Act cycles to test and measure small changes or improvements linked to short term outcomes. <sup>9</sup>

## MODEL FOR IMPROVEMENT: 'The implementing part' (PDSA cycles)



It also needs to be acknowledged that there are many other projects and programs that are undertaking promising work in similar areas, and that success within this Plan can be contributed to the various initiatives, programs and plans working collectively.

<sup>9</sup> Developed for Best Start sites by the Centre for Community Child Health





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to those who have been involved in the development of the Greater Shepparton Best Start Early Years Plan 2020 – 2025.

We thank you for your time, feedback and commitment to making Greater Shepparton a great place to live.

*Working together for the children and families of Greater Shepparton*

## DEFINITIONS

- ABS** – Australian Bureau of Statistics
- AEDC** – Australian Early Development Census
- ARACY** – Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth
- BSEYP** – Best Start Early Years Plan
- DET** – Department of Education and Training
- DHHS** – Department of Health and Human Services
- ESK** – Early Start to Kindergarten
- GSCC** – Greater Shepparton City Council
- MCH** – Maternal and Child Health
- SEIFA** – Social Economic Indexes for Areas



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# APPENDIX

## Linking the Greater Shepparton Best Start Early Years Plan 2020-2025 to other Council Plans

BSEYP Theme - Play	Relationship to Council Plan	Relationship to Public Health Strategic Plan 2018-2028
<p>Play</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children and families engage and participate in Supported Playgroups</li> <li>Children and families are active and playing together</li> </ul>	<p>2.1 Greater Shepparton is a welcoming, inclusive and safe place for all.</p> <p>2.4 Social and cultural, educational and employment opportunities are created to enable children, young people, individuals and families to actively participate in their community.</p> <p>2.7 Greater Shepparton is valued for cultural celebrations, inclusion and engagement of our diverse communities.</p> <p>2.8 Our Aboriginal culture and people are valued and celebrated, with collaborative actions undertaken to enable peaceful, healthy and productive lives in a safe environment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide inclusive physical activity and active participation opportunity for all ages and abilities.</li> <li>Increase the proportion of people meeting the recommended guidelines for physical activity from baseline 54 per cent.</li> </ul>

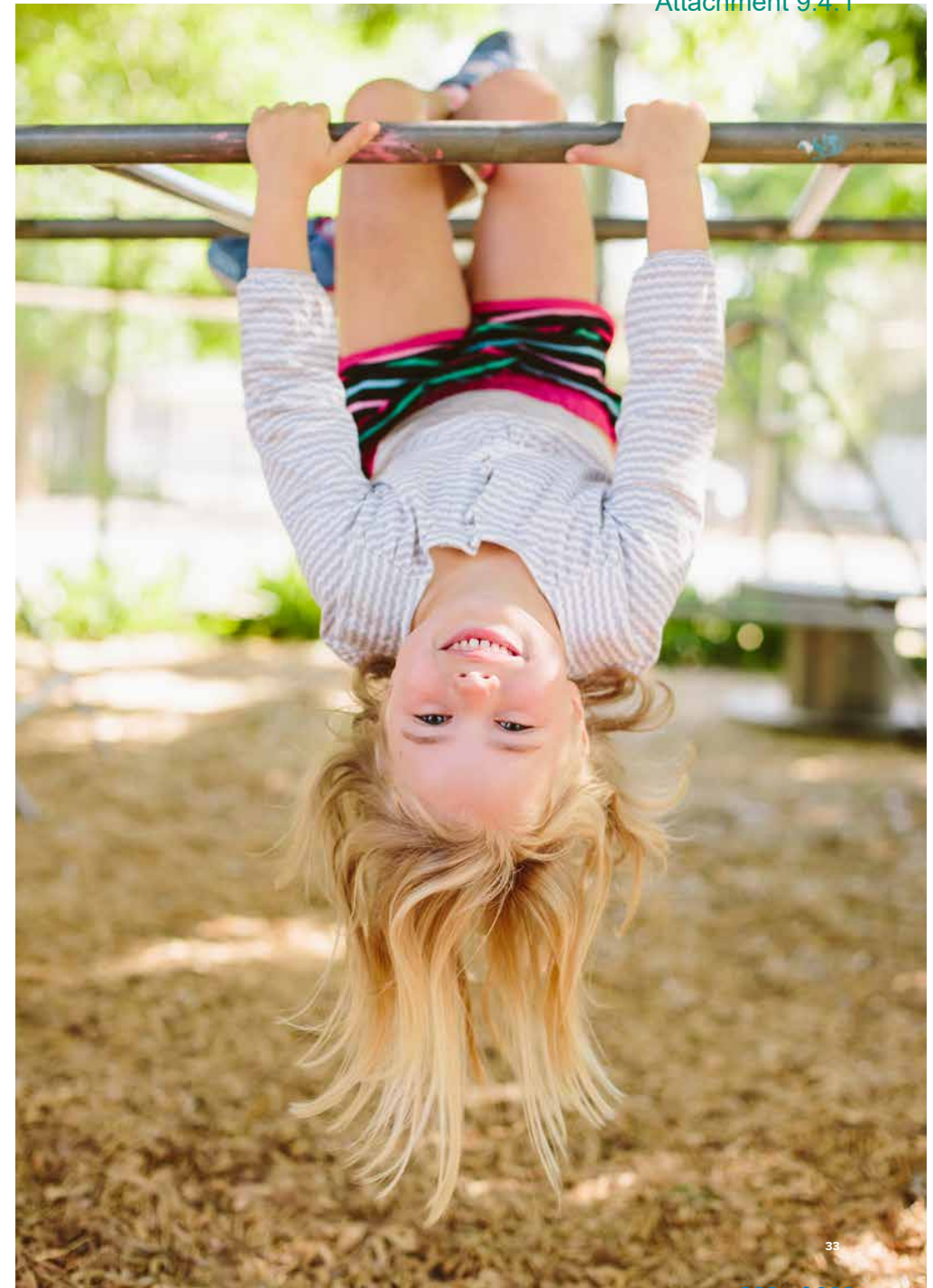
BSEYP Theme - Learn	Relationship to Council Plan	Relationship to Public Health Strategic Plan 2018-2028
<p>Learn</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children engage and participate in early childhood education</li> <li>Families are supported to have the knowledge, skills and confidence to be their child's first educator</li> <li>Children have access to the supports they need to ensure active engagement in learning</li> </ul>	<p>2.3 Lifelong learning is valued and fostered in our community</p> <p>2.4 Social and cultural, educational and employment opportunities are created to enable children, young people, individuals and families to actively participate in their community.</p> <p>2.7 Greater Shepparton is valued for cultural celebrations, inclusion and engagement of our diverse communities.</p> <p>2.8 Our Aboriginal culture and people are valued and celebrated, with collaborative actions undertaken to enable peaceful, healthy and productive lives in a safe environment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decrease the proportion of children at school entry who are developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains of the AEDC</li> </ul>

BSEYP Theme - Thrive	Relationship to Council Plan	Relationship to Public Health Strategic Plan 2018-2028
<p>Thrive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children and families actively engage with MCH services, attending key ages and stages visits</li> <li>Our community is supported to fully understand the critical importance of the First Thousand Days</li> </ul>	<p>2.4 Social and cultural, educational and employment opportunities are created to enable children, young people, individuals and families to actively participate in their community.</p> <p>2.7 Greater Shepparton is valued for cultural celebrations, inclusion and engagement of our diverse communities.</p> <p>2.8 Our Aboriginal culture and people are valued and celebrated, with collaborative actions undertaken to enable peaceful, healthy and productive lives in a safe environment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase the proportion of children attending key ages and stages visits</li> </ul>





BSEYP Theme - Voice	Relationship to Council Plan	Relationship to Public Health Strategic Plan 2018-2028
<p>Voice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children have the language and communication skills required for optimal learning</li> <li>• Consultation and feedback is sought from families and children to inform early years planning and development</li> </ul>	<p>2.1 Greater Shepparton is a welcoming, inclusive and safe place for all.</p> <p>2.3 Lifelong learning is valued and fostered in our community.</p> <p>2.4 Social and cultural, educational and employment opportunities are created to enable children, young people, individuals and families to actively participate in their community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decrease the proportion of children at school entry who are developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains of the AEDC</li> </ul>





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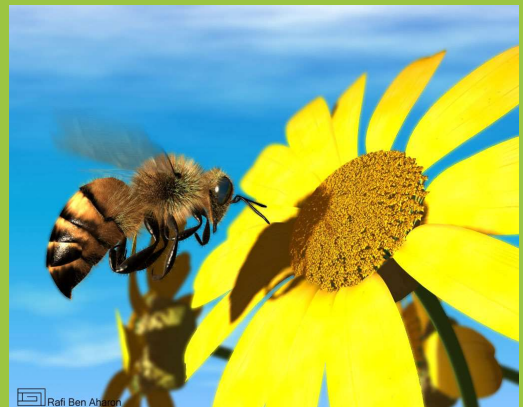
GREATER  
SHEPPARTON

# Greater Shepparton/BestStart Municipal Early Years Action Plan Community Consultation

## Consultation feedback Report July 2020

### Sexton Consulting

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....Pollinating great ideas

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**Task:**

Undertake community consultation process and drafting of annual action planning document to support implementation of Municipal Early Years Plan (MEYP) Goals

**Consultation Process:**

The consultation aimed to engage parents/carers, families and service providers of young children, with a priority focus for families with children between the ages of birth and four years old, in a conversation about raising a family in Greater Shepparton, access to services and what additional supports or information families may need.

In addition a key focus of the conversations with families revolved around their interactions and engagement particularly with play opportunities for their children and the identification of barriers to increased engagement. Service providers were also asked to share their knowledge of their clients in this regard.

A set of survey questions was developed that ensured each of the five themes within the MEYP were addressed with particular interest in ensuring feedback gained supported the outcome measures being sort.

**Survey questions:<sup>1</sup>**

1. Can you tell us about the kinds of play and learning activities that you do with your children?
2. What gets in the way of you playing with your children as much as you'd like to?
3. What can our community do to support/help families to participate more often in play activities?

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<sup>1</sup> Further detail in Appendices 2

4. Do you feel like you have enough information about childhood development in order to support you raising your children?
  - a. What information have you found valuable?
  - b. What would you like to know more about?
5. What makes it difficult for you to have your children involved in early childhood services? These might include; Maternal & Child Health Nurse, playgroups, kindergarten programs, day care etc.
6. Do you feel there are enough early childhood services available within our community and information about these services is easy to find?
  - a. What could our community do to make these services and information more available and useful for families?
7. Have you heard anything about the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)?
  - a. If yes, can you tell us what you have heard about it?
8. How well do you believe our community supports;
  - a. Children generally?
  - b. You and your family?
9. What do you believe our community needs to do to better support you to raise your family?

Given the current COVID19 environment the initial plan of engaging face-to-face with both service providers and small groups of parents/carers/families was not able to occur.

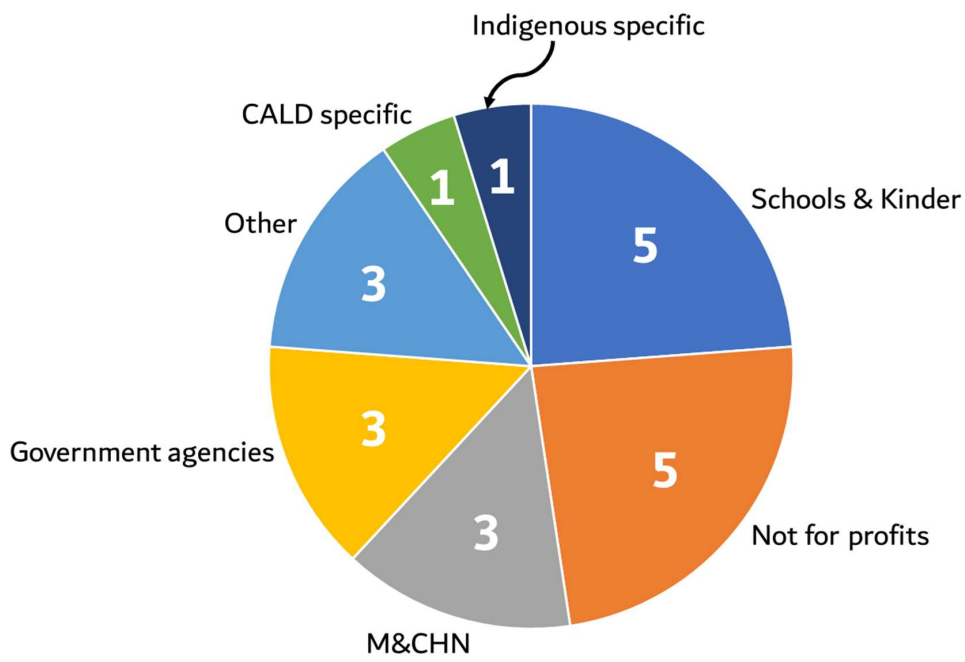
The consultation process continued through phone, Zoom etc, some one-on-one interviews and an on-line survey link. Whilst not ideal, and limiting in breadth and overall numbers, the consultation was able to conclude with considerable numbers of service providers and individuals<sup>2</sup> providing significant input through various means.

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<sup>2</sup> Full numbers and cohort identification see 'Consultation Data' section

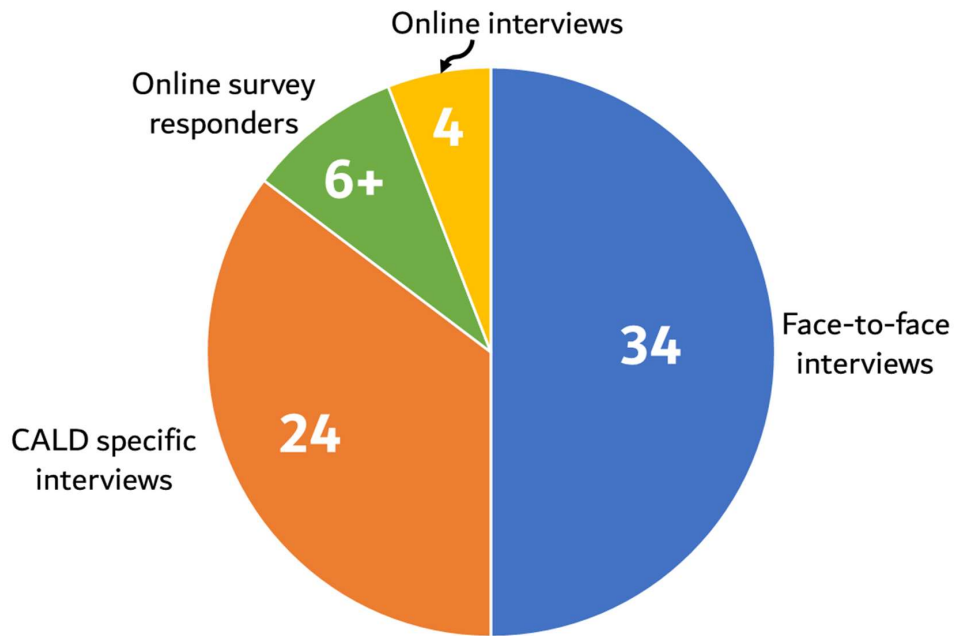
**Consultation Data:**

**Service Providers**



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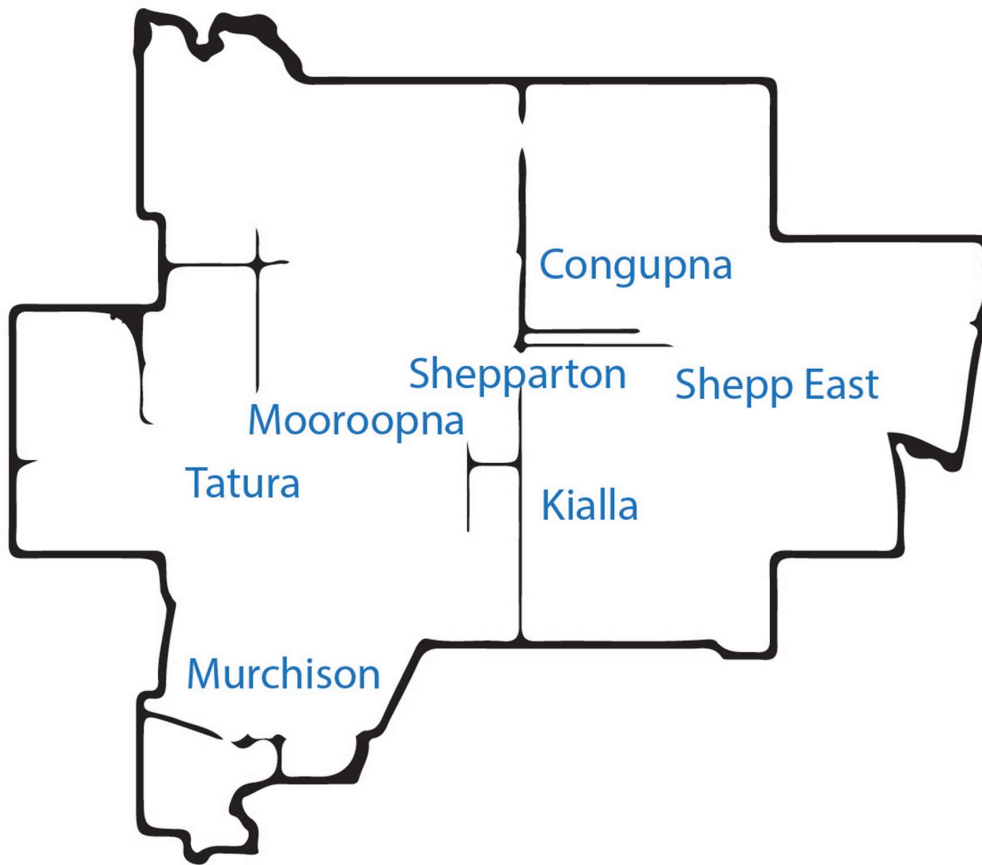
### Community Members



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Participating sub-communities within LGA



## **Consultation feedback in response to the MEYP Themes;**

### **Theme 1: Play**

#### **Outcome 1.1 - Children and families engage and participate in playgroup**

#### **Outcome 1.2 - Children and families are active and playing together**

Feedback noted the value of playgroups, particularly those where a facilitator was present. Responders felt that increased facilitated playgroups would add value and encourage increased parental participation and engagement as well as providing an opportunity for learning by the parents/carers – eg. role modelling of interactive play by facilitator

Most of the feedback gained identified that whilst many families are citing that their children engage in play, both indoor and outdoor, that their (parent/adult) involvement in the play situation with the child was minimal, and frequently non-existent.

There was clearly a significant lack of understanding of the role play has for infants, toddlers and young children as their mode of learning. *“Why would I read to my 4 month old baby, they can’t understand the story”* (First time parent).

### **Theme 2: Learn**

#### **Outcome 2.1 – Children engage and participate in early childhood education**

#### **Outcome 2.2 – Families are supported to have the knowledge, skills and confidence to be their child’s first educator**

#### **Outcome 2.3 – Children have access to the supports they need to ensure active engagement in learning**

Overall there appeared to be a strong belief that *“learning happens when Stacey\* gets to school”* (Father of 3 and name changed). Engaging in play with your child was considered time consuming and not the highest priority within the household. This generalised consideration was not related to culture, vulnerability or socio-economic status. The ‘priorities’ within the households varied across demographics, however the fundamental belief remained similar.

**Theme 3: Thrive**

**Outcome 3.1 – Children and families actively engage with the Maternal and Child Health services, attending key ages and stages visits**

**Outcome 3.2 – Our community is supported to fully understand the critical importance of the First Thousand Days**

Engagement with universal services appears to be quite high and almost all responders saw these services as helpful and important in supporting them to raise their children. Many noted that ongoing engagement within a particular service is often dependent on the individual service provider and ‘first impressions.’

Overall understanding of the theory of child development and The First Thousand Days’ was limited. It was frequently noted that the lack of parental role modelling available to families impacts on their ability to know what to expect, understand stages of development and overall parenting. *“these new mums haven’t had a positive parenting experience themselves, it is little wonder they don’t know what to do or how to engage with their babies and toddlers”* (M&CHN).

**Theme 4: Voice**

**Outcome 4.1 – Children have the language skills required for optimal learning**

**Outcome 4.2 – Consultation and feedback is sought from families and children to inform early years planning and development**

Service providers noted the deterioration in language development they are seeing across the board. Many stating that they are often the first ones to point out possible concerns with language development to the parent/s.

Overwhelmingly individuals were enthusiastic about having an opportunity to talk about raising children and to inform Council’s direction in these areas. A significant number believe they have ample opportunities to have their voices heard, however many noted that when they do have a say, they don’t often hear anything further, this was a notable frustration *“don’t ask us if you don’t care what we say and we never see anything from our ideas”* (Grandmother caring full-time for grandchildren)

**Theme 5: Share****Outcome 5.1 – Further community engagement and response to the AEDC****Outcome 5.2 – Our community has a shared responsibility for its children**

Across the board service providers are aware of and positively engage with the AEDC, this cannot be said for parents/carers and families generally. There was very little knowledge about the AEDC within the ‘general parent population’.

*Ann’s wondering; is this because they don’t yet have a child who has been part of the AEDC survey? That is don’t really need to know. Or is it because we are not making the dissemination of the information accessible to ‘ordinary folk’????*

Significant interest is noted within the CALD community to further engage their communities with the AEDC.

In relation to the shared responsibility for children, the feedback indicated a belief that there are a lot of opportunities and activities provided for children in the early years space, however it isn’t always in ‘my’ immediate neighbourhood so access, engagement and sense of community for families may be reduced.

There were a number of comments also relating to the disconnection of families from their own broader family network and fewer social connections creating added isolation for many families of young children.

*Ann Sexton*

## Appendices 1:

### Consultation Feedback – consolidated themes

- Considerable variation in amount and use of toys/books in the home
- Very limited in CALD families particularly
- Middle income families may have, but don't use much
- **Limited interaction with babies/toddlers during play**
- **Little reading to young babies – don't see the point**
- **Very little understanding of play as learning for infants/toddlers.** Much of this learning/teaching is being provided by service providers with varying success rates
- High beliefs that learning only happens at school – some maybe at kinder. Many feel this is 'the job' of schools not parents/families
- **Service providers believe the greatest concern is the increasing lack of interaction/engagement of parents in play with their children**
- **Individuals also noted often that they do not interact/engage much** variety of reasons offered – too busy, other things to do, housework, expectation of partner, don't see why it's important etc.
- Children often 'just left to it' even in outdoor play times eg. at a park – kids play parents, sit and engage their own social media etc
- IT raised as a concern. Whilst educational based Apps/tools may be used, the interaction with the parent is still often non-existent
- Belief that there is a lot of information available for parents/families about child development and services – not always utilised, too many different 'pieces of paper/pamphlets etc. Maybe better all in one document/place??
- Service providers noticing an increase in the numbers of families not wanting to socialise broadly with groups etc – COVID became a 'good excuse'. Less numbers coming along to groups etc. **Concern about the mental health of parents as well as developmental opportunities for the children**
- Most believe there is a lot/adequate services and activities for children provided in Greater Shepparton – **however many noted these would be better/more likely to be engaged with if they could be delivered even more locally ie; in the small park in my neighbourhood not just at Victoria Park Lake**
- Significant lack of deep knowledge of child development. Most know the basics, but not always aware of what they don't know. Again service providers working hard in this area of education for families.
- **Service Providers have good knowledge and understanding of AEDC. Families little to no knowledge**
- Service providers response to change in **AEDC data for Kialla area**; most noted that this is clearly linked to two key changes; IT for the parents – total focus, less interaction with child and believe all that is accessible on the net; and secondly the change in demographics – that is more families buying in the newer estates, as they're cheaper and then having multiple family groups reside on one home. So this means that these households may actually be quite vulnerable families pooling resources.

**Appendices 2:****Survey Questions – key feedback responses;**

1. Can you tell us about the kinds of play and learning activities that you do with your children?
2. **What gets in the way of you playing with your children as much as you'd like to?**
  - *Time and other commitments eg. other children, home duties, work*
3. What can our community do to support/help families to participate more often in play activities?
4. **Do you feel like you have enough information about childhood development in order to support you raising your children?**
  - a. What information have you found valuable?
  - b. What would you like to know more about?
    - *General belief there is enough information available, access to and desire to know key blockers.*
    - *Responders found difficulty in identifying specific items/aspects of information that would prove useful or that they would like to know*
5. What makes it difficult for you to have your children involved in early childhood services? These might include; Maternal & Child Health Nurse, playgroups, kindergarten programs, day care etc.
6. **Do you feel there are enough early childhood services available within our community and information about these services is easy to find?**
  - a. What could our community do to make these services and information more available and useful for families?
 

*Overwhelming belief that there is enough EC services and activities available within the shire. Most well publicised, responders had heard/knew about most*
7. **Have you heard anything about the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)?**
  - a. If yes, can you tell us what you have heard about it?
 

*From individual responders this response was an overwhelming NO.*

*Most service providers were aware, although knowledge and accuracy of knowledge variable.*
8. **How well do you believe our community supports;**
  - a. Children generally?

b. You and your family?

*Part a received extremely positive responses across the board. Part b responses generally positive with a focus on 'if I want their support I know where I could get it from'.*

*Exceptionally positive feedback regarding services provided by Uniting CALD team!*

9. What do you believe our community needs to do to better support you to raise your family?