Rural City of Wangaratta

Municipal Early Years Plan

2026-2030



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands, on which the Rural City of Wangaratta communities reside. We pay our respect to their Elders past, present and emerging, and celebrate and respect their continuing cultures. We are committed to walking beside all traditional owners as we move towards reconciliation.

The Rural City of Wangaratta is committed to providing a safe and inclusive environment, free from discrimination. We celebrate diversity and value the lived experience of people of every ethnicity, faith, age, ability and disability, culture, language, gender identity, sex and sexual orientation



Contents

	Acknowledgment of Country	**2**
	A Message from the Mayor	**4**
1	**Municipal Early Years Plan**	**5**
1.1	Introduction	**5**
1.2	Wangaratta's commitment to child safe standards	**7**
1.3	Our Partnering Stakeholders	**8**
1.4	Strategic Planning Framework	**9**
1.5	Role of the Rural City of Wangaratta	**10**
1.6	Snapshot of Children & Families in Wangaratta	**11**
2	**Our Goals**	**13**
	Goal 1: Health & Wellbeing	**14**
	Goal 2: Learning & Development	**15**
	Goal 3: Family & Community Support	**16**
	Goal 4: Safe & Connected Communities	**17**
3	**Measuring Our Success**	**18**





A Message from the Mayor

As Mayor, I am proud to share our commitment to giving every child in Wangaratta the best possible start in life. Early childhood education is more than learning—it's about building confidence, friendships, and a love of discovery that lasts a lifetime.

Our community values fairness, transparency, and opportunity. That's why we are working towards a centralised enrolment approach that makes it easier for families to access kindergarten programs. This system will ensure that every child has an equal chance to thrive, and every family feels supported through a simple, streamlined process.

We know that collaboration is key. By working together—council, educators, and families – we can create a system that reflects our shared values and meets the needs of our growing community.

Thank you for being part of this journey. Together, we are building strong foundations for the future of Wangaratta.

Cr Irene Grant
Mayor





1. Municipal Early Years Plan

1.1 Introduction

The Rural City of Wangaratta is committed to ensuring all children aged 0-12 years and their families have access to high quality services, safe environments and opportunities to thrive. The Municipal Early Years Plan (MEYP) 2025 –2029 provides a coordinated approach to early childhood development, aligned with state and national framework and informed by community consultation..



Plan Overview

Wangaratta's Municipal Early Years Plan (MEYP) is a local plan designed to provide strategic direction for the development and coordination of early year's programs, activities and other local community development processes that impact on children 0 – 12 years in our municipality. The MEYP engages our community and partners to work together towards positive early years outcomes for children and families within the Rural City of Wangaratta.

The MEYP provides an evidence-based approach to planning Council's involvement in social support and change for children and families. It provides a roadmap for planning services and facilities that will be delivered in collaboration with other partner organisations committed to the support and wellbeing of children.

The MEYP is a product of collaborative community involvement, and its development has involved families, residents and other service providers who have provided ideas, opinions, data and feedback on the strategic directions proposed. As it is implemented, this collaborative approach with community will be maintained through local area partnerships to improve the health and wellbeing outcomes for children.



Vision

All children in Wangaratta are healthy, safe, and supported to reach their full potential.



Guiding Principles

Equity and Inclusion

Every child and family, regardless of background or circumstances, has access to services and opportunities.

Collaboration

Working in partnership with families, services providers, Aboriginal communities, and government.

Child and Family Centred

Respecting the voices and experiences of children and their caregivers.

Evidence-informed

Guided by current research and local data.

1.2 Wangaratta's commitment to child safe standards

Council is committed to creating and maintaining a child safe organisation where all children are valued, protected from abuse, and where their wellbeing and empowerment is placed at the heart of what we do. We will meet this commitment by:

- Demonstrating through our leadership, actions, policies, procedures, and documentation that the principles of being a child safe organisation are embedded into our everyday thinking and practices
- Upholding the right of all children to feel safe and protected
- Having a zero tolerance for child abuse and taking all safety concerns seriously
- Promoting cultural safety for Aboriginal children, and children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and by providing a safe environment for children with a disability or who are considered vulnerable.
- Creating an inclusive, safe and connected community for children and young people. Recognising that children and young people have different needs, characteristics and life experiences and, although there are similarities within groups, no one child's experience is the same.
- Ensuring we have systems in place to evaluate risk, document incidents and identify appropriate responses consistent with law, policy and procedure.
- Council will not tolerate improper conduct or the taking of reprisals against those who come forward to disclose such conduct.

1.3 Our Partnering Stakeholders

- Healthcare providers, incl. Gateway Health and Northeast Health
- Local Long Daycare Providers
- Local Kindergartens
- Local Primary Schools
- Playgroups & Community Organisations
- Wangaratta Library
- Wangaratta Sports & Aquatic Centre
- Wangaratta Youth Council
- Wider Wangaratta Community



1.4 Strategic Planning Framework

1 Purpose of the MEYP

The MEYP is a local area strategic plan that:

- Guides the development and coordination of early years programs and activities.
- Supports broader community development processes that impact.
- Aligns council efforts with community priorities and state level strategies.

2 Key Strategic Functions

- Incorporating community priorities into Council planning and programming.
- Mapping the early years system to help families understand available services and pathways.
- Identifying council's role not only in direct service delivery but also in partnership and advocacy.

3 Community Engagement

The Framework is community informed shaped by:

- Community survey and children's worksheets
- Consultation events and workshops
- Feedback from local service providers

4 Plan Development

- **Survey Phase:** Community input gathered via online survey events.
- **Review Phase:** Contributions are evaluated to identify key themes and needs.
- **Final Report:** Outcomes and recommendation are documented for future actions.



1.5 Role of the Rural City of Wangaratta

Council understands the importance of the early years and embraces this through the development of this plan and direct links to service provision including:

Direct service delivery including Maternal and Child Health services, Early Childhood Education and Care services, immunisations, library services, recreation and leisure activities.

Advocacy on behalf of children and their families to influence other levels of government and other organisations or agencies.

Providing and supporting programs and infrastructure that support children and their families, such as children's events and festivals, arts programs, walking paths and play spaces.

Community capacity building through provision of forums, workshops and support to communities that encourages information sharing, workforce development, and local collaborations.

Collaborative partnerships and networks to embed a strong, coordinated and responsive service system and community for children and their families.

Planning to develop and implement services, and advocate for shared goals to support the developmental needs of children.



1.6 Snapshot of Children & Families in Wangaratta

The Rural City of Wangaratta is home to **30,169 residents**

with **6,343** under 12 years

0-4 years old

Rural **123**

Urban **2080**

5-11 years old

Rural **851**

Urban **3289**

2065 couples with children

670 one parent families

2735 households with children under 15 years

13% of families with children were step-families or blended families



3 most popular activities to do as a family

- ✔ Parks & Playgrounds
- ✔ Splash Park/Pool
- ✔ Bike Rides

3 top requested activities from the community

- ✔ Indoor play activities
- ✔ More school holiday activities
- ✔ More enclosed Parks

* Municipal Early Years Engagement Survey 2025



2. Our Goals

The Municipal Early Years Plan focuses on four goal areas

1. Health and Wellbeing

2. Learning and Development

3. Family and Community Support

4. Safe and Connected Communities.

Each goal has its own strategic actions which are supported by tailored initiatives. Council's Role in each of these initiatives is outlined.

- **Deliver –** focuses on Council services and what is within their capacity to provide.
- **Partner –** Collaboration and coordination with community and other service providers and sectors, including joint initiatives, referral pathways, and cross-sector planning.
- **Advocate –** includes opportunities for Council to influence other organisations and levels of government for funding, programs and policy development.



GOAL 1: HEALTH & WELLBEING

Objective

Support children and families to achieve optimal physical, emotional and mental wellbeing through accessible, inclusive and representative services.

Strategic Action

1.1 Promote healthy eating, physical activity, and mental health in early years settings.

Initiative	Council Role
Implement movement programs	Partner, Deliver
Promote healthy eating initiatives	Partner, Advocate
Include mindfulness and emotional literacy activities in early years programming	Partner, Deliver

1.2 Strengthen partnerships with early years, health, education and community services.

Initiative	Council Role
Partner with local providers to deliver health information sessions	Partner, Deliver
Develop referral pathways, shared resources, and shared care plans	Partner, Deliver
Establish Early Years Partnership meetings, and develop joint initiatives	Partner, Deliver

1.3 Provide targeted support for vulnerable families

Initiative	Council Role
Continue Maternal Child Outreach programs	Deliver, Advocate
Connect families with culturally safe services.	Partner
Promote programs that support vulnerable families	Partner

1.4 Support services to provide child-safe practices and trauma-informed care.

Initiative	Council Role
Continue to offer training and development to staff in best practice for children's wellbeing, including training in child safe standards and trauma-informed care	Deliver
Promote child-safe standards across all early year's services	Partner

GOAL 2: LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

Objective

Ensure all children have access to high-quality learning experiences that support their development.

Strategic Action

2.1 Increase access to funded kindergarten programs, especially for priority groups.

Initiative	Council Role
Collaborate with community services to boost enrolment.	Partner, Deliver
Expand outreach to priority families.	Partner, Deliver

2.2 Support educators with professional development aligned to Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework.

Initiative	Council Role
Provide mentoring and peer learning opportunities across Council Services	Deliver
Continue to offer regular training for staff at Council services	Deliver

2.3 Promote play-based learning and inclusive curriculum planning.

Initiative	Council Role
Engage families in curriculum planning.	Deliver
Promote local playgroups, programs and events for children that provide these outcomes.	Partner

2.4 Strengthen transition between early years services and schools.

Initiative	Council Role
Coordinate transition plans with schools, especially for vulnerable children.	Partner, Deliver
Facilitate joint orientation sessions for children and families.	Partner, Deliver

GOAL 3: FAMILY & COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Objective

Empower families with knowledge, confidence, and support to nurture their children's safety, development and wellbeing.

Strategic Action

3.1 Provide accessible parenting programs and peer support networks.

Initiative	Council Role
Promote and deliver group and online parenting sessions.	Partner, Deliver
Facilitate parent-led groups and support circles.	Partner, Deliver

3.2 Strengthen referral pathways to family support services..

Initiative	Council Role
Continue to build partnerships with community agencies and service providers	Partner
Work collaboratively to streamline referral processes	Partner

3.3 Engage families in decision-making and service design.

Initiative	Council Role
Create opportunities for regular family feedback, including forums and surveys	Deliver
Include family representatives in planning committees.	Deliver

3.4 Improve Service navigation and access for families.

Initiative	Council Role
Create centralised service directories.	Partner, Deliver
Share resources and referral pathways with other agencies	Partner, Deliver

GOAL 4: SAFE & CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

Objective

Create safe, inclusive, and welcoming environments where children and families feel supported, valued, connected to their cultural identity and community.

Strategic Action

4.1 Support services to respond to family violence and child protection concerns.

Initiative	Council Role
Provide regular staff training on family violence and child protection.	Deliver
Regularly review reporting protocols	Deliver

4.2 Offer culturally responsive and flexible family services.

Initiative	Council Role
Work with community and partner services to identify needs.	Partner, Deliver
Deliver inclusion and cultural awareness training and development for staff and services engaged with children.	Deliver
Work with cultural and community groups to offer community events that build social connections and inclusion	Partner

4.3 Partner with Aboriginal and multicultural organisations to co-design programs.

Initiative	Council Role
Engage cultural leaders in planning and delivery.	Partner
Work with cultural and community groups to offer community events that build social connections and inclusion	Partner

4.4 Embed inclusive practices across community services, spaces and programs

Initiative	Council Role
Use inclusive materials and signage in public spaces to create welcoming environments that reflect diverse experiences	Deliver
Promote diverse storytelling through libraries and media	Deliver

3. Measuring Our Success

Success across the MEYP goals is measured though a combination of data, feedback, and service-level evaluation. This includes tracking participation rates in programs, improvements in child development and wellbeing, and family satisfaction with services. Tool such as surveys, observational assessments, professional development records, and community engagement logs help build a clear picture of progress.

Each goal has tailored measures: health and wellbeing is assessed through Maternal Child Health data and early intervention outcomes; learning and development through school readiness and educator feedback; family support through programs uptake and service access; safe communities through child-safe standards and community involvement; integrated systems through service coordination and responsiveness; and culture and identity through children's pride, family inclusion, and diverse representation. Together, these measures ensure services are meeting the needs of Wangaratta's children and families in meaningful and measurable ways.



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