

# MOYNE SHIRE COUNCIL

## Early Years Plan 2020 - 2030



**Adopted by Council 25 February 2020**

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

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- Parents and carers of children living in Moyne;
- Early years professionals supporting the delivery of Council operated early years' services;
- Agencies and organisations supporting children and families across Moyne and the wider region.

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- Jan Consedine, Manager Community Services;
- Sharon Wilson, Coordinator Early Years Services.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the extensive work undertaken by Planning for Communities Pty Ltd to review early years' services and supports in Moyne Shire, and develop the Early Years Plan.

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## Why an Early Years Plan

The Early Years Plan is an important way **Council demonstrates its commitment to supporting families and children in Moyne**. By providing clear information about the needs of children and families, the Plan will guide Council in its decision making about services and infrastructure for children and families.

The Plan is underpinned by a clear understanding that families play a critical role in building resilience and capacity in children, and consequently it is as important to support the family as it is to support the child.

The Plan acknowledges the important role Council plays in supporting families and children through specific services such as maternal child health, immunisation, childcare and playgroups, but more broadly through the community infrastructure it provides such as parks, playgrounds, walking and cycling paths, swimming pools, libraries, events and sporting infrastructure. It outlines how Council will continue to support families and children, ensuring the delivery of sustainable services that respond effectively to community needs and support families to thrive in Moyne.

## Scope of the Plan

The Early Years Plan is underpinned by extensive research about the:

- Benefits of investing in families and children;
- Local, state and federal policy context for delivering services to families and children;
- Demographic and health profile of the Moyne community;
- Supports available to families and children in Moyne;
- Results from consulting with the families, children, early years' professionals, service providers and Council officers.

A summary of the research outcomes is provided as part of this document, and a Discussion Paper, a Consultation Report and a Background Report are available separately.

The Plan identifies a vision for families and children in Moyne and three pillars demonstrating the areas Council will focus on over the next 10 years. The Plan also identifies priority actions for the next 3 years, after which time the actions will be reviewed and updated to respond to new or emerging areas of need.

## Index of Key Terms

Disadvantaged:	A child or family who experience social or economic challenges such as low incomes, low educational attainment, physical or mental health issues, poor access to services and supports.
Vulnerable:	A child or family that is at risk of being unable to respond effectively to changes or difficulties occurring in their life.
Resilience:	The ability of a child or family to adapt to and recover from changes, difficulties or social disadvantage occurring in their life.
Early Intervention:	Interventions directed to children or families where there is a risk of child abuse or neglect, or where children have a developmental delay or disability. Interventions may also be directed where a child is at risk of disengagement from education or engaging in risky behaviours. <sup>1</sup>
Early Years:	From birth to 6 years of age.

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<sup>1</sup> Victorian State Government (2011), Report of Protecting the Vulnerable Children Inquiry, Part 4: Major protective system elements. Available: <http://www.childprotectioninquiry.vic.gov.au/report-pvvc-inquiry.html>

## Benefits of Investing in Families and Children

There is established national and international evidence that **the development of the brain is an ongoing process beginning at birth and continuing into adulthood**. The life experiences and circumstances of a child impacts significantly upon how the brain develops and consequently upon the health, social and education outcomes for that child. Central to healthy brain development are supportive family relationships and positive learning experiences, along with universal access to services and additional support where families are faced with stressful circumstances and lower levels of resilience.<sup>i</sup>

### Early Years

The period from conception to age 3 is recognised as a time when the foundations of a child's life are laid <sup>ii</sup>, with the most rapid period of brain growth and development occurring during this time. **From pregnancy and through early childhood (0 – 6 years), all of the environments in which children live and learn, and the quality of their relationships with adults and caregivers, have a significant impact on their cognitive, emotional and social development.** Significant adversity such as poverty, abuse or neglect, parental substance abuse or mental illness and exposure to violence in early childhood, can lead to lifelong problems.<sup>iii</sup>

Early intervention is key to preventing or minimising the impact of adversity in a child's early years and economic modelling shows the cost of investing in the early years provides significant long term savings and benefits such as higher levels of educational attainment, increased employment options, reduced crime, and improved health outcomes.<sup>iv</sup>

## Policy Context

The Early Years Plan supports the directions of the Council Plan, Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan, Child Safe Policy and Disability Awareness Policy. Key Council priorities underpinning the Early Years Plan are:

- An aspiration to create the most liveable small communities.
- A commitment to being involved in direct service delivery for children and families.
- The value of universal services and infrastructure such as walking and cycling paths, playgrounds and libraries.
- A commitment to delivering accessible services and infrastructure.
- The importance of having social connections and being able to participate in community life.
- A commitment to addressing disadvantage and ensuring all members of the community have an opportunity to thrive.
- The value of advocacy to drive change.
- A commitment to creating safe environments for children.

The Early Years Plan is also influenced by the International, State and Federal Government policy context. Internationally, the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)* sets out the basic human rights of a child no matter where they live, setting standards in health care, education, legal, civil and social services. These principles are consistent with the direction and policy frameworks accepted by governments in Australia. **Over the past decade the State and Federal governments have shown they understand the importance of investing in children to build resilience and provide the best opportunity for children to thrive.** This is demonstrated through:

- The establishment of national standards for the delivery of early years' services, including universal access to 15 hours of preschool or kindergarten for four-year-old children.
- Significant changes to the federal childcare funding arrangements designed to make funding for occasional care more readily available in communities of high need, and to reduce the complexity for families accessing childcare fee subsidies. For Moyne, this means funding for the occasional care services at Chatsworth and Hawkesdale will cease from June 2021.
- Significant changes to the service delivery model for early childhood intervention through the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). While the aim has been to increase the support available for people with a disability, there are significant wait times for assessments and service delivery, and this is impacting upon the effectiveness of the policy.



- The staged roll out of universal access to 15 hours of funded 3-year-old kindergarten from 2020 in Victoria, and 2022 in Moyne Shire.
- The introduction of the School Readiness Program providing needs-based funding to kindergartens to support children as they prepare to attend school.

## Moyne Families and Children

### Population Size and Age Profile

Moyne is experiencing **moderate population growth** and is expected to reach 17,400 people by 2031 and 18,499 by 2041. However, **the location of growth and the age cohorts impacted are variable**. Port Fairy and Koroit are projected to experience the highest population growth with Port Fairy growing by nearly 12 percent and Koroit by nearly 11 percent between 2019 and 2031 however, this growth is not expected to occur in the younger age cohorts (0 – 19 years).<sup>v</sup>

Overall, **the population aged 0 – 19 years is projected to increase slightly between 2017 and 2022 before a small but steady decline is expected through to 2041**. Current projections indicate the number of children aged 0 – 4 years in Moyne Shire will decrease by 8.1 percent and those aged 5 – 19 years by 7.3 percent by 2041.<sup>vi</sup> Consistent with this, the number of households without children is projected to increase.

The most significant decrease in the 0 – 4 years population is projected to occur in:

- East Moyne where the 0 - 4 years population is projected to decrease by over 40 percent between 2019 and 2041.
- Hawkesdale where by 2031, projections suggest there will be only one child aged 0 – 4, although this is expected to increase to seven children by 2041.
- Mortlake where the 0 – 4 years population is projected to decrease by 31 percent between 2022 and 2041.<sup>vii</sup>

This suggests demand for services and infrastructure to support children aged 0 – 4 years and their families will decline in Koroit, East Moyne, Hawkesdale and Mortlake from 2022 onwards, but remain consistent in others, particularly Port Fairy.

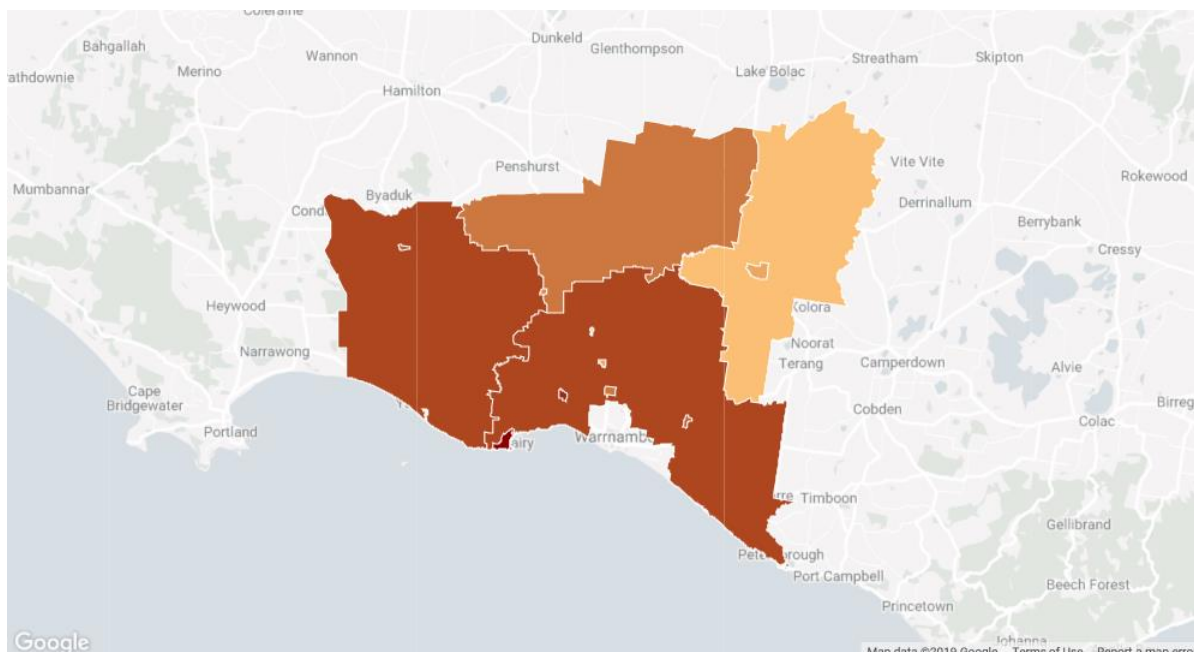


Table 1: Population change, Moyne Shire and small areas 2016 - 2041<sup>viii</sup>

## Disadvantage and Access

While generally households in the Moyne Shire are considered to be relatively advantaged and have good capacity to pay to access fee for service programs or facilities, this is not consistent across all parts of the Shire with the levels of **disadvantage notably higher in Mortlake and Macarthur**. In addition, service providers and agencies working with families have noticed **increasing levels of disadvantage in many of the smaller communities such as Hawkesdale, Macarthur and Mortlake** because families are moving to these areas to access low cost housing.

The variable levels of disadvantage across Moyne highlights how critical it is to consider the particular needs of individual communities when identifying where services are located, how they operate, and the fees and charges associated with them. In communities like Mortlake and Macarthur, families are more likely to have limited capacity to pay for services and have limited capacity to travel to access services. This means that having services such as kindergarten, childcare, maternal child health, immunisation and libraries within these townships is **critical** to supporting families experiencing disadvantage.

While communities such as Port Fairy are relatively advantaged, with good capacity to pay and an ability to travel to access services, reasonable access to universal services is just as critical for these communities, helping to ensure children and families receive the support they need to live healthy, happy and fulfilling lives.

## Health and Wellbeing

Key health and wellbeing indicators suggest **children in Moyne Shire are experiencing variable outcomes** in relation to their health, development, education and social connectedness. On the positive front, compared to the Victorian State average, Moyne residents have strong breastfeeding rates, particularly in relation to the number of children being breastfed at 3 months, high vaccination rates, and consistently high preschool participation.<sup>ix</sup> In contrast to this, there are **an increasing number of children in their first year of school identified as being vulnerable on 1 or 2 or more domains**. The Koroit community has a particularly high and increasing proportion of children who are vulnerable on two or more domains and very high proportions vulnerable on one domain.<sup>x</sup> This finding is interesting as often these vulnerabilities are associated with disadvantage in a community, however the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) and household income data for Koroit does not indicate the community experiences particularly high levels of disadvantage. The domains where children in Koroit are most vulnerable are social, emotional and physical.

Other areas of concern for children in the Moyne community are **the increasing proportion of children whose parents report one or more concerns with child speech or language on entry to primary school** and the high proportion of children at school entry with emotional or behavioural difficulties.<sup>xi</sup>

These outcomes are very consistent with information gathered through consultation with early years' educators and agencies working with children and families. Many identified they were seeing an increase in children experiencing speech and language delays and an increasing number of children with social, emotional and behavioral difficulties.

## Changing Parental Work Patterns

While, not specific to Moyne, there has been a substantial change in the work pattern of parents over the past two decades. In many families **both parents are working and rely heavily upon early years services such as childcare and kindergarten**. While extended families may also provide informal childcare support, many grandparents are remaining in the workforce longer and are unable to provide the informal care they may have in the past. Combined, these factors are driving increased demand for formal childcare options.

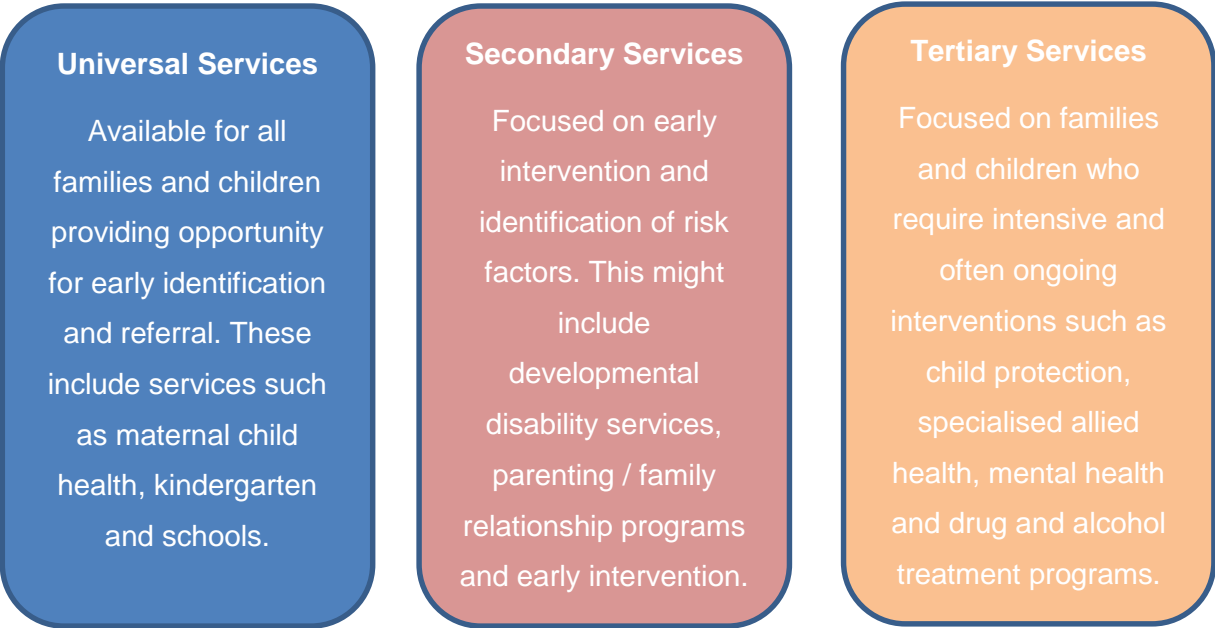
The 2015 Productivity Commission inquiry into the childcare and early childhood sector in Australia looked specifically at the link between the availability of affordable quality childcare and workforce participation, especially by women, and the contribution access to childcare makes to optimising children's learning and development. The Inquiry identified that **formal and informal childcare plays a vital role in enabling parents to work** and estimates that there may be up to 165,000 parents (on a full time equivalent basis) who would like to work but are not able to do

so because they are experiencing difficulties with the cost of, or access to, suitable childcare.<sup>xii</sup> A key local employer in Port Fairy has identified a lack of access to childcare as a key challenge in recruiting and retaining qualified staff.

## Supports Available

There are a range of facilities and services available in the Moyne Shire that support families and children including 13 primary and secondary schools, 3 public libraries, 1 indoor swimming pool and 3 outdoor swimming pools, 17 sportsgrounds, approximately 130 sport and recreation clubs, 1 neighbourhood house, 2 community centres, and over 10 childcare and kindergarten facilities just to mention a few. Services for families and children are delivered by a mix of providers including private operators, community-based organisations and Council who plays a significant role in the delivery of childcare, kindergarten, maternal child health and immunisation services.

The service system is organised into three broad categories as outlined below.



All three segments of the service system are experiencing challenges, with access to secondary and tertiary services particularly difficult for the Moyne community and the wider region. The service system is fragmented making it difficult for families to understand what services are available and how to access them. In addition, the availability of services in locations that can effectively support families is an ongoing challenge because of the geographic area Moyne covers, the number of small communities and the lack of public transport available.

**Key challenges in the universal service system are the availability and accessibility of childcare, maternal child health and immunisation services.**

- The community consultation identified many families are accessing services outside the Moyne Shire (particularly in Warrnambool) because they are not available or not easily accessible locally, or it is more convenient to access them in Warrnambool.
- The current service model for 4-year-old kindergarten (3 x 5 hour days at all kindergartens), the limited operating hours and days of some childcare services (Chatsworth and Hawkesdale), and the limited availability and cost of before and after kindergarten care, makes it difficult for working parents who require reasonably priced, longer hours of care for their children. There also appears to be a shortage of outside school hours care, a key service supporting working parents as children transition from kindergarten to school.
- The limited availability or lack of maternal child health and immunisation services in some parts of the Moyne community (specifically Moyne East) means families are required to travel to access these services or access them in an alternate way e.g. through a local medical practice. While this may be a reasonable alternative, if bulk billing is not available, or families do not have access to transport, immunisation services can become cost prohibitive.
- A lack of nature-based playgrounds in Moyne Shire, and limited or no playgrounds in some communities. Playgrounds are free and universally accessible and if they are not available or they offer limited or poor play opportunities, the impact upon families and children can be significant. There is increasing research about the importance of nature-based play opportunities in the development of gross-motor skills in children.<sup>xiii</sup>
- Walking and cycling paths to assist families to travel to and from kindergarten, school, childcare, playgrounds etc. It is acknowledged there are challenges with managing community expectations and the resources Council has available to it, but like playgrounds, walking and cycling paths are free and universally accessible, and are an important resource for families.

**Many of the secondary services for children with additional needs are located outside Moyne** in places such as Warrnambool or Hamilton. Families and early years' services such as kindergartens find it difficult to access these services because of long waiting lists, a lack of allied health practitioners in the region, and some services / practitioners being unwilling to travel to smaller communities because their travel costs are not covered by government programs. Specific issues include:

- The significant wait times for families seeking developmental assessments which in turn means families are not able to secure the support their child / children need in a timely way.

- Difficulties gaining access to speech and occupational therapy services because health services are not effectively resourced to deliver the service, and because of the difficulties recruiting and retaining allied health professionals.
- A growing demand for intervention / support services such as enhanced maternal child health, parenting support programs and case management. This reflects the growing complexity of issues families are experiencing and highlights the limited services available to support families with emerging needs. Federal and State government funding is largely directed to tertiary services for families and children at high risk, rather than families with emerging needs.
- Housing support and accommodation including crisis accommodation is a key gap. Consistently throughout the consultation discussions the issue of housing affordability was raised, and how this is resulting in families moving to smaller and more remote communities leaving them isolated and unable to access services.

Service providers are clearly of the view **many of the tertiary services for children and their families are stretched to the limit**, particularly DHHS Child First which provides child and family information and referral support services. This places other service providers such as maternal child health services in the position of ‘holding’ children and families for extended periods of time until the right supports can be put in place.

## Council’s Role

Council has a number of roles in supporting children and families in Moyne.

- 1 Providing and planning for **universally accessible** experiences, programs, facilities and services available to and designed to strengthen the health and wellbeing of the whole of Moyne. For example; libraries, swimming pools, playgrounds, parks and community events.
- 2 Providing, facilitating or planning for programs, facilities and services **specifically designed** to support children and their families such as childcare, kindergarten, maternal child health, and immunisation services, developing and maintaining early years infrastructure, **advocating** to government or other agencies, **development and capacity building** of the early years sector.
- 3 Providing **targeted supports** for families with lower levels of resilience or experiencing disadvantage including enhanced maternal child health services, supported playgroups, and school readiness initiatives. These services are funded by the Victorian State Government and provide an important safety net for families and children.

In total Council owns nine facilities with a specific focus upon the delivery of early years' services including centre based childcare, 3 and 4-year-old kindergarten, before and after kindergarten care, maternal child health and immunisation services and supported playgroups. In addition:

- Council leases space from Moyne Health in Koroit and Terang and Mortlake Health Service in Mortlake, to deliver maternal child health and immunisation services.
- Council leases space to the Port Fairy Medical Clinic at the Koroit Kindergarten who deliver general practitioner services from the site five days per week.
- A Council run supported playgroup operates from various venues throughout the Shire.

A summary of facilities and the services offered by Council is provided in table 2 below.

Council has invested significantly in early years infrastructure in the past decade with the development of the Port Fairy Community Services Centre, and upgrades to the Merri and Koroit Kindergartens. There are good examples of contemporary family services hub models at the Port Fairy Community Services Centre and Hawkesdale and District Family Services Centre which both have the capacity to support childcare, kindergarten, maternal child health and immunisation services. For families, the co-location and integration of services is attractive and significantly improves the accessibility of services. Opportunities exist for other family services hubs to be considered such as in Mortlake where maternal child health services, kindergarten, and privately operated childcare services are all located separately in aging infrastructure.

Several of the early year's facilities also have the capacity to be used more extensively including Nullawarre and Mortlake kindergartens, Chatsworth Occasional Childcare Centre and Hawkesdale and District Family Services Centre. Further research is needed to understand whether it is possible to achieve an increased level of use or whether consolidation of some facilities should be considered.

Location	Centre Based Care	4-Year-Old Kinder	3-year-old Kinder	Before/ After Kinder Care	MCH	Immun.	Supported Playgroup
Port Fairy Community Services Centre	5 days						Various locations depending on need
Koroit Kindergarten							
Koroit MCH					Non-Council owned facility	Non-Council owned facility	
Mortlake Kindergarten							
Mortlake MCH Centre					Non-Council owned facility	Non-Council owned facility	
Macarthur Kindergarten							
Hawkesdale & District Family Services Centre	3 days						
Nullawarre Kindergarten							
Merri Kindergarten				Privately operated			
Chatsworth Childcare Centre	2 days						
Younger Ross Centre Warrnambool							

Table 2: Moyne Early Years Infrastructure and Services, July 2019



## Consultation and Engagement

Consultation and engagement with parents and carers, preschool aged children, early years professionals, early years agencies and Council officers has been an important part of informing and developing the Early Years Plan.

**For Children** having the opportunity to play (especially at playgrounds) and having a variety of play opportunities is very important to them. When asked about the things they like to do at kindergarten, at childcare or when they are home, the children identified many different activities, but they all centred around playing, and usually with their friends or family. This highlights how important it is for children to be exposed to a variety of play and learning opportunities and how important families, kindergarten and childcare services are to the social and emotional development of children.

**For Parents and Carers**, having access to childcare, maternal child health and immunisation services in Moyne Shire is very important, however many families are accessing these services and others outside Moyne (mostly in Warrnambool), because it is too challenging to access them locally, they are not available in their local community, or it is more convenient to access them in Warrnambool. This reinforces how important the delivery of maternal child health and immunisation services at the Moyne Shire Younger Ross Centre in Warrnambool is to the community.

Key reasons *childcare* is challenging to access in Moyne include waiting lists (Port Fairy), limited availability of spaces (Koroit), limited days and hours of operation for the services (Chatsworth and Hawkesdale), the high cost and limited availability of before and after kindergarten care, limited availability of outside school hours care and a lack of information about the services available. Key reasons both *maternal child health services and immunisation* are difficult to access in Moyne include not having services available in local communities (e.g. in Hawkesdale), the limited availability of services in small communities particularly at times that suit working parents, and the limited availability of immunisation services at the same time as maternal child health services.

Access to information about services and supports can be difficult to obtain, particularly for families who are new to the area or where their children need additional support. In addition, parents and carers have trouble accessing speech therapy, occupational therapy and general practitioner services, along with other more specialist services such as paediatric physiotherapy and post-acute care (especially in home). A small number of parents and carers raised some concern about how difficult it is to access immunisation, maternal child health and childcare services in the eastern part of Moyne Shire. This area is geographically located between Moyne, Corangamite and Warrnambool Councils and the lack of public transport adds to the difficulties accessing services in the region.

Other services and resources important to parents and carers are kindergartens, parks, playgrounds, swimming pools, community events, supported playgroups, and story time at the library. In Port Fairy this is funded but other Libraries it is volunteers. Consistent with this, playgrounds and parks are one of the things parents and carers like most about living in Moyne, but they are also one aspect they would most like to see improved, along with walking and cycling paths, access to childcare, and access to community and support services.

Parents and carers would particularly like to see changes to kindergarten, childcare, maternal child health and immunisation services, playgrounds and walking and cycling paths. For *kindergarten*, longer days for 4-year-old kindergarten particularly in Port Fairy and Koroit, making 3-year-old kindergarten available in Port Fairy and reducing the cost of before and after kindergarten care, are key. For *childcare*, it is more increased opening hours, better availability of before and after kinder care and outside school hours care, and reduced fees / costs. For *maternal child health and immunisation services*, having the services available in more locations, offering more sessions / alternate days, and having the two services available concurrently are key. For *playgrounds*, improved provision of playground infrastructure especially nature-based play opportunities in Koroit and to a lesser extent Port Fairy and Macarthur is key, and improved *walking and cycling connections* to make it easy for families and children to walk or ride to school is important to families.

**For Early Years Professionals** the primary concern is the increasing number of children presenting to kindergarten, childcare and school with issues in relation to speech and oral language development, fine and gross motor skills, and behavioural and emotional issues. Key factors early years professionals believe are driving this are parents having less time to play and read with their children, the increased use of technology, and an increasing number of children coming from complex family circumstances. This is particularly noticeable in smaller communities like Macarthur, Mortlake and Hawkesdale where more families are moving to access cheap housing. Often these families are disadvantaged or vulnerable and moving to smaller communities means they cannot access services locally and are unable to travel to central locations such as Warrnambool or Port Fairy. Compounding this, early years professionals are noticing a significant shortage of specialist services to assess developmental needs and deliver services to children and families. They describe the service system as being fragmented and increasingly difficult for families to navigate, which particularly impacts families living in smaller communities. This includes some disconnection between Council services, too many standalone services, and disconnection between Moyne Council services and other agencies. Some families have trouble understanding and navigating the kindergarten program, particularly 3-year-old kindergarten.

Other areas of concern for early years' professionals are the reduced sense of community and community connections between families, and declining parenting skill and capacity. Educators are observing a growing number of new families moving into the area who find it difficult to make community connections. In addition, parent engagement in kindergarten and childcare services is declining because there are more families where both parents are working, parents are preoccupied with social media, and more children are being delivered to services by bus. In relation to declining parenting skill and capacity, early years' professionals believe this may be occurring because of the increasing levels of disadvantage in small communities, and because of the lack of understanding about the developmental impacts for children of having too much access to technology.

Possible ways issues could be addressed include offering parent education initiatives focusing upon the importance of reading and spending time with your children, and the issues associated with social media and extensive access to technology. It will be critical to consider the timetabling, location, accessibility and marketing of these initiatives to make them easy for families to access. Other suggestions raised by early years' professionals included Council increasing the availability of support services such as maternal child health, advocating for access to more specialist services such as speech therapy, increasing the availability of information about the services and supports available for families, and improving the co-operation and co-ordination between services.

**Agencies:** There is clear consistency between the concerns raised by agencies and early years' professionals including the increasing migration of families to smaller communities such as Hawkesdale, Macarthur, Mortlake and even Koroit to access affordable housing. Overall, agencies believe the levels of vulnerability and disadvantage are growing in the community, with services seeing more families and children presenting with multiple and complex issues. In addition, there are increasing referrals related to trauma and engagement, particularly, but not only amongst farming families and the Aboriginal community, resulting in a growing demand for integrated family services.

Like early years' professionals, agencies are seeing an increasing number of children presenting to kindergarten, childcare and school with issues in relation to speech and oral language development, along with behavioural and emotional issues. Agencies believe this is driven by families who are too busy and stressed, parents and children are using screens and technology more frequently and increasing anger and conflict in families. In particular, children from indigenous backgrounds are not kindergarten ready because they have limited exposure at home to reading, writing and numerology.

Agencies confirmed there is a significant shortage of specialist services to assess developmental needs and deliver services to children and families, and growing wait times. A range of factors are impacting upon the effectiveness of the service system such as limited referral pathways and sharing of information between services (including the transition to school), difficulty accessing information about the services and supports available for families, and the centralisation of services in Warrnambool. Access to services is compounded by the lack of public transport and lack of outreach services into smaller communities.

Agencies believe there is great opportunity for services (including Council) to work more collaboratively with each other. Without this, the service system will not change, and the needs of children and families cannot be addressed. Other suggestions raised by agencies to improve outcomes for families and children include making the kindergarten application process more accessible i.e. don't offer only an online process, offering children's Storytime at all libraries in Moyne and offering parent education programs and support (particularly about the impact of technology and the importance of developing oral and written language in children). Focusing upon strategies to attract and retain quality allied health professionals in the area, using outdoor play spaces (particularly nature based) as a form of intervention were also suggested and building the capacity of early years' educators.

## Challenges and Opportunities

Through research undertaken in developing the Early Years Plan, a number of challenges and opportunities have been identified for Council to consider and respond to. These are outlined below and underpin the vision and pillars for the Early Years Plan.

- Ensuring Council's infrastructure and kindergarten service model can effectively support the roll out of funded 3-year-old kindergarten in Moyne from 2022.
- Responding to the changing needs of the community for childcare and kindergarten services that support families where both parents are working. Particular consideration must be given to operating hours, the affordability of services and the resourcing implications for Council.
- Delivering equitable and accessible services for children and families across the Shire, particularly where populations are small or declining and the evidence does not support investment in existing or new early years infrastructure or services.
- The coordination and co-location of early years and other community or allied health services offers great opportunity to improve the accessibility of services for families, strengthen service outcomes, and deliver more sustainable service models for Council. This may include co-location of infrastructure or simply the coordination of service operating hours. Locations where this opportunity is strongest include Mortlake and Koroit.

- Responding to the increasing levels of vulnerability and disadvantage amongst children and families across the Shire, particularly in Koroit, Mortlake, Macarthur and Hawkesdale.
- The need for strong advocacy for outreach services to support children and families experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage.
- Examining how the current scheduling of immunisation and maternal child health services can be changed to better respond to community need.
- Ensuring the community has access to the right information about services and supports for families and children, particularly for families who are new to the area or where children require additional support.
- Regardless of where they live some families will choose to access early years' services like childcare, kindergarten, immunisation and maternal child health services either outside the Moyne Shire or through other service providers such as private childcare operators.
- The fragmented nature of the service system supporting families and children and the importance of working collaboratively with agencies, government and service providers to improve access to services and outcomes for children and families.
- The loss of connection to community being experienced by families, and the opportunity to strengthen the connection of families to their local community through universally accessible experiences, programs, facilities and services such as libraries, swimming pools, walking and cycling paths, playgrounds, open space and community events.

## **Vision**

Children and families have access to the supports and services they need to actively participate in community life, feel valued and reach their full potential.

## Pillars

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### **Pillar 1**

#### **Children and Families Thrive in Moyne:**

We will support children and families to thrive by facilitating access to quality early years services, improving access to information, and supporting children and families who are facing additional challenges.

We will strengthen the capacity of families and children to actively participate in community life, ensuring their contribution is valued and their voices are heard.

We will ensure libraries, playgrounds, open space, aquatic facilities, festivals and events are easy to access and their value to children and families is understood.

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### **Pillar 2**

#### **The Service System is Strengthened:**

We will strengthen existing partnerships and actively seek to establish new partnerships with agencies and the community, to improve outcomes and support for children and families.

We will advocate for improved access to early years services and supports in Moyne, particularly outreach services in small rural communities.

We will actively build the capacity of our early year's workforce encouraging cooperation, information sharing and skill development.

We will be proactive in planning for the current and future needs of our community ensuring programs, services and activities are consistent with Council's broader priorities, and deliver the right outcomes for families, children and children.

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### **Pillar 3**

#### **Services and Infrastructure are Responsive and Sustainable:**

We will deliver services and supports for families and children that respond to the evidence-based needs of our community.

We will deliver early years services in smaller and remote communities to ensure children and families across the Moyne Shire have equitable access to services.

We will actively look for opportunities to deliver integrated services and infrastructure, provide services that are agile and have sustainable funding models.

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## Three Year Action Plan

The Action Plan identifies specific activities or initiatives Council will pursue in the next three years to respond to the findings of the research about early years services, resources and needs in the Shire of Moyne. The Action Plan identifies priority activities or initiatives for year 1, 2 and 3.

<b>Children and Families Thrive in Moyne</b>	<b>Priority</b>
1. Review and update the information available on Council's website about services and supports for children and families in Moyne Shire and the surrounding region.	Year 1
2. Increase resources to the Corangamite Regional Library Service to support the delivery of children's story time activities by a paid staff member at Mortlake and Koroit libraries.	Year 1
3. Working in partnership with Warrnambool City Council, Moyne Health, South West Health and other relevant agencies, to improve the availability of information about allied health services and supports in the region to families.	Year 2
4. Assess the feasibility of upgrading and / or providing walking and cycling path infrastructure to connect early years facilities with schools, local shops and local residential streets.	Year 2
5. Improve the playground facilities available in Moyne with a focus upon providing nature-based play experiences, particularly in Koroit and Port Fairy.	Year 3
<b>The Service System is Strengthened</b>	
1. Develop a 12-month calendar of activities and initiatives to facilitate cooperation, information sharing and skill development amongst Council's early years workforce.	Year 1
2. Identify opportunities to work collaboratively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services to ensure Council's early years services effectively support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children.	Year 1
3. Build a stronger partnership with the South Coast Early Years network in relation to services provided in this region.	Year 1
4. Advocate to Moyne Health, South West Health and the State Government for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="263 1803 1270 1892">a. Improved access to speech pathology and occupational therapy services for children in Moyne Shire.</li> <li data-bbox="263 1892 1270 1993">b. Improved outreach services for children and families in the smaller rural communities of Moyne Shire.</li> </ul>	Year 2

5.	Advocate to local schools for, and explore opportunities to increase, the provision of outside school hours care programs in Moyne.	Year 3
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### **Services and Infrastructure are Responsive and Sustainable**

1.	Review the service model for Chatsworth and Hawkesdale childcare services developing a business plan which assesses the ongoing viability of the services and explores alternate operating models such as offering longer and more days. The review will need to consider the link between Chatsworth service and the potential development of a children and family services hub in Mortlake.	Year 1
2.	Undertake service planning to explore opportunities for better cooperation and coordination between services. This should include but not limited to the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Scheduling of maternal child health and immunisation services, giving consideration to rotating the days and times services are available in various communities, offering evening and weekend session times and providing access to maternal child health and immunisation services at the same time.</li> <li>b. Opening days / hours of the libraries in relation to the operating days of the kindergartens, maternal child health and immunisation services.</li> </ul>	Year 1
3.	Review the service model for kindergarten and before and after kindergarten care with a view to implementing longer kindergarten sessions to support families where both parents are working. Key considerations will be the viability of before and after kindergarten care, the support from families for longer kindergarten sessions and the availability of space to support before and after kindergarten care.	Year 1
4.	Assess the feasibility of upgrading the infrastructure at the Port Fairy Community Services Centre to support the delivery of funded 3-year-old kindergarten and the high demand for childcare services.	Year 1
5.	Pursue the relocation of maternal child health services in Koroit from the Moyne Health site to the site of the Council owned Koroit kindergarten.	Year 2
6.	Pursue the development of a children and family services hub in Mortlake incorporating kindergarten, maternal child health, immunisation and childcare services.	Year 3



## Review and Evaluation

Review and evaluation is an important part of implementing the Early Years Plan and measuring its impact. Key components of the review and evaluation process will include:

- Assessing the ownership and engagement of internal and external partners in helping to implement the vision, pillars and actions of the Plan.
- An assessment of what activities and initiatives have been implemented and their effectiveness in improving outcomes for children and families in Moyne Shire.
- Identifying opportunities to build on those activities and initiatives that have worked well.
- Refining the Plan, and in particular the Action Plan, to ensure Council can respond to new and emerging needs.
- Celebrating key achievements and outcomes with the community and partners.

To ensure the success of this Plan, Moyne Shire Council will work with the community and partner agencies to:

- Implement a process for informing the broader community and service providers about the Early Years Plan.
- Support service providers to identify how their organisation can play a role in achieving the vision, pillars and actions.
- Regularly review progress towards the vision and pillars, and seek solutions to challenges.

## End Notes

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- <sup>i</sup> Centre on the Developing Child (2007), The Science of Early Childhood Development (In Brief). Available at: <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/InBrief-The-Science-of-Early-Childhood-Development.pdf> and City of Boroondara (2014), Draft Children and Young People's Strategy. Available at [www.boroondara.vic.gov.au](http://www.boroondara.vic.gov.au).
- <sup>ii</sup> Brown SJ et.al, (2015), Policy Brief 2: Health Consequences of Family Violence, Murdoch Children's Research Institute, Melbourne.
- <sup>iii</sup> Centre on the Developing Child (2007), The impact of early adversity on children's development (In Brief). Available at: <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/inbrief-adversity-1.pdf>.
- <sup>iv</sup> Yoshikawa, H., Weiland, C., Brooks-Gunn, J., Burchinal, M., Espinosa, L., Gormley, W., Ludwig, J.O., Magnuson, K.A., Phillips, D.A., & Zaslow, M.J. (2013, August, September). Investing in our future: The evidence base for early childhood education. Society for Research in Child Development and Foundation for Child Development. Available: <http://fcd-us.org/sites/default/files/Evidence%20Base%20on%20Preschool%20Education%20FINAL.pdf>.
- <sup>v</sup> Remplan, Forecast Profile. Accessed 15 July 2019. Available online: <https://www.communityprofile.com.au/moyne/trends/population>
- <sup>vi</sup> Remplan, Forecast Profile. Accessed 15 July 2019. Available online: <https://www.communityprofile.com.au/moyne/trends/population>
- <sup>vii</sup> Remplan, Forecast Profile. Accessed 15 July 2019. Available online: <https://www.communityprofile.com.au/moyne/trends/population>
- <sup>viii</sup> Remplan, Community Profile and Forecast Profile. Accessed 15 July 2019. Available online: <https://www.communityprofile.com.au/moyne/trends/population>
- <sup>ix</sup> Victorian State Government (2015), VCAMS Indicators Available at: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/research/Pages/vcamsindicator.aspx#link24>
- <sup>x</sup> Australia Early Development Census, 2019, Data Explorer. Available online: <https://www.aedc.gov.au/data/data-explorer?id=-1&term=moyne%20shire>
- <sup>xi</sup> Victorian State Government (2017), VCAMS Indicators Available at: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/research/Pages/vcamsindicator.aspx#link24>
- <sup>xii</sup> Australian Government Productivity Commission (2014), Childcare and Early Childhood Learning. Available at: <http://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/childcare/report/childcare-overview.pdf>
- <sup>xiii</sup> Nature Play WA, Why a Nature Based Playground? Available online: <https://www.natureplaywa.org.au/programs/nature-playgrounds/benefits>