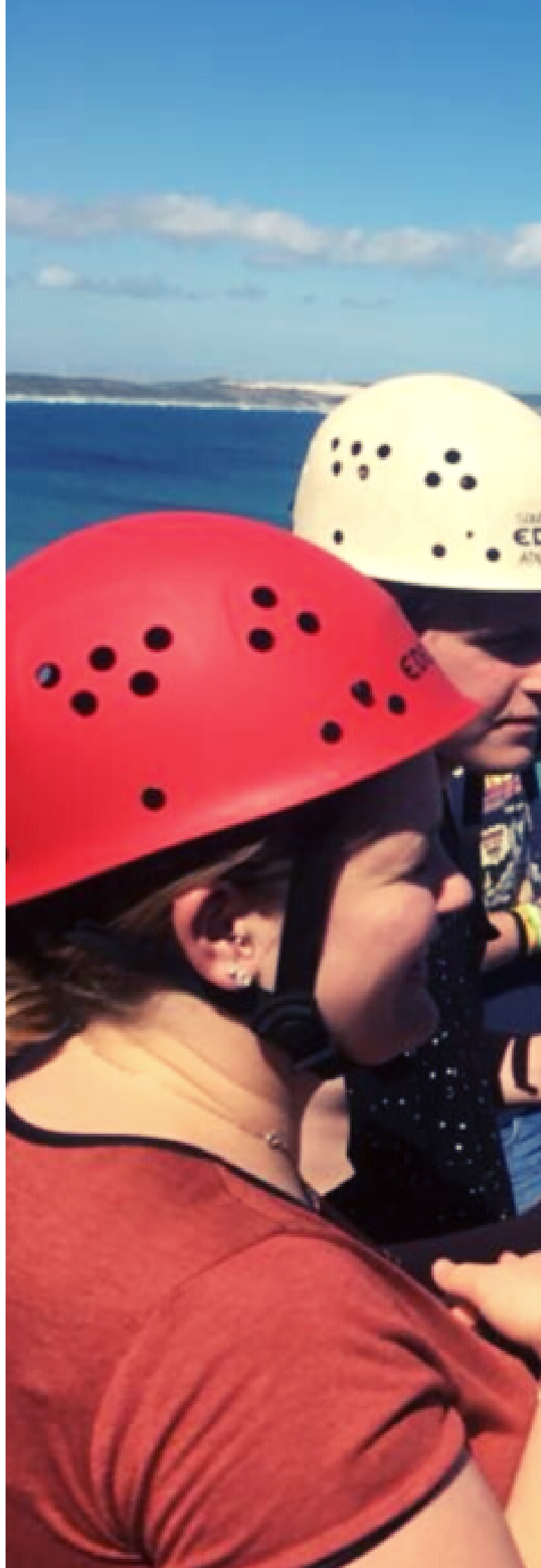




**Swan Hill Rural City Council
Youth Strategy
2020-2025**

"Councils play a key role in the delivery of youth services. They often provide the most immediate experience of being part of a democratic process and provide opportunities for young people to participate in their communities through funding for youth workers and support for youth councils."

*The State Government Youth Policy,
Building Stronger Youth Engagement in Victoria*



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Swan Hill Rural City Council acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we operate, and pays its respects to their Elders, past and present.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Swan Hill Rural City Council acknowledges the contribution of the many young people, parents/caregivers, community members, schools and service providers who have played a part in the development of Swan Hill Rural City Council Youth Strategy 2020-2025.

In particular:

- Swan Hill Rural City Council Youth Support Program staff
- Novo Youth Council
- Youth Strategy Researchers- Milla Devlin and Mia Rovere
- Swan Hill College
- Swan Hill College FLO Program
- Swan Hill Specialist School
- Robinvale College
- St Mary MacKillop College
- Manangatang P-12 College
- Sunraysia Institute of TAFE

Lastly, a big thank you to all of the young people who willingly gave their time, knowledge and experiences , your input has played a big part in shaping this Strategy.





INTRODUCTION

Swan Hill Rural City Council recognises the immeasurable value that young citizens bring to their communities.

Widespread community consultation was undertaken to inform the development of a five-year Youth Strategy that will consider the needs and aspirations of young people aged 12-25 who live, work or study in the municipality.

In total the engagement and consultation process heard the voices of 1,106 young people, parents, service providers and community members.

The 2020-2025 Swan Hill Rural City Council Youth Strategy will provide overall direction for Council's Youth Support Program and guide their programs, initiatives, advocacy and support work for young people and their families.

This is the third consecutive Youth Strategy that Council has developed since 2009. We now have a very valuable and comprehensive local data set spanning a ten year period which provides significant insight into the health and wellbeing of our young people that tracks changes and emerging trends.

Swan Hill Rural City Council remains committed to the safety of all young people. This strategy will strictly adhere to Council's Child Safe Policy and forms a part of Council's work towards meeting Child Safe Standards; particularly standard number seven.

It is hoped that the in-depth Youth Strategy consultation results and trends data (*see Swan Hill Rural City Council Youth Strategy Consultation Report*) can also support service providers, schools and community groups in informing their work with young people.

“

"Ensure that every young person feels involved and welcome in their community. No matter what background they come from".

- Young Person -

COUNCIL'S ROLE IN YOUTH SERVICE DELIVERY

The **Swan Hill Rural City Council's Youth Support Program** is underpinned by a strong focus on youth participation and inclusion ensuring that:

- young people have connection to community
- services and support initiatives create healthy and safe environments; and
- young people across the municipality are able to contribute to decision making and development of policy, programs and initiatives that affect them and their community.

Our service delivery is shaped through a co-design model of practice with a strong focus on preventative health and wellbeing initiatives and addressing the issues that young people have told us are most important to them e.g. bullying, career pathways, respectful relationships, mental health, managing study pressures, body image and alcohol and drug use.

The **Youth Support Program** operates from the Youth Inc hub. The Youth Support Team offer a wide range of services, activities and programs for young people:

Generalist Youth Support Services

- Empower Youth Program
- Service navigation and support
 - Referral pathways
- Early invention programs and initiatives,
 - Information and resources
 - Coaching Young People for Success

Youth Participation/Leadership

- Novo Youth Council
- Random Events Committee (Freeza)
- SAGA (Sexuality and Gender Alliance)
- Coaching Young People for Success

Co-Design & Consultation

- LGA wide Youth Survey
- Co-design of programs, initiatives and events with young people
 - Linking youth voice to matters of youth and community importance e.g. Sexy and Safe, Royal Commission into Mental Health, UN's Youth Consultation, Community Planning Process (SHRCC)

Youth Led Activities & Events

- FREEZA- drug and alcohol free events
- Arts/culture activities
 - Youth Week
 - Mental health week
 - Youth Ball
 - Youth Arts Festival
- Health and wellbeing initiatives

Partnerships & Advocacy

- School partnerships
- Health and community service partnerships
- Victorian Rural Youth Services Group (Yacvic)
- Youth Strategy Advisory Group (State Gov)
 - Advocacy on youth issues
- Southern Mallee Youth Community Development Network (sub regional)
- Swan Hill Youth Network, Health and Wellbeing Network
- Youth Engagement & Participation Training Program

Service demands have grown since the Youth Support Program's inception with local data highlighting growing levels of vulnerability and disadvantage across the Swan Hill LGA. Increasingly, our service is supporting young people and their families impacted by complex factors such as: poverty, family violence, teenage pregnancy, bullying, child protection substantiations, poor literacy and numeracy, youth disengagement, alcohol consumption and increasing multiculturalism.



YOUNG PEOPLE IN 2020

Young people today are navigating a far more complex world than previous generations, with challenges created by the internet, changing social norms, the changing world of work, political instability and most recently the COVID-19 pandemic. They face uncertainty in terms of unemployment and housing security, education, income inequality, climate change and the economy.

Australia has experienced nearly three decades of uninterrupted economic growth; however some Australians are being left further behind. This is especially true at the time of writing this Strategy with the COVID-19 pandemic resulting in widespread unemployment and economic uncertainty in Australia and worldwide. There is growing concern that young people have been (and will continue to be) disproportionately affected by COVID-19. Adding to this there continues to be certain groups of Australians at high risk of experiencing entrenched poverty, deprivation and social exclusion.

Research with young Australians shows that those who experience more severe disadvantage are less able to engage and excel in school and report lower levels of life satisfaction, less positivity about the future and feel less safe than their peers. The link between child poverty and poor educational outcomes highlights that its impact reaches well into the future.

Those who are disproportionately more vulnerable to poverty are sole parents, unemployed people, families relying on social security, Indigenous people and people living with a disability. There is a higher proportion of all of these population groups in rural and remote areas than in major cities (National Rural Health Alliance, 2015).



A snapshot of our local data clearly demonstrates significant levels of disadvantage for some young people across our local government area (see pages 5-6). Some of our young people are not doing as well as they should.

Despite this adversity, our young people continue to have hope and aspiration and the best programs and interventions are those designed with young people for young people.

In response to the changing rural youth landscape our Youth Support Program has developed significantly and now offers a range of services for young people. We remain strongly committed to hearing the voices of young people; especially those experiencing vulnerability and at greater risk of entrenched disadvantage.



“

Adolescence is a time of significant developmental transition that is considered to be second only to infancy in the magnitude of changes that occur.

(Lerner and Villarruel, 1994)

WHY DO WE NEED A YOUTH STRATEGY?

Young people aged 12-25 are a significant group representing 17% of the overall population. Research highlights the substantial changes that occur during adolescence and the crucial transitions to adulthood during this time. It also confirms that successes or difficulties experienced during the transition from school to either education or training are linked to outcomes beyond education and employment, including health outcomes and lifetime earnings (Youth Action and Western Sydney Regional Information and Research Service (WESTIR) 2018).

Local data reveals the magnitude of some of the additional challenges and the higher level of disadvantage that many young people and their families are facing across the Swan Hill Rural City Council municipality:

- *Swan Hill Rural City Council had almost double the amount of child protection substantiations, 2014/2015 (20.7 per 1000 eligible population) compared to Victoria (11.4 per 1000 eligible population).*
- *Almost three times more family violence incidents (28.9 per 1000) compared to Victoria, 2014/2015 (12.4 per 1,000); a ranking of third highest of all LGAs in the state.*
- *There were almost twice as many government housing rentals in the Swan Hill LGA, 2016 (4.6%) compared to Victoria (2.5%).*
- *There was a higher number of health care card holders in the Swan Hill LGA, 2017 (9.1%) compared to Victoria (7.9%).*
- *SEIFA data which measures relative socio-economic disadvantage highlights that the Swan Hill LGA has a higher level of disadvantage (947) compared to Victoria (1010), 2016.*

The data sheds light on the high levels of vulnerability and complex needs that some young people experience and the importance of Swan Hill Rural City Council's sustained efforts towards improving outcomes for young people and their families.

Data sources: ABS Census, PHIDU - The Social Health Atlas of Australia Data by Local Government Area, Statistical Data for Victorian Communities www.socialstatistics.com.au, Victoria Health LGA Profiles, Swan Hill 2013 & 2015

A SNAPSHOT OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE



77.9% of young people in the Swan Hill LGA aged 16 were in full-time secondary education, 2016 (Victoria 86.1%).

Source: PHIDU - The Social Health Atlas of Australia Data by Local Government Area October 2013 & February 2019



20.3% of 20-24-year-olds in the Swan Hill LGA had left school before completing year 11, 2016 (Victoria 10.3%).

Source: Statistical Data for Victorian Communities www.socialstatistics.com.au



95.6% of year 9 students in the Swan Hill LGA attained national minimum standards in numeracy (Vic 95.6%) and 90.5% attained national minimum standards in literacy (Vic 93.5%).

Source: Victoria Health LGA Profiles, Swan Hill 2013 & 2015



4.4% of young people in the Swan Hill LGA aged 16 to 24 were receiving an unemployment benefit June 2017, (Victoria 2.5%).

Source: PHIDU - The Social Health Atlas of Australia Data by Local Government Area, June 2015 & February 2019

3,489

young people aged
12-25

17%

of the overall
population

Source: 2016 ABS Census

**discrepancies within the Robinvale Census data suggest this figure may be higher



There are a total of 832 (4% of people) in the Swan Hill LGA that identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. The overall Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander population in the Swan Hill LGA has a median age of 21, 2016 ABS Census.



15.6% of the Swan Hill LGA had both parents born overseas (Victoria 38.5%), 2016 ABS Census.



23.3% of families in the Swan Hill LGA were single parent families with children aged less than 15 years (Victoria 18.3%), 2016 ABS Census.



Swan Hill LGA had the highest teenage fertility rate in Victoria 41.9 per 1000 births, 2012 (Victoria 10.4 per 1000).

Source: PHIDU - The Social Health Atlas of Australia Data by Local Government Area Published: 2011 & February 2019



27.6% of children in the Swan Hill LGA were in low income, welfare dependant families, 2017 (Victoria 19.3%).

Source: PHIDU - The Social Health Atlas of Australia Data by Local Government Area Published: October 2013 & February 2019

THE POLICY PICTURE

The Swan Hill Rural City Council Youth Strategy 2020-2025 aligns with and is informed by local, state, national and international priorities and outcomes.

Local

- Swan Hill Rural City Council Plan
- Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (2017-2021)
- SHRCC Aboriginal Community Partnership Strategy
- SHRCC Community Access and Inclusion Strategy (2017-2021)
- SHRCC Economic Development Strategy (2017-2022)
- SHRCC Swan Hill Riverfront Masterplan
- SHRCC Creative Strategy (2018-2022)
- Swan Hill Rural City Council Child Safe Policy
- Swan Hill Rural City Council Youth Strategic Plan (2015-2019)
- SHRCC Early-Middle Years Plan (2020-2029)

STATE

- Victorian Child Safe Standards
- Children, Youth and Families Act No.96 of 2005 (Victoria)
- Victorian Health and Wellbeing Plan 2015-2019
- Victoria's Vulnerable Children-Our Shared Responsibility (2013-2022)
- Roadmap to Reform Strong Families Safe Children (2016)
- Ending Family Violence-Victoria's Plan for Change (2017)
- Public Health and Wellbeing Act (2008)
- Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Action Plan
- Disability Discrimination Act (1992)/Disability Amendment Act (2012)
- YacVic's Strategic Plan 2020-2022

NATIONAL

- National Principles for Child Safe Organisations
- National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children (2009-2020)
- Jobs for Families Childcare Package

INTERNATIONAL

- Convention on the Rights of the Child (Ratified in Australia in 1990)

WHAT WE HEARD- PRIORITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Consultation with young people, parents, service providers and community members highlighted the following key priority areas for Swan Hill Rural City Council's Youth Support Program to focus on over the next five years:

DELIVER PREVENTION PROGRAMS/ACTIVITIES

The top health/wellbeing concerns for young people overall are: pressures of schoolwork, mental health of themselves, body image and mental health of others. Alarming, since 2015 young people's concern for their own mental health has doubled. Young people want to work with Council to design/plan a range of prevention programs/activities that are focussed on mental health, bullying, drug and alcohol, social media use, acceptance of diversity, LGBTQI, sexual health, respectful relationships, goal setting/future planning, life skills, body image, managing school pressures, health.

OFFER ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Boredom is once again a top five concern for young people. Young people want whole of community events, arts and culture events, festivals, activities for under 18's, activities for 19-25 age group, low cost/no cost events, weekend and holiday activities.

MORE GENERALIST YOUTH SUPPORT ACROSS THE MUNICIPALITY

Young people and service providers/parents and community both shared that they want Council to continue offering generalist youth support for young people and their families e.g. support to access services, counselling, family support, case management, future planning support and strengthening mental health and wellbeing. Young people and service providers, parents and community also highlighted their desire for Swan Hill Rural City Council to offer more generalist youth support for young people and their families in Robinvale and Manangatang.

STRENGTHEN YOUTH PARTICIPATION/LEADERSHIP AND YOUTH VOICE

Young people want more leadership activities and camps, more opportunities to co-design projects and initiatives, diverse representation on youth council, climate action and a strengthened youth voice in decision making for both youth and community matters.

ADVOCACY AND PLANNING

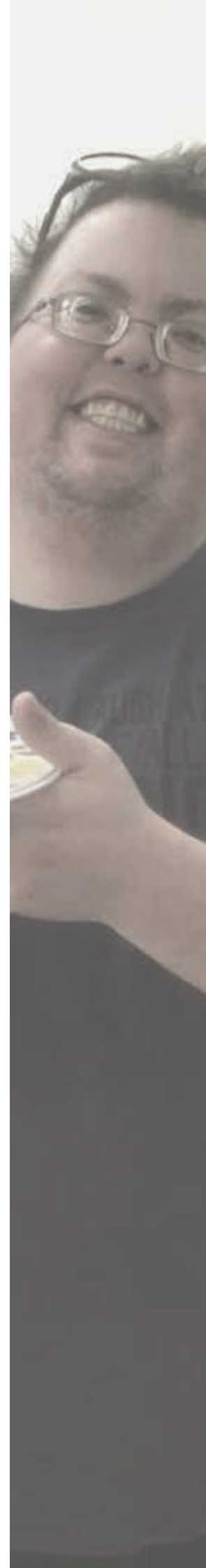
Young people want Council to partner with them to advocate and plan for: local tertiary education options, transport, youth friendly spaces, poverty/disadvantage, crime/community safety, community infrastructure, local shopping, employment/career options, teenage pregnancy and youth access to quality health care services.

STRONGER FOCUS ON 19-25 YEAR AGE GROUP

In 2019 220 young people aged 19-25 completed the youth strategy survey. Young people in this age group had the highest level of concern compared to all age groups for: their own mental health, their body image, the mental health of others, their physical health, money problems and concern about career/employment opportunities for the future. The consultation results confirmed that this transition age is a significant time of need with thoughtful resources and engagement required.

STRENGTHENED FOCUS ON MANANGATANG AND ROBINVALE

Young people, parents and service providers highlighted the need for stronger youth supports based in Robinvale and Manangatang. A desire for a dedicated Youth Worker for Robinvale and Manangatang was captured during consultation. It is envisaged that this worker would offer generalist youth support, prevention activities and programs, youth activities and events and strengthen youth participation and leadership in both communities.



trends



LOADING...

DATA TRENDS

This is the third consecutive Youth Strategy that Council has developed since 2009. Comparisons have been made where possible to reveal data trends spanning this ten year period.

Youth Survey trends of note between 2009-2019:

- Young people shared that they feel safe-very safe in their community; a similar rating of personal safety overall when compared to 2015 results
- Young people are playing less sport
- More young people are using social media
- More young people are volunteering

Young people are MORE personally concerned about:

- In 2019, twice the number of young people are concerned about their own mental health AND the mental health of others compared to 2015
- Pressures of schoolwork concerns continue to grow for young people
- Young people are more concerned about their body image
- Fewer young people feel their school had strongly supported them to explore their hopes, dreams and goals for the future

Young people are LESS personally concerned about:

- Housing/homelessness
- Gambling
- Physical abuse
- Physical bullying
- Family violence
- Sexual abuse
- Racism
- Drugs
- Boredom/nothing
- Cyber bullying

Detailed trend comparisons and full consultation results can be found in the **Swan Hill Rural City Council Youth Strategy Consultation Report**.

WHO DID WE HEAR FROM?



Young People

711 young people filled in a survey and 82 young people took part in one of seven focus groups.



Service Providers

16 service providers attended one of two focus groups and 63 filled in a survey.



Parents

78 parents completed a survey.



Community Members

170 community members filled in a survey.



"I love the people and I am surrounded with the land, the environment and my family".

-young person-

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE LIKED BEST ABOUT WHERE THEY LIVED

In line with 2015 Swan Hill Rural City Council Youth Survey findings, young people once again shared the high value they place on 'the people' in their communities rating the people (33%) as the thing that they like the most about where they live.

1. The people (33%)
2. Quiet/peaceful (17%)
3. Small country town feel (12%)
4. Safety/freedom (9%)
5. Open spaces (8%)
6. River/lakes/nature (7%)
7. Everyone knows everyone (6%)
8. I don't like anything (6%)
9. Opportunities (6%) e.g. work, school, community
10. Sports (5%)/easy to get around (5%)

“

"The community aspect and the slow-paced lifestyle. I also love that when there are events and things going on, it's often locals who are showcased".

- young person-





“Mental illness is extremely prevalent in the youth of Swan Hill and there needs to be more help, talk and solutions in schools and in our community”.

-young person-

THE ISSUES THAT YOUNG PEOPLE THINK ARE MOST IMPORTANT IN THEIR COMMUNITY/REGION

Young people once again demonstrated their interest in broader community issues (not just youth matters) by highlighting the issues that were most important to them in their community/region:

1. Drug misuse (25%)
2. Boredom/not enough to do in the community (15%)
3. Mental health (13%)
4. Bullying (11%)
5. Crime/community safety (11%)
6. Drought/farming (7%)
7. Climate change/environment (7%)
8. Alcohol misuse (6%)
9. Employment, Local shopping, Access to services/supports (5%)
10. Town pride/littering (5%)

“
“We need people to be nicer to one another, less judgement”.
 - young person-

“Our farmers are struggling”.

- young person-





“Better access to generalist youth workers for support and advice. more events and activities which are not associated with the sporting clubs- that are free or low cost”.

-service provider-

“We need more interactive activities that do not include phones”.

-parent-

“Transition to further education and training programs for those who don't want to leave to go to Uni. More apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities. Better linking of services”.

-service provider-



WHAT DO YOU THINK IS NEEDED TO SUPPORT BETTER OUTCOMES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 12-25 YEARS AND THEIR FAMILIES? PARENTS/SERVICE PROVIDERS/COMMUNITY

The top five things that parents/service providers/community members think is needed to support better outcomes for youth and their families are:

1. **More services/supports (31%)** e.g. generalist youth workers, mental health services, service access information, links to services, a Youth Worker in Robinvale and childcare.
2. **More activities/events (28%)** e.g. low cost/no cost events/activities, social connections, music, school holiday and weekend programs.
3. **Youth friendly spaces (8%)**
4. **Youth voice/youth leadership (8%)**
5. **Access to local tertiary education options (7%)**

OUR KEY FOCUS AREAS

Feedback from young people, parents, service providers and the wider community has informed four key focus areas for the Swan Hill Rural City Council Youth Strategy 2020-2025.



Healthy



Participating



Valued



Prepared

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE WANT

Young people want to have good physical and mental health, strong community connections, a safe and inclusive community and a range of activities and events to get involved in.

The 2019 Swan Hill Rural City Council Youth Survey revealed the top five issues that were of personal concern for young people in the past year:

1. Pressures of schoolwork (57%)
2. Mental health of yourself (56%)
3. Body image (52%)
4. Boredom/nothing to do (48%); and
5. Mental health of others (47%)

“Offer support, give knowledge of what services are available. Education around drugs and alcohol. Offering support around general life as a young person. There needs to be more services such as family therapy, individual therapy and more youth workers.”

-young person-

WHAT WE'LL DO

Key Directions

- 1 Deliver health prevention campaigns, activities, projects and programs for young people related to their health and wellbeing needs.
- 2 Promote services that are available to young people and their families.
- 3 Offer a range of low-cost/no-cost activities/events and programs for young people that build their social connections with their peers, families and the wider community.
- 4 Deliver Generalist Youth Services that offer counselling, referrals and wrap around support for young people and their families.
- 5 Support young people to have respectful and safe relationships that build their health and wellbeing.
- 6 Support young people to connect with the digital world in positive and safe ways.
- 7 Plan together with key partners to offer arts and cultural activities and events for young people.
- 8 Promote and develop Youth Inc ensuring that it is a welcoming, safe and inclusive space for all young people.
- 9 Seek resources to employ a full time Generalist Youth Worker for Manangatang and Robinvale.
- 10 Advocate for accessible, affordable, high quality and responsive services, initiatives and supports that meet the needs of young people from the middle years to 25 years of age.



-12%

Less young people are playing sport compared to 2009 & 2015 Youth Surveys.

“Cut down on social media as it is draining everybody I feel and taking them away from the real world.”

-young person-

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE WANT

Young people want to have a say in youth and community matters, have opportunities to co-design and get involved in youth and community projects and initiatives and be respected for their diversity.

Young people who completed a survey wanted to strengthen youth participation/leadership and youth voice e.g. leadership activities and camps, diverse representation on youth council, climate action, including youth voice in decision making.

"It's very isolated from the rest of the state; I feel like our region is left out of a lot of important government decisions".
-young person-

"More opportunities to do volunteer work as a teenager - I know that probably sounds silly but I struggled to do volunteer work or get involved in it".
-young person-

"YACVic & Youth Inc have provided me the opportunity to be meaningfully involved in relevant projects involving local issues for young people which gives me a wealth of knowledge & experience".
-young person-

WHAT WE'LL DO

Key Directions

- 1 Inform, consult and involve young people in decisions that affect them and their communities.
- 2 Develop the leadership capacity and skills of young people aged 12-25 across the municipality.
- 3 Co-design and partner with young people on projects, programs and initiatives of importance to them e.g. recreational, social justice, arts/cultural, health and wellbeing.
- 4 Build the capacity of the whole of Council to engage young people in the work that they do.
- 5 Strengthen engagement with young people aged 19-25 years who live, work or study in the Swan Hill municipality.
- 6 Respect, appreciate and include young people from diverse cultures, backgrounds and abilities.
- 7 Enable and promote the safe participation of young people by assisting them to understand their rights, educating them on how they can raise their concerns and involving them in child safe planning.





FOCUS AREA 3: VALUED

"Have our communities look out for young people".
-young person-

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE WANT

Young people want to be respected, valued and appreciated for their skills and achievements in their communities. They also want community members of all ages to realise and acknowledge the vital role they play in their communities and the valuable contributions that they make.

"Celebrate and encourage youth to hold events/stand up for what they believe in/participating in local events etc".

-young person-

WHAT WE'LL DO

Key Directions

"Somehow, allow older people to see the value of young people & the knowledge they can bring if they are listened to".
-young person-

1

Celebrate, acknowledge, value and promote the achievements of young people across the Swan Hill municipality.

2

Offer grants to resource youth-specific projects identified by young people in the municipality.

FOCUS AREA 4: PREPARED

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE WANT

Young people want to be confident and ready for their future with skills and experience in the work environment, goal setting, job search, and life skills for independent living.

-7% of survey respondents wanted more education, employment and career opportunities.

-81% of survey respondents strongly agreed or agreed that their family had supported them to explore their hopes, dreams and goals for the future and 52% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their school had supported them to explore their hopes dreams and goals for the future.

-For the overall group of survey respondents work (53%), university (51%) and completing high school (48%) were the top three plans noted. 10% of young people weren't sure of their future plans.

"Provide young people with the skills & education necessary to handle life, relationships and plan for the

future".

-young person-

WHAT WE'LL DO

Key Directions

- 1** Support young people to identify and strengthen their resilience, personal goals, networks and personal supports and better plan for their future.
- 2** Support young people to develop their life and employment skills and be work-ready.
- 3** Support advocacy efforts for more traineeships, apprenticeships and youth employment opportunities.

"The Coaching Young People for Success program has helped me".

-young person-



71% of young people who filled in a survey said that they were positive or very positive about their future.



MONITORING, REVIEW & REPORTING

The Youth Strategy is incorporated into the Council Plan (2017-2021) with accompanying responsibilities, resources and timeframes identified.

A corresponding yearly work plan will be developed to guide implementation, review, timeframes, partnerships and resourcing.

NOVO Youth Council will work closely with Council's Youth Services team; advising, guiding and bringing continuous youth voice to the implementation process.

A youth and community friendly yearly report card will be published to share the progression and outcomes of the Youth Strategy 2020-2025 with young people, the youth sector, parents and the wider community.