

**YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES:**

# **ENGAGED ACTIVE CONNECTED**

**YOUTH AND FAMILY  
STRATEGY 2021-26**



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The City of Greater Dandenong respectfully acknowledges [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people](#) as the First Australians and the Traditional Owners of the land and continues to acknowledge and respect their continuing connection to culture and country.

Council acknowledges the contribution of the many [young people and families](#) who shared their wisdom, experience and ideas to inform this Strategy.

Council also extends its appreciation to the many [organisations](#) who provided guidance on the needs of young people and families in Greater Dandenong which informed this strategy.

The City of Greater Dandenong is a [Child Safe Organisation](#), working to protect children from harm through upholding the Child Safe Standards in every interaction with children and young people.

[Family Support Services](#) provides funded service provision that is accredited under ISO 9001: 2015 and Human Services Standards. External audits are conducted to ensure compliance with this accreditation is maintained.

The [Gender Equality Act 2020](#) requires local government to take positive action towards promoting gender equality in their policies, programs and services. A Gender Impact Assessment has been completed in line with the development of this strategy to ensure that accompanying actions are inclusive and promote equity.

In January 2020, Council declared a '[Climate and Ecological Emergency](#)' and committed to emergency action on climate change. Sustainability is a core principle of this strategy, with emphasis placed upon embedding our commitment across work practices; and in advancing young people and families' efforts to positively contribute to the environment.





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# MAYOR'S MESSAGE

**Greater Dandenong City Council wants to create a community where young people and families feel safe, respected and supported.**

The Youth and Family Strategy 2021-26 outlines a plan for Council to best direct services to meet the needs of young people aged 12-25 years and families in Greater Dandenong.

There are more than 30,000 young people aged 12-25 living in Greater Dandenong. They make up an important part of our diverse and vibrant city. Working with the cities' young people and families in supporting them to achieve their full potential and engage in civic life is a priority for Council.

Families play an important and vital role in building resilience and nurturing the development of children and young people. This strategy recognises the central role of families and marks Council's strengthened commitment in supporting families to prosper.

With the guidance of this strategy, Council will work with young people, families, key agencies and the local community to help young people achieve their goals and aspirations.

On behalf of Council I would like to acknowledge the many agencies and individuals who have assisted in the development of this strategy. We would not be able to provide the services we do without the support of the whole community.

As Mayor of the City of Greater Dandenong I am proud to get behind this comprehensive strategy, and I look forward to seeing its actions implemented across our city.



**Cr Angela Long**  
Mayor



# COUNCIL'S VISION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES

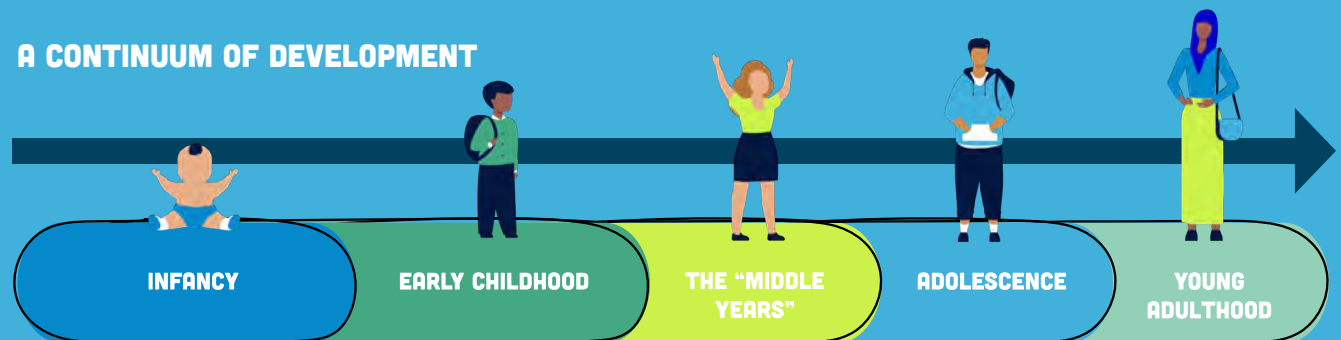
**Council's vision is that young people and families are valued, celebrated and supported to reach their full potential.**

To achieve this vision Council will work with young people, families and the community to enhance their participation across all aspects of life including social, cultural, environmental and economic, so young people and families can prosper and thrive.

Council is committed to promoting the health and wellbeing of young people and families that live, study or have a significant connection with the City of Greater Dandenong. The Youth and Family Strategy, Young People and Families: Engaged, Active, Connected, continues to build upon the work of the preceding Youth Strategy (2016-19) through recognising and supporting the central and important role family and family connections play in shaping positive child and adolescent development.



## A CONTINUUM OF DEVELOPMENT





# DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGY

The development of this strategy has been informed by an extensive evidence-base developed by Council, including:

- Consultation with young people and families, as well as local service providers and relevant Council departments,
- A review of relevant policy frameworks at a local, state and federal level,
- Benchmarking activities; and
- A comprehensive review of the previous Youth Strategy Action Plan 2015-19.

This evidence-base is summarised in a supplementary background document: *Key Themes in the Data and Literature - Children, Young People and Families*. For detailed citation of data and consultation findings referenced in the Youth and Family Strategy 2021-26, please refer to this document.

## Definitions

The following definitions are provided based on consultation and guidance from a range of sources including the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Young People, and the Australian Bureau of Statistics. These definitions reflect the vision and priorities set forth in this strategy, taking into consideration the role of local government and the diversity of the Greater Dandenong community.



### MIDDLE YEARS (8-14 years)

This definition reflects local government policy and funding frameworks; and considers current service provision and the discrete practice specialties of children and youth service staff working across the 0-8 years and 12-25 years respectively.

### YOUNG PERSON/PEOPLE (12-25 years)

This is in accordance with the national and state definitions of young people.

### FAMILY

'Family' refers to at least one adult with a caring relationship for a child or children. This is inclusive of both single and couple parenting arrangements, as well as biological, adoptive, step, kinship or fostering relationships.



# OUR PRIORITIES

## PRIORITY 1: LEAD AND ADVOCATE

### OBJECTIVE:

Working in partnership, lead and advocate in response to the needs of young people and families

## PRIORITY 2: ENGAGED AND VALUED

### OBJECTIVE:

Facilitate and value active participation and engagement of young people and families in the community

## PRIORITY 3: LEARN AND WORK

### OBJECTIVE:

Support engagement in learning, skill development and employment pathways

## PRIORITY 4: HEALTH AND WELLBEING

### OBJECTIVE:

Strengthen health and wellbeing outcomes for young people and families

## PRIORITY 5: SAFE AND INCLUSIVE

### OBJECTIVE:

Creating a community where young people and families feel respected and safe



# ROLE OF COUNCIL IN DELIVERING YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES

## Greater Dandenong City Council recognises its central role in providing a universal service base for young people and families in the municipality.

As a local government, Council is uniquely positioned to undertake collaborative work with the local community it is appointed to serve; and has a leading role in responding to the health and wellbeing needs of young people and families.

Council demonstrates sound leadership and commitment to community by undertaking the following four key strategic roles:

### 1. LEADER:

Collaborates with tiers of government and service providers, to identify priority needs and mobilise innovative responses.

### 2. PLANNER:

Together with service providers, stakeholders, young people and families, identifies gaps and opportunities for responses.

### 3. ADVOCATE:

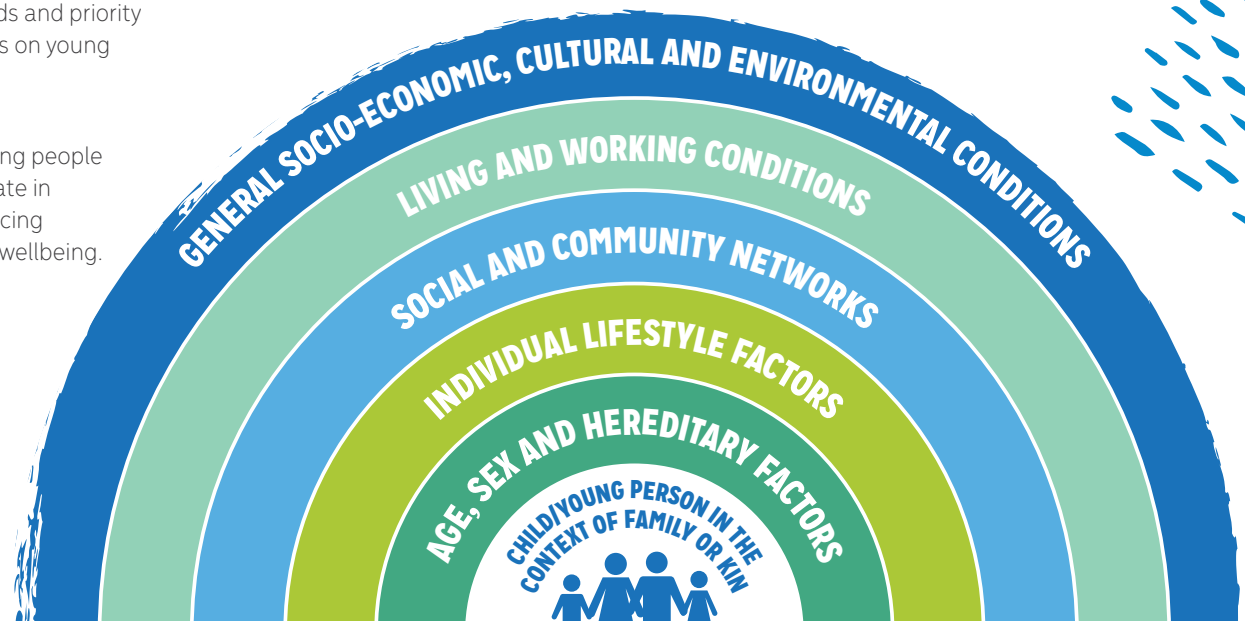
Provides advocacy on local needs and priority areas of concern and its impacts on young people and families.

### 4. PROVIDER:

Facilitates opportunities for young people and families to actively participate in community and civic life, enhancing social and life skills, health and wellbeing.

## Social Model of Health

Council works from a social model of health, recognising the multiple factors influencing a persons' health and wellbeing. This model also fully encompasses Council's acknowledgement of the important role of families and community in shaping the wellbeing of young people.





# COUNCIL'S STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Through this strategy, Council is taking an integrated approach to supporting positive outcomes for young people and families within the City of Greater Dandenong.

Council has also developed this strategy to reflect the objectives of our Council Plan 2021-25 (incorporating the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan), as outlined below.

Council Plan 2021-25	Health and Wellbeing	Youth and Family Strategy 2021-2026
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES	PRIORITIES	OBJECTIVES
A socially connected, safe and healthy city	Active living	Working in partnership, lead and advocate in response to the needs of young people and families
A city that supports entrepreneurship, quality education and employment outcomes	Physical health and mental wellbeing Social cohesion and community safety	
A socially connected, safe and healthy city	Physical health and mental wellbeing	Strengthen health and wellbeing outcomes for young people and families
A city that supports entrepreneurship, quality education and employment outcomes	Physical health and mental wellbeing	Support engagement in learning, skill development and employment pathways
A socially connected, safe and healthy city	Social cohesion and community safety	Creating a community where young people and families feel safe and respected
A city of accessible, vibrant centres and neighbourhoods		
A city that respects and celebrates diversity, our history and the arts	Active living	Facilitate and value active participation and engagement of young people and families in the community
A socially connected, safe and healthy city	Physical health and mental wellbeing Social cohesion and community safety	



# BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Council is committed to the following principles which underpin the development and implementation of the City of Greater Dandenong's Youth and Family Strategy 2021-26.



## PRINCIPLES

Council is committed to:

### 1. LEADERSHIP, ADVOCACY AND PARTNERSHIPS

Lead, advocate and work in partnership to strengthen the local service system and be responsive to the needs of young people and families.

### 2. YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Engage and empower young people in purposeful discussion and decision-making processes and as active participants in community life.

### 3. FAMILY CENTRED PRACTICE

Work from a strengths-based approach with a focus on prevention and early intervention services for families.

### 4. CAPACITY BUILDING

Build the capacity of young people and families, to encourage active participation in community life.

### 5. EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Ensure Council's services reflect the diverse views and experiences and backgrounds of our community.

### 6. CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Use evidence-informed practice and adopt innovative approaches in developing programs and services for young people and families.

### 7. SUSTAINABILITY

Ensure our work practices follow current environmental principles; and encourage young people and families to take positive action on the environment and the communities in which they live.

# A PROFILE OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES IN THE CITY OF GREATER DANDENONG



Located in Melbourne's south-east, Greater Dandenong has a population of 175,000 people and is proudly recognised as Australia's most culturally diverse municipality.

In developing this Youth and Family Strategy, Council has considered the following defining demographic characteristics of the municipality, as well as the associated challenges impacting on Greater Dandenong's young people and families.

## YOUNG PEOPLE

**30,548**

Young people aged 12-25 years

**1 IN 6**

Young people represent 1 in 6 residents in Greater Dandenong



**130**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people live in Greater Dandenong



**851**

Children and young people up to the age 25 years have a profound or severe disability



**50%**

of young people were born overseas



**70%**

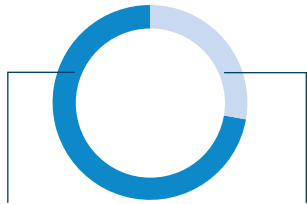
of young people speak a language other than English at home





# A PROFILE OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES IN THE CITY OF GREATER DANDENONG (CONTINUED)

## FAMILIES



**72%**

Couple families with children



**28%**

Single-parent families with children

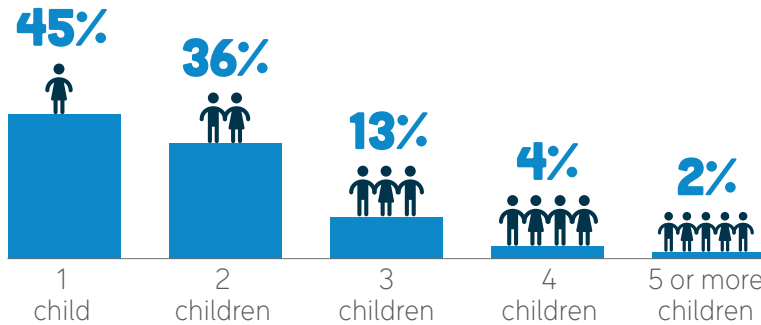


**THREE-QUARTERS**

of families with children have parents who were born overseas



## NUMBER OF CHILDREN PER FAMILY



## KEY SOCIAL ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

### Cultural Diversity

Greater Dandenong is proudly recognised as Australia's most culturally diverse municipality. However with one of the highest rates of humanitarian and asylum seeker settlements in Melbourne, there is associated economic and social vulnerability. Subsequently, addressing the needs of these communities is a high priority for Council.

- **65 per cent** of residents were born overseas; representing **157** different birthplaces.
- **70 per cent** of residents speak a language other than English at home.
- **6 per cent** of young people have limited fluency in English.
- **17 per cent** of children and young people 0-25 years in 2016 were recently arrived migrants.
- **2,436** asylum seekers resided in Greater Dandenong in 2017, representing **27 per cent** of asylum seekers in the state.

### Economic Disadvantage

Greater Dandenong is ranked as the second most disadvantaged municipality in Victoria on the 2016 SEIFA Index. The SEIFA Index looks at 'people's access to material and social resources, and their ability to participate in society'. High rates of disadvantage may be associated with a range of factors, including low income, many people in low skill occupations or without qualifications, high unemployment, lack of access to resources such as a car, and lack of access to affordable housing.

- In 2016, the median individual weekly gross income in Greater Dandenong stood at **\$476**. This is the lowest level in Melbourne

### Family Violence

The City of Greater Dandenong has the third highest rate of domestic violence callouts in metropolitan Melbourne.





## KEY SOCIAL ISSUES AND CHALLENGES (CONTINUED)



### Unemployment and disengagement

Greater Dandenong continues to experience high rates of youth unemployment and disengagement, coupled with entrenched intergenerational social and economic disadvantage.

- **2,516** individuals aged 15–24 years are not engaged in education or paid employment; an increase of **26 per cent** between 2011 and 2016.
- **13 per cent** of young adults aged 20–24 years had left school before Year 11 (**69 per cent** of whom were born overseas); compared to **8.3 per cent** across metropolitan Melbourne.
- **31 per cent** of families with children have no parent in paid employment; compared to **19 per cent** across metropolitan Melbourne.

### Housing and homelessness

Homelessness and access to affordable housing are key issues for young people and families in Greater Dandenong. Greater Dandenong has the highest number of homeless persons in Victoria; estimated at **1,942** individuals.

- For young adults aged 18–25 years: **51 per cent** live in a household with couple parents; **19 per cent** live in a household with a single parent; and **11 per cent** live in a group household.
- **38 per cent** of renting households in Greater Dandenong faced poverty after paying their rent; the second highest level in Victoria.
- **4.1 per cent** of private dwellings (**5,720** homes) are considered overcrowded; the highest proportion in metropolitan Melbourne.

### Climate Change

Greater Dandenong is committed to ensuring the community understands the importance of climate change and its impact.

Young people in particular are seeing climate change as an issue.

The 2020 Mission Australia Youth Survey consulted 25,000 young people highlighting climate change as the fourth biggest issue

- **29.5 per cent** stated this was an important issue for them
- **14.8 per cent** were involved in some form of environment group



# STRATEGIC ACTIONS

## ACTION PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Council's Youth and Family Services team will lead the implementation and monitoring of this strategy. Annual action plans will accompany this strategy, to support its implementation and to provide a framework for annually reviewing the progress against each strategies' objectives.

## MONITORING AND REVIEW

Key outcomes will be reported in line with quarterly reporting processes. Further an annual report card will be produced in January, highlighting key achievements from the annual action plan and in turn presented to Council. This reporting timeline fits with service delivery operating in accord with the calendar year.



# PRIORITY 1: LEAD AND ADVOCATE



## OBJECTIVE: Working in partnership, lead and advocate in response to the needs of young people and families

A well-connected, engaged and responsive service sector is critical to ensuring that the needs of young people and families are addressed. Council is a leader and advocate and performs a key role in supporting the service sector to respond to the needs of young people and families. The high concentration of services based in Greater Dandenong underpins the need for Council to provide a leadership role in supporting partnerships and collaboration between agencies.

Youth and Family Services leads and facilitates local networks and works closely with key stakeholders to enhance accessibility across the service system.

### Actions

- 1.1 Lead and facilitate strategic planning of service delivery, in partnership with key stakeholders.
- 1.2 Advocate on behalf of young people and families to address generational and situational disadvantage.
- 1.3 Work with stakeholders to identify emerging needs and trends impacting on young people and families.
- 1.4 Facilitate local service networks to share information and support sector development.
- 1.5 Enhance referral pathways for seamless service delivery to young people and families.
- 1.6 Advocate for increased support to address the lack of targeted service responses for young people in the middle years (8-14 years).
- 1.7 Pursue external funding opportunities to be responsive to the needs of young people and families.

Parents and carers have told us that they want easy access to information about services that can support the wellbeing of their family.

Young people have told Council that they want more information about the services and supports available to them; and that services need to be accessible and youth friendly.

Young people in Greater Dandenong are two and a half times more likely to turn to a community agency for support, compared to their peers across Victoria.



# PRIORITY 2: ENGAGED AND VALUED



## OBJECTIVE: Facilitate and value active participation and engagement of young people and families in the community

Active citizenship provides opportunities for young people and families to develop valuable skills and to enhance a sense of community connectedness. Council recognises and celebrates the invaluable contributions of young people and families; and upholds their right to participate in decision making that affects their lives. Youth and Family Services works collaboratively across Council and community to facilitate meaningful opportunities to hear the voices of young people and families.

### Actions

- 2.1 Facilitate opportunities for young people and families to actively participate in council consultations and decision-making processes.
- 2.2 Provide opportunities for young people to develop leadership skills and make positive contributions to their community.
- 2.3 Provide opportunities for young people and families, including the most vulnerable, to participate in programs and initiatives that build a sense of community belonging.
- 2.4 Facilitate opportunities for young people to engage in projects that support the environment and sustainability, including addressing the impacts of climate change.
- 2.5 Recognise, celebrate and promote the contributions of young people as active citizens.
- 2.6 Provide information to families about accessible opportunities that encourage participation in the community.
- 2.7 Provide opportunities for young people to be involved in the planning and delivery of community events.

Families have told Council that they appreciate the right to be heard, and to have their views considered in decision-making processes.

Young people have told Council that they value a range of opportunities to have their say, including online and face-to-face. Young people have mentioned that 'anonymity', 'fairness' and 'respect' help them to feel confident in sharing their views.

Findings from the Greater Dandenong Resilience Survey (2019) demonstrate that only 56 per cent of secondary school students feel valued and appreciated.





# PRIORITY 3: LEARN AND WORK



## OBJECTIVE:

### Support engagement in learning, skill development and employment pathways

Engagement in education and employment is critical to improving social and economic outcomes for young people and families. Council advocates for measures to address systemic barriers to participation in education and employment, as well as the creation of improved pathways to sustainable employment. To improve outcomes for young people, Council supports the development of transferable skills through participation in youth programs and volunteering.

## Actions

- 3.1 Strengthen the capacity of parents and carers to support young people's engagement in learning.
- 3.2 Facilitate opportunities for young people to gain skills and experience to enhance personal development and improve work-readiness.
- 3.3 Provide information to assist young people and families to navigate key education and employment transition milestones.
- 3.4 Facilitate young people and families' access to information about education and employment pathways, including links with local employment opportunities.
- 3.5 Facilitate volunteering opportunities for young people as a pathway for enhancing employability.
- 3.6 Strengthen referral pathways for young people experiencing (or at-risk of) disengagement from education and employment.

Families have told us that they value Council's role in supporting their children's engagement in learning and educational opportunities.

Young people have told Council that they highly value education; however, 46 per cent perceive barriers to completing their post-school goals.

Young people in Greater Dandenong are twice as likely to rate education as the most important issue in Australia, compared to other young people in Victoria (19.5 per cent compared to 8.9 per cent).

# PRIORITY 4: HEALTH AND WELLBEING



## OBJECTIVE:

### Strengthen health and wellbeing outcomes for young people and families

Improving health and wellbeing outcomes for young people and families encompasses physical and mental health and social connection to build resilience. Strengthening the capacity of parents, in turn supports their role in improving the health and wellbeing outcomes of their children, throughout the stages of childhood and adolescent development. For young people who are developing more independence, the focus is on building health literacy and equipping them with the skills and information they need to make positive choices and support their own health and wellbeing.

## Actions

- 4.1 Implement and support health promotion and prevention initiatives targeting young people and families.
- 4.2 Strengthen the health and wellbeing of families, including a focus on vulnerable families, through the provision of support programs and services.
- 4.3 Increase awareness of mental health and support services available to young people and families.
- 4.4 Facilitate young people's participation in the design and development of health promotion activities.
- 4.5 Encourage young people and families to be physically active and participate in recreational opportunities.
- 4.6 Deliver initiatives to raise awareness amongst young people of the adverse effects of alcohol and drug use.
- 4.7 Collaborate with relevant stakeholders to improve Indigenous health to improve outcomes for young people and families.

Families have asked Council for more support in promoting the healthy development of their children.

Young people commonly identify coping with stress and mental health as issues of high importance in their lives.

The Greater Dandenong Resilience Survey (in 2015, 2017 and 2019) consistently highlighted challenges for young people around participating in physical activity and getting enough sleep, coupled with high levels of stress.



# PRIORITY 5: SAFE AND INCLUSIVE



## OBJECTIVE:

### Creating a community where young people and families feel safe and respected

Safety at home, at school, at work and in the community is of high importance to young people and families in Greater Dandenong. Developing safer communities includes reducing experiences of bullying, family violence and discrimination; as well as providing safe and accessible public spaces and facilities. These actions support young people and families to participate in community life. The Greater Dandenong City Council upholds the safety of young people and families by ensuring that services are welcoming, safe, inclusive and culturally responsive.

## Actions

- 5.1 Deliver initiatives to address Family Violence and its causes.
- 5.2 Facilitate positive parenting programs that aim to strengthen the capacity of families.
- 5.3 Deliver initiatives that support social cohesion and promote understanding of diversity across the community.
- 5.4 Activate and promote safe and accessible public spaces and facilities for young people and families, catering to a diversity of needs and interests.
- 5.5 Work with partners to respond to community safety concerns for young people and families, including a focus on improving perceptions of safety.



Families have expressed a need to be connected to services that can support families with the impact of family violence.

Young people have told us that bullying and discrimination including racism, gender inequality, homophobia and transphobia, are key issues to address.

Young people in Greater Dandenong are more likely to nominate 'personal safety' as an issue of concern (as compared to their peers across Victoria).



# APPENDIX

## LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY CONTEXT

This strategy has been informed by a range of Local, State and Commonwealth policies and legislation.

### Local Context

- Council Plan 2021-25 (incorporating the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan)
- A Safe and Harmonious Greater Dandenong. A community safety plan for Greater Dandenong 2015-22
- Greater Dandenong People Seeking Asylum and Refugees Action Plan 2018-21
- City of Greater Dandenong Disability Action Plan 2017-23
- City of Greater Dandenong Reconciliation Plan "Innovate RAP" 2021-23
- City of Greater Dandenong Library Strategy 2018-23 and Library Strategy Action Plan 2018-21
- City of Greater Dandenong Open Space Strategy
- City of Greater Dandenong Make Your Move Physical Activity Strategy 2020-30
- Greater Dandenong Climate Emergency Strategy and Action Plan 2020-30
- Children's Plan 2021-26

### State Legislative

- Gender Equality Act 2020
- Victorian Charter for Human Rights and Responsibilities.
- Victorian Child Safe Standards
- Child, Youth and Families Act (2005), Best Interest Principles Framework

### Commonwealth Legislative

- Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986

### State Policy

- The Code of Ethical Practice for the Victorian Youth Sector
- Victoria's Vulnerable Children: Our Shared Responsibility Strategy 2013-22
- Roadmap to Reform: Stronger Families, Safe Children

- Victorian Charter for Child Friendly Cities and Communities
- Youth Policy - Building Stronger Youth Engagement in Victoria (under review - new strategy to be launched mid 2021)

### Commonwealth Policy

- National Youth Policy Framework (under development)
- National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Their Children 2010-22

