Wodonga Youth Strategy
2014-2015 to 2016-2017
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Executive summary

The Youth Strategy is Wodonga’s plan for our young people, outlining the council’s priorities over the next three years. The strategy has been developed to address the growing concerns and feedback received from more than 800 young people in 2013 during council’s youth consultations. The strategy is strongly linked with the council plan under the strategic area of Our People: Providing a great lifestyle. The youth services team work closely with the various departments across the council to ensure that young people’s needs are being met and their voices are heard through all council strategies including the cultural services plan, the sport and recreation strategy and the playground strategy.

In Wodonga there are more than 8900 young people: some work, some study, some are parents, some are looking for work some volunteer and some do a mixture of all of these activities.

In the 2013 youth consultation, young people told us that they like living in Wodonga and enjoy the events, programs, facilities, services and the sense of community. Many commented that they would like Wodonga to feel safer and that bullying, mental health, safety and violence were issues they were concerned about. They also told us they wanted to get more involved and have their say and have more opportunities to come together to socialise, participate in activities and skill development sessions.

In the following strategy and action plan, the council will address many of these concerns through continuing to provide a range of activities including the Youth Leadership Program and breakfasts, FReeZA Program, REDfest, the RED Carpet Youth Awards and range of other services and activities. Into the future youth services will develop a youth engagement policy to ensure young people are involved and participating in important council decisions, we will support the establishment of headspace, investigate the viability of a youth hub and develop a cross-border anti-bullying campaign in collaboration with the community by 2017. Further to this, the council will continue to recognise young people’s achievements, provide 7000 youth contact and discount cards, and work closely with the local youth sector.

Through these measures we will continue to realise the council’s plan that all young people are:

- Healthy, safe, resilient and happy;
- Given opportunities to learn, develop, work and contribute to the community;
- Feel connected with a sense of belonging to their community;
- Have their voices heard and respected in all matters that directly affect them; and,
- Have their achievements and contributions acknowledged and celebrated.
It is with great pleasure that I am able to present the Wodonga Youth Strategy 2014-2015 to 2016-2017.

I’m proud to be part of a council that takes a great interest in the youth of our city.

Each month we support their achievements through our Young Achiever Support Scheme.

Each year we recognise a young citizen of the year and celebrate the achievements of young people through the RED Carpet Youth Awards.

We support young people’s growth and development through the Youth Leadership Program.

We provide activities and entertainment through the FreeZA program and with the annual REDfest celebrations as part of National Youth Week.

This council is committed to understanding the needs, aspirations and unique challenges young people face.

We have listened to more than 800 young people through a variety of channels in 2013 where they shared what was important to them, how they wanted to be involved in the community and how the community could involve them.

All these messages and information have been reflected in the Youth Strategy which sets the council’s direction for the next four years.

There are dedicated actions to facilitate, promote and support our young people as effective and integral community members.

In collaboration, young people and the council will review the strategy annually to ensure it remains current and reflective of the needs and aspirations of young people in the changing demands of the city.

We are set to benefit from the energy, enthusiasm, creativity, talent and contribution young people make on a daily basis to our community, as we continue to build our capacity to foster their participation and enhance their involvement in public dialogue.

Cr Rodney Wangman
Wodonga Mayor
What is a youth strategy?

The Wodonga Youth Strategy outlines the activities and services that Wodonga Council will provide for young people over the next three years.

Wodonga Council aims to strengthen the community in all that it does through the strategic areas of:

- **Our people**
- **Our city**
- **Our future**

Youth programs, services and activities are captured in 'our people' and include all people aged nine to 24 years who live, work, study or play in Wodonga. The council aims to provide opportunities and encouragement for young people to actively participate and contribute to the Wodonga community.

The youth action plan has been developed with three age groups identified to account for the developmental stages of young people and the role that families play in their transition to adulthood.

Wodonga Council’s vision is that all children and young people will:

- Be healthy, safe, resilient and happy;
- Be given opportunities to learn, develop, work and contribute to the community;
- Feel connected with a sense of belonging to their community;
- Have their voices heard and respected in all matters that directly affect them; and,
- Have their achievements and contributions acknowledged and celebrated.

Wodonga Council supports the outcomes for children and young people as described by the Victorian Child and Adolescent Outcomes Framework.

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**Children and young people**
- optimal antenatal/infant development
- optimal physical health
- adequate nutrition
- free from preventable disease
- healthy teeth and gums
- healthy weight
- adequate exercise and physical activity
- healthy teenage lifestyle
- safe from injury and harm
- optimal social and emotional development
- positive child behaviour and mental health
- pro-social teenage lifestyle and law abiding behaviour
- teenagers able to rely or supportive adults
- optimal language and cognitive development
- successful in literacy and numeracy
- young people complete secondary education

**Families**
- healthy adult lifestyle
- parent promotion of child
- health and development
- good parental mental health
- free from abuse and neglect
- free from child exposure to conflict or family violence
- ability to pay for essentials
- adequate family housing
- positive family functioning

**Community**
- safe from environmental toxins
- communities that enable parents, children and young people to build connections
- draw on informal assistance
- accessible local recreation spaces, activities and community facilities
- low levels of crime in community

**Society**
- quality antenatal care
- early identification of child health needs
- high quality early education and care experiences available
- adequate supports to meet needs of families with children with a disability
- children attend and enjoy school
- adult health and community services that meet the needs of parents critical to parenting
- adequate supports for vulnerable teenagers

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Wodonga Y outh Strategy

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Wodonga Council supports the outcomes for children and young people as described by the Victorian Child and Adolescent Outcomes Framework.
**Why is it important?**

The strategy is inclusive of all young people acknowledging and valuing their diversity: socio-economic status, sex, gender, sexuality, ability and cultural background.

Young people have always been seen as the future of the city. But they need to be acknowledged as active citizens now because the skills and values that they currently possess, and the ones that others equip them with, will impact on the community in the future.

A city that supports, respects and actively includes young people in all aspects of community life will benefit from the energy and passion of youth. Putting in place youth-friendly policies, programs and initiatives across the city of Wodonga is an investment in the long-term health, participation and well-being of the community.

The economic benefits of successful programs can be substantial, especially when they improve school retention and attainment. An increase of one year of schooling in the average educational attainment of the workforce is estimated to increase the long-run level of gross domestic product (GDP) by about 8 per cent and boost GDP growth by supporting more rapid adoption of new technologies. This will have a significant effect on the economic future of Wodonga.

**What is the council's role?**

The council will continue to demonstrate strategic leadership through advocating, lobbying and planning for young people in the city.

It is through adopting strong partnerships within the youth sector and building local community capacity to effectively plan and respond to youth sector issues that leads to effective youth sector planning and co-ordination across the municipality.

A systems approach ensures that local government and the local youth sector are working toward shared goals to meet the needs of young people. Youth connectedness to the local government sector is an important aspect to foster in any community.

It is through a holistic perspective the council continues to engage with young people through work experience programs, major events and promotion, recreation and parks, arts and culture, leisure facilities and economic development.

The youth strategy forms part of the strategic objective in the council plan that aims to enhance social connectedness, physical and mental health and well-being, education and participatory opportunities and advocates for diverse range of services for young people.

The youth strategy focuses on social inclusion and community participation recognising that a sense of belonging is an important contributor to personal and community health and well-being outcomes.

The council recognises the valuable role that families and significant others play in the ongoing support and development of our young people. It is the responsibility of families, the community and the council to support young people and provide them with every opportunity to succeed.
Who are Wodonga’s young people?

There are more than 8900 young people aged nine to 24 years living in Wodonga, making up 25.1 per cent of the city's population.

There are approximately 500 more males than females, and more than 220 (2.6 per cent) young people identify as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. There are more than 270 (3.2 per cent) young people in Wodonga who were born overseas and over 340 (4.0 per cent) young people who have a disability or require extra assistance.

There have been some positive trends for young people in the city over the past five years.

The proportion of young people aged 19 years who have attained year 12 or equivalent has increased from 77.9 per cent in 2009 to 88.2 per cent in 2012 and is now above the state average of 84.2 per cent.

The teenage fertility rate (the rate of live births for women aged 15 to 19 years per 1000 women in this age group) has decreased from 24.2 per 1000 in 2008 to 15.5 per 1000 in 2012 and remains above the state average of 10.4 per 1000.

In 2011, 11 per cent of young people aged 15 to 24 years in Wodonga were classed as unemployed. This rate is consistent with regional Victoria and below both the Victorian and Australian rate of 12.0 and 12.2 per cent respectively.

By 2031 it is likely that more than 13,000 young people will call Wodonga home.

Through working with young people, their families and the community; outcomes for young people will improve. A dialogue will be created that raises community focus on young people and through this the development of innovative programs and projects will evolve.

Wodonga’s young people are a diverse group:

- **Primary schoolers (9 to 11)**: 5.6%
- **Secondary schoolers (12-17)**: 8.7%
- **Tertiary education and independence (18 to 24)**: 10.8%

Some study, some work, some are parents, some are looking for work, some volunteer and some do a mixture of all of these;

Some like music, some like sport, some like gaming, some like shopping, some like performing, some like nature, but the majority enjoy spending time with family and friends; and

Some like everything about Wodonga, some would like to change certain things, but the majority are passionate about Wodonga and its people.
What young people have said

The opinions and ideas of more than 800 young people were gathered through surveys (530), focus groups (65), consultation walls (115), suggestion boards (85) and casual conversations (25) conducted right across Wodonga between March and October, 2013.

Here’s what they said:

• They like living in Wodonga due to the people, facilities, services and sense of community;
• Family relationships, friendship and school or study are important to them;
• Bullying, mental illness, safety and violence are issues of concern;
• Young people are interested in a diverse range of activities, but most enjoy spending time with family and friends;
• Lack of time, not knowing how to get involved, lack of confidence and access to transport for those who live out of town are the main reasons why young people don’t always get involved in the community;
• Wodonga should look nicer, have better public transport, feel safer and have better study and job opportunities;
• Young people would like youth spaces that offer opportunities to socialise, activities and programs, non-judgmental advice, meeting rooms for youth groups/committees, and that are welcoming, fun and safe;
• Young people want to be more involved in decisions that affect them and their community;
• Facebook/social media is the best way to communicate with young people, along with email and text messages;
• Young people like the events and programs that are provided for them in Wodonga; and
• Young people would like more regular youth events that are better promoted, offer greater variety and provide skill development workshops.
What young people would change about Wodonga
Great things Wodonga already does

More than 80 per cent of young people rate their experience of current youth events and programs as “good” or “fantastic”. So the council is going to keep supporting these:

Innovative youth programs and projects:
- Youth Leadership Program;
- Leadership breakfasts;
- FReeZA Program;
- REDfest/National Youth Week celebrations;
- Young people involved in community events and festivals;
- Youth contact and discount card;
- Midnight Basketball program;
- L2P Learner Driver program;
- The Vibe;
- Artyfacts;
- Young Writer’s Group; and,
- Manga and Anime Club.

Youth sector partnerships:
- Work strategically and collaboratively across the Wodonga youth sector;
- Attend and participate in Youth Albury Wodonga (YAW), Upper Hume Inter-agency Team (UHIT), and other network meetings/professional development opportunities; and
- Talk about issues of concern to young people with organisations that can help take positive action.

Consult with young people:
- Actively encourage young people and their family to participate in all community consultations.

Recognise young people’s achievements:
- Red Carpet Youth Awards;
- Young Achiever Support Scheme (YASS) and YASS Youth Excellence Award; and,
- Young Citizen of the Year.

Youth services also provides strategic advice and support for youth specific programming that occurs at the Wodonga Library, Arts Space Wodonga, The Cube Wodonga, community centres and as part of the Settlement Assistance Program. Information about the needs of young people is also considered in the council’s strategic, infrastructure, recreational and playground planning.
What is new or improved

Based on the feedback, ideas and suggestions of young people, here are some new or improved youth events and programs that have been suggested:

Innovative youth programs and projects:
- Update the format of REDfest to provide a series of youth events and activities throughout National Youth Week;
- Mix up FReeZA program activities to offer a more diverse range of events and increase opportunities for skills development;
- Provide young people with meaningful work placements that focus on job readiness skills through a structured work experience program at Wodonga Council;
- Provide local secondary school bands with the opportunity to participate in the Kool Skools music industry program; and,
- Initiate an anti-bullying campaign involving young people, education providers, youth agencies and the Wodonga community that aims to take a zero tolerance stance on bullying.

Consult with young people:
- Develop and implement a youth engagement policy to ensure that youth participation and family practices are embedded across the council organisation.

Support headspace in Albury-Wodonga:
- Provide support to the establishment and operation of headspace Albury Wodonga through membership of the headspace reference group and by encouraging the involvement of young people.

Investigate a youth hub in Wodonga:
- Research successful youth space models across Victoria; and,
- Research and develop appropriate models and test options for youth-friendly spaces across Wodonga.
Where to now?

Wodonga Council will know that youth events, programs and services are meeting the needs of young people if it implements and continues to:

Provide innovative youth programs and projects through:
- Hosting a leadership program for 18 to 24-year-olds that incorporates mentoring, volunteering and community project components, with an annual target of 12 participants;
- Hosting a series of leadership breakfast sessions for nine to 18-year-olds, with a target of 200 participants;
- Engaging a FReeZA committee of 12 young people each calendar year to plan and deliver a minimum of five youth music or cultural events, that attract an audience of 1400 young people;
- Providing 7000 youth contact and discount cards to young people in Wodonga each year;
- Encouraging and support meaningful involvement of young people at community events and festivals;
- Provide an opportunity for Year 6 students to attend a yearly camp in Portsea and attend a follow up leadership breakfast;
- Supporting Junction Support Services to deliver driver training and mentoring to 35 young people annually, under VicRoad’s L2P Learner Driver Program;
- Supporting Midnight Basketball in Wodonga; and,
- Developing and implementing a cross-border collaborative anti-bullying campaign by June, 2017.

Youth sector partnerships through:
- Hosting two Wodonga youth sector meetings each year to discuss and strategically plan for the needs of young people.

Consulting with young people through:
- Increasing the number of young people and their family participating in community consultations and decision making, especially through social media channels; and,
- Providing training for council officers to use “Yerp”, the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) youth engagement toolkit.

Investigating a youth hub in Wodonga through:
- Implementing pilot programs to activate current spaces across Wodonga into safe and welcoming areas for young people to socialise with their peers; and,
- Advocating and lobbying at all levels of government for investment in youth spaces.

Support headspace Albury Wodonga through:
- Regularly attending headspace Albury Wodonga reference group meetings.

Recognising young people’s achievements through:
- Engaging a committee of young people to plan and host the RED Carpet Youth Awards, with the aim of attracting a minimum of 50 quality nominations and 200 guests to the gala dinner presentation ceremony;
- Providing financial assistance to 12 young people under the Young Achiever Support Scheme (YASS); and,
- Attracting quality nominations of young people’s contributions to be recognised through Wodonga’s Young Citizen of the Year awards.
Youth Action Plan and the link to the Council Plan

Our People: Providing a great lifestyle

Strategic objective: Our people will enjoy an excellent quality of life

How the council will achieve it (the strategies):
Provide services and activities that encourage and empower young people to be involved in decisions that affect their lives and encourage them to participate in community life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What the council will do (the key priority activities)</th>
<th>Youth Strategy actions</th>
<th>Council Plan</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Revise the youth strategy to reflect the needs of all young people and provide and initiate research into new, innovative programs and projects.</td>
<td>Host a leadership program for 18 to 24-year-olds that incorporates mentoring, volunteering and community project components, with an annual target of 12 participants.</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Host a series of leadership breakfast sessions for nine to 18-year-olds, with a target of 200 participants.</td>
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<td>Engage a FReeZA committee of 12 young people each calendar year to plan and deliver a minimum of five youth music or cultural events that attract an audience of 1400 young people.</td>
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<td>Provide an opportunity for 30 Year 6 students to attend a yearly camp in Portsea and attend a follow up leadership breakfast.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Engage a committee of young people to actively plan and deliver all aspects of REDfest, and apply for National Youth Week funding to support the involvement of young people.</td>
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<td>Provide 7000 youth contact and discount cards to young people in Wodonga each year.</td>
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<td>Encourage and support meaningful involvement of young people at community events and festivals.</td>
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<td>Support Junction Support Services to deliver driver training and mentoring to 35 young people annually, under VicRoad’s L2P Learner Driver program.</td>
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<td>Support the Midnight Basketball Wodonga committee to deliver a midnight basketball tournament in 2014.</td>
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<td>Develop and implement a community-wide anti-bullying campaign by June, 2017.</td>
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Key: 18 to 24-year-olds  12 to 17-year-olds  9 to 11-year-olds
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<tr>
<td>Build partnerships across the youth sector and strategically plan and advocate for required infrastructure, services and funding.</td>
<td>Host two Wodonga youth sector meetings each year to discuss and strategically plan for the needs of young people.</td>
<td>Year 1 Year 2 Year 3 Year 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ensure young people are consulted and considered in matters that directly impact them.</td>
<td>Increasing the number of young people participating in community consultations and decision making, especially through social media channels.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investigate partnerships and models for a youth hub in Wodonga.</td>
<td>Implementing pilot programs to activate current spaces across Wodonga into safe and welcoming areas for young people to socialise with their peers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support the establishment of a headspace centre for youth in Albury-Wodonga.</td>
<td>Regularly attending headspace Albury Wodonga reference group meetings.</td>
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Key: ● 18 to 24-year-olds  ● 12 to 17-year-olds  ● 9 to 11-year-olds
How the council will achieve it (the strategies):

**Offer diverse and accessible recreation, leisure and sporting opportunities.**

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<tr>
<td>Continue to implement the Wodonga Council Recreation Strategy actions.</td>
<td>Actions in the strategy implemented over the life of the plan with consideration given to young people and youth services. ● ● ●</td>
<td>● ● ● ●</td>
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<tr>
<td>Continue to implement the Wodonga Playground Strategy to provide play experiences that promote development and well-being.</td>
<td>All actions of the strategy delivered over the life of the council plan with consideration given to young people and youth services. ● ● ●</td>
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How the council will achieve it (the strategies):

**Advocate for people who suffer disadvantage, including those with lower socio-economic status, disability, culture and vulnerability in planning for the city.**

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<tr>
<td>Work with agencies to promote inclusiveness and accessibility for the community regardless of socio-economic status, disability, culture and vulnerability.</td>
<td>Meet annually with relevant youth sector agencies over the life of the plan to promote inclusiveness. ● ● ●</td>
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How the council will achieve it (the strategies):

Support young people through programs which recognise their contributions and achievements.

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<td>What the council will do (the key priority activities)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Continue to recognise the efforts of young people through youth awards.</td>
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Measures

Wodonga Youth Strategy measures for the Youth Action Plan.

- **Increase in levels of young people participating in community consultation, through the youth inclusion engagement tool.**
  Source: Youth report on the number and breadth of young people consulted during the life of the plan, with a goal of 33 per cent achieved at the end of the plan.

- **Decrease of adolescents in Years 7, 9 and 11 who report bullying.**
  Source: Victorian child and adolescent monitoring system.

- **Increase in the acquisition of play equipment suitable for young people aged nine to 14 years in all new or revised playgrounds in the city.**
  Source: Playground inventory report.

- **Increase in nominations for the RED Carpet Youth Awards, with a minimum of 50 per year over the life of the plan.**
  Source: RED carpet award nomination statistics.

- **Increase in the council engagement with youth work experience by providing the Work Inspiration model for 20 young people in 2014-2015 and increase the number by five each year over the life of the plan.**
  Source: People and Workplace work experience statistics.
Acknowledgement of young people

Wodonga Council would like to acknowledge and thank all of the young people who contributed their opinions and ideas, and generously gave up their spare time to assist in the development of this document.

Contacting youth services

The council offices are located at
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Website: wodonga.vic.gov.au