youth strategy
Improving the wellbeing of young people in Wodonga
acknowledgement of country

Wodonga Council acknowledges the traditional owners of the land on which it stands and pay its respects to their Elders past, present and future, for they hold the memories, the tradition and the culture of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
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Young people are central to a vibrant and healthy community. When given the opportunities, young people bring passion, energy and creativity to the whole community.

Wodonga Council (the council) wants to ensure all young people in Wodonga benefit from local opportunities and are given the chance to achieve optimal wellbeing.

The council is committed to supporting young people, their families and carers by working with stakeholders to foster environments and conditions that enhance health and wellbeing of young people as they navigate through to adulthood.

Transitioning through adolescence and into young adulthood can present many challenges for young people, especially those who are disadvantaged or marginalised. Difficult transitions can then be compounded by the changing landscape of new technologies and social trends that are changing the way people engage and connect, adding to the complexity of navigating relationships, accessing information and developing identity.

It is with this in mind, the council designed the Wodonga Youth Strategy; a strategy that seeks to help our young people be safe, healthy, connected, and prepared.
purpose

The Wodonga Youth Strategy provides a clear, strategic platform for action for the next five years. The strategy will guide the council’s work and direct resource toward priorities that will support Wodonga’s young people to improve their wellbeing.

The Strategy seeks to define the council’s role in working for and alongside young people in Wodonga, ensure local actions are evidence based, and align local efforts and resources to improve shared outcomes.

scope

The Youth Strategy:

- Covers young people aged from nine years to 24 years who work, live, learn and play in Wodonga;
- Is a whole of council strategic document; and,
- Does not cover organisations or groups outside of the council. It does, however, seek to guide the council’s work with these groups.

action plan

The Strategy will be supported by an annual action plan that will set out key actions for implementation against priority areas, including measures to track progress against outcomes.

An action research approach will be taken to continually review and track progress. This will allow initiatives to be responsive, targeted, adaptive and more effective, while maintaining strategic longer term direction.
There are currently approximately 8000 young people living in Wodonga.

Young people aged nine to 24 years of age make up 20 per cent of our community and play an invaluable role in making Wodonga the progressive, innovative, city that it is today.

By 2036, there is expected to be 11,873 young people; an increase of almost 3500 young people over the next 18 years\(^1\).

There will be 3500 additional young people in 18 years’ time.

Given this projected growth, it’s critically important that the council considers and plans for the current and future needs of young people as the city continues to prosper.
who are our young people?

- 32% are 10 to 14 year olds
- 34% are 15 to 19 year olds
- 34% are 20 to 24 year olds
- 53% are males
- 47% are females
- 4% are indigenous young people
- 4% need assistance with core activity
- 5% were born overseas

- 60% are employed (in full or part-time work)
- 13% are unemployed (either looking for full or part-time work)
- 19% are volunteer
- 90% completed year 12

- 27% are overweight or obese
- 68% do not do enough physical activity
- 70% have drunk alcohol
- 16% have used marijuana or other illegal drugs

* Wodonga Council acknowledges there are more than two genders. Due to a lack of data, only males and females are represented here.
70% have a trusted adult in their life

51% of Grade 5 and 6 students feel socially connected

43% of Year 7 and 9 students feel socially connected

80% live in a healthy functioning family

91% feel safe

50% have been bullied recently

16% are bullied most days

36% witness or are involved in family violence

15% have high levels of psychological distress

19% access mental health services when needed
what are our young people facing?

trends and social issues

Our young people are influenced by trends and social issues that can impact how they develop. The way young people contribute to, are part of, and understand trends and social issues can provide opportunities for improved wellbeing.

Changing job markets

- Fewer full-time employment opportunities for school leavers.
- Harder to get an entry-level job with no experience.
- Unskilled or semi-skilled jobs being replaced by machines, robots or computer.
- Many young people are employed as casuals (in a limited range of occupations, such as in the fast food industry).

Digital technology

- Digital technology enables young people to access a lot of information and entertainment and to stay connected with their family and friends around the clock.
- Digital technology has changed the way that many young people meet and interact with others (such as gaming, dating apps, social media and online streaming services).
- Overuse of technology is leading to poor social skills, disconnection, mental and physical health.
- Other negative aspects of digital technology for young people include loss or confusion of identity, sexting, cyberbullying, online gambling, texting while driving, hearing loss from headphone usage, reduction in inter-personal skills, an addiction to electronic devices, and easy access to pornography.

Mental health

- There has been a much greater focus on recognising poor mental health and wellbeing as one of the significant health concerns of the 21st Century.
- Various support services such as headspace, Kids Helpline and Beyond Blue all have a major focus on improving mental health.

Loneliness and social isolation

- One in eight young people in Victoria aged 16 to 25 reported feeling or having felt a very high intensity of loneliness.
- Loneliness is becoming a serious public health problem for young people.
- Those who are lonely have worse physical and mental health, and are more likely to be depressed.

Changing family structures

- Trauma including family violence, complex family issues such as drugs and alcohol, mental health and abuse.
- Changing family dynamics including single partner or one parent families and same sex parents.
- Family connection. A decrease in available family time due to work and other commitments.
- Generational poverty and unemployment which can decrease aspirations.
transitional life stages

Our young people will move through transitional life stages to reach adulthood. These stages can be opportunities to improve health and wellbeing:

- Navigating through educational institutions - from primary to secondary school to higher education
- Entering and moving through the workforce
- Creating independent friendships and widening friendship circles
- Developing intimate relationships with others
- Changing family life (such as parents divorcing, parent acquiring a new partner, moving into a new care environment, moving house or town)
- Growing or changing as a young person into a young adult, and becoming aware of their identity.

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levels of disadvantage

There are young people in our community who face significant disadvantage.

We know that people from regional areas will have poorer health and wellbeing outcomes. Further disadvantage is experienced by our young people within the following demographic groups:

- Young people from lower-income households;
- Those from culturally diverse backgrounds (newly settled and refugee backgrounds);
- Women and girls;
- People with a disability;
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, non-binary and gender diverse (LGBTIQ+) people; and,
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We need to consider and plan to reduce disadvantage and address stigma and discrimination impacting young people.

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what do our young people and sector say?

The voice of our young people has been at the heart of developing this strategy.

Young people have contributed and co-designed the Youth Strategy in the following ways:

1. A youth survey in 2017 of 657 young people living in Wodonga who told us that mental health, bullying, drugs and alcohol and education and employment were the issues of most concern.

2. A series of four forums were then held in 2018 to provide a more in-depth understanding of these issues through mapping the factors that impact on young people being happy and healthy. Considering the transitional life stages and diverse needs of our young people, the four forums were targeted as follows:
   - One forum to hear from the service sector - 46 providers attended from industries including education, employment, housing, disability, mental health, community health and hospitals
   - Three forums to hear from our young people (Nine to 14 years; 15 to 17 years; and 18 to 24 years) - 127 young people attended and contributed their thoughts and ideas

Five key issues emerged that were common across all forums:
- Mental health;
- Drug and alcohol use;
- Employment, education and training;
- Social connection and sense of belonging; and,
- Access to local services.
Other factors arose that were specific to each group during the consultation process. These include:

**Youth Aged Nine to-14 Years Old**
- Poverty
- Bullying
- Lack of sleep
- Excessive screen time
- Limited time spent with family

**Youth Aged 15 to 17 Years Old**
- Stress as a result of school
- Conflict in relationships
- Housing insecurity
- Access to public transport
- Self-confidence

**Youth Aged 18 to 24 Years Old**
- Negative perceptions of young people
- Ability to find employment
- Being able to travel independently;
- Limited attainment of life skills (soft skills)
- Loss of connection to family and friends

**Service Sector**
- Completion of school
- Discrimination
- Homelessness
- Family violence and family functioning

These issues and factors reflect the diverse experience of our young people and have helped to inform our vision and mission for young people in Wodonga.
This strategy has been designed with young people of Wodonga at the centre. To design the youth strategy and identify priority areas for action, we considered:

1. Local issues that impact the most on the well-being of our young people;
2. The issues that our young people identified as most important;
3. What local data revealed about young people;
4. The council’s role and ability to address these issues; and,
5. A strong research and evidence base.
Details of consultation findings and recommendations are included in the Youth Engagement and Consultation Report.
a strategy for young people into the future

our vision
Young people in Wodonga are empowered, respected and valued as part of a growing and prosperous community.

our mission
To increase access to opportunities for young people to improve their wellbeing.
our guiding principles

The guiding principles for design and implementation of this strategy include:

1. Collaboration and co-design with young people and the service sector;
2. Integrated planning and action across multiple partners and disciplines;
3. Building on the assets of young people and community;
4. Evidence informed decision making and practice;
5. Respecting the voices of young people;
6. Recognising that diversity is a community strength; and,
7. Promoting and providing equity and access to all services, activities and events for young people.

These guiding principles will direct resources and help Wodonga Council deliver strengthened outcomes for our young people.
our role

The council is in a unique position to work for and alongside young people to improve their wellbeing as they transition to adulthood. As a local government, the council:

- Understands the local context;
- Works with a range of youth-related networks and the broader sector; and,
- Works closely with other levels of government, peak bodies and the community.

The council has identified the following ways it can work with and for young people:

1. **Leadership and advocacy** - The council is a local leader with reach into the community. We develop policy and strategies that impact on the social and economic outcomes for our young people. The council also acts to raise awareness of changes and issues facing young people at a federal, state and local level.

2. **Strategic partnerships** - The council has strong partnerships with community organisations, educational institutions, businesses, residents and other stakeholders at the local level. The council, therefore, is well placed to create shared understanding and align goals and objectives with various stakeholders who work to improve outcomes for young people.

3. **Capacity building** - Community development and capacity building is a core function of the council. The council works with the community to develop knowledge, skills and capabilities in order to improve outcomes for our people. The council also develops our young people through initiatives such as the Youth Empowerment Program and Red Carpet Youth Awards.

4. **Programs, events and activities** - The council delivers events and activities that provide the community with the opportunity to socially connect and celebrate various aspects of our cultural life. The council delivers programs, events and activities with young people that address barriers to participation, increase social connectedness and celebrate achievements. These include How2Dayz, Street Jam and All Aboard.

Multiple sectors, organisations and community members engage in efforts to improve health and wellbeing for young people. The council recognises that no one organisation can do it alone.
Wodonga Council recognises that peers, families, organisations and other institutions play a vital - and often more direct - role in providing opportunities for improved wellbeing of our young people.

Young people are engaged in places right across Wodonga where they live, learn, work and play.

Given the various places and people of influence in young peoples lives, strategic partnerships across the Wodonga community will be critical to achieve our mission for young people.
our local partners

We are committed to working collaboratively with our local partners. These include:

- Young people and families;
- Service providers;
- Educational institutions;
- Community organisations and groups;
- Neighbouring councils;
- Sporting and recreation clubs; and,
- Business and industry.

The role of the council is to continue to work with local key stakeholders to facilitate action toward agreed priorities and goals as set out in this strategy.
our priorities

To achieve our mission, four key priority areas have been identified based on our role as local government, guiding principles, evidence base and research, as well as input from young people and key stakeholders.

For each priority area we have provided an overview, highlighting the issues, contributing factors and objectives with strategic actions.
Are considered and planned for

Strategic and community planning

Are engaged and connected

Participation and social connection

Are healthy and well

Prevention and early intervention

Are prepared

Life skills, education and employment
our young people are considered and planned for strategic and community planning for the future
The council has a role to cater for young people through built infrastructure and amenities as the city continues to grow, as well as advocate for local services to meet current and future demand.

Planning effectively to meet future growth and the changing needs of our young people, as well as exploring opportunities for creating and encouraging youth friendly spaces across the city, is a priority for Wodonga Council.

the issue

There will be 3500 additional young people in 18 years’ time

This is an increase of 50 per cent of young people in Wodonga, who will all require access to local opportunities and services to foster their development. This includes educational institutions, recreation facilities and housing.

Planning for adequate access to infrastructure and services

National research suggests little progress has been made in the past 10 years to reduce youth homelessness. In Wodonga, community housing providers report a lack of appropriate housing options for young people, contributing to higher levels of homelessness. This issue has also been identified in the Wodonga Housing strategy in the context of creating more affordable housing for young people as the city grows.

Educational infrastructure and services appear to be meeting local demand; however, with an increasing population and number of young people in our community, we will need to work with the Victorian Government, education providers and other strategic partners to ensure services and opportunities keep up.

In addition, local service providers report identified service gaps for young people who are navigating through to adulthood. This includes appropriate mental health services, and alcohol and other drug related services, such as appropriate rehabilitation options for young people.

The council will stay abreast of local needs, work with service providers to identify gaps and opportunities, and lobby and advocate for improved services for young people.


**Access to youth friendly spaces across the city**

Research from the Black Dog Institute states that youth need a space where they can come together, engage in activities related to their diverse needs and interests, participate in decision making processes and freely express themselves.\(^1\)

Both young people and the youth sector identified a key need for physical spaces where young people feel welcome and comfortable, to foster better connection with services and engagement of young people.

Engaging effectively with young people can be challenging. Access to appropriate spaces, locations and creation of the right atmosphere helps to encourage young people to access and participate in the range of programs, activities, services, resources and programs that are available to them.

In addition, welcoming spaces for young people help them to participate, socially connect and ultimately feel they belong to their community.
### actions

**priority: our young people are considered and planned for - strategic and community planning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Understand the current and future needs of young people to inform infrastructure and service planning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collect and analyse data annually on youth health and wellbeing</td>
<td>Leadership and advocacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work with the sector to identify local gaps and opportunities in service delivery</td>
<td>Strategic partnerships/Leadership and Advocacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identify future needs of young people for services including education, housing and recreational needs</td>
<td>Leadership and Advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consult and co-design with young people on issues affecting them</td>
<td>Leadership and Advocacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Convene and participate in relevant networks to collaborate with other organisations</td>
<td>Strategic partnerships</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<th>Cater for young people in infrastructure developments across the city</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work with internal business units to encourage public infrastructure to be welcoming to young people</td>
<td>Strategic partnerships/Leadership and Advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explore opportunities for young people through the cultural precinct redevelopment</td>
<td>Leadership and advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with building and planning to ensure new city infrastructure is accessible and friendly for young people</td>
<td>Leadership and advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence precinct master planning across the city to ensure young people are considered (Gateway Lakes)</td>
<td>Leadership and advocacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lobby and advocate for essential infrastructure and services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lobby and advocate to the Victorian Government for identified service gaps in partnership with providers</td>
<td>Leadership and advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocate to governments to fund a feasibility study for a Youth Foyer to improve housing and employment opportunities as identified in the Wodonga Housing Strategy</td>
<td>Leadership and advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish partnerships with state government and peak bodies</td>
<td>Leadership and advocacy/strategic partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explore possibilities of youth spaces or resource to be utilised by young people across the city</td>
<td>Leadership and advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lobby and advocate to State governments for improved public transport.</td>
<td>Leadership and advocacy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
our young people are engaged and connected

participation and social connection
the issue

“Loneliness is proving to be more than just part of the human condition. New research shows it’s a serious public health problem for young people.” - Vic Health

One in eight young Victorians aged between 16 and 25 years experiences a high intensity of loneliness, which is linked with decreased mental wellbeing.

During consultation, Wodonga’s young people commented on the importance of connections with family and friends, and the need for greater connection to avoid social isolation.

Given the impacts that loneliness and social isolation can have on our young people, it is critically important that we work with stakeholders to address the underlying contributors and support more diverse opportunities for social connection.

Many students in Wodonga report they don’t feel they are socially connected\(^9\).

“Higher levels of loneliness are associated with higher levels of social interaction anxiety, less social interaction, poorer psychological wellbeing and poorer quality of life.”\(^10\) – Australian Psychological Society

“We need to frame social connectedness as a protective factor against psychological distress, isolation, depression and anxiety.” – Forum participant (Service provider cohort) \(^11\)

Marginalisation

Young people experience social isolation for a variety of reasons such as discrimination, lack of employment, being homeless or generally being in situations where they feel like their ideas and opinions are not valued.

Disadvantaged and marginalised young people are more likely to be discriminated against and excluded, making it harder to socially connect and feel like they belong in the community. This supports the need to work with partners to encourage participation of disadvantaged young people and create more opportunities to connect to others through various programs, events or activities. Furthermore, this highlights the need for more diverse opportunities for all our young people to socially connect.

More diverse events and activities

Young people of all ages in Wodonga reported a need for both social connection and more diverse opportunities to participate and engage in community life. Proposed engagement opportunities included events, programs and activities that are both more accessible financially and for all abilities, as well as more diverse in content or experience.

“Increase social connections, positive community experiences, cultural connections, builds life skills, friendships. Decreases discrimination, stress, social isolation.” - Forum participant (18 to 24 year old cohort).

Young people and services reported that they were aware of the many sports activities and events; however, there was a real need for more diverse activities to meet the needs of young people who are not interested in sport. Also the inability to access them due to transport issues.

Connecting young people with diverse activities (such as performing and creative arts) where they can meaningfully engage in something that interests them, particularly in regional areas, was seen as a key way to improve social connection and reduce isolation and loneliness.
### Priority: Our Young People Are Engaged and Connected - Participation and Social Connection

#### Provide ways for all young people to socially connect and be involved in community life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Leadership and Advocacy/ Strategic Partnerships</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engage and work with Office of Youth Affairs Victoria to adapt funding outcomes to include more diverse programs and events</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work with YacVic and other peak bodies to leverage local opportunities for youth engagement</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Work with and alongside young people to identify and deliver a diverse range of accessible programs, activities and events (such as performing and creative arts) that cater for different ages</td>
<td>Leadership and advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with internal business units to deliver diverse initiatives for young people (library, arts and culture, and events)</td>
<td>Capacity building/ Programs and events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with the Sport and Recreation business unit to identify and deliver initiatives for young people that encourage participation and connection</td>
<td>Programs and events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify ways to communicate and engage with young people to promote programs, events and encourage participation</td>
<td>Leadership and Advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explore other internal opportunities to increase participation and social connection amongst young people, such as cross generational initiatives</td>
<td>Strategic partnerships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Support young people from all walks of life in our community to feel included

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Area</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engage with the Victorian Government and other various peak bodies to stay up to date with funding opportunities to benefit young people within Wodonga</td>
<td>Leadership and advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with the sector to identify and implement initiatives that address disadvantage of young people</td>
<td>Strategic Partnerships/ Leadership and advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner with other organisations to strengthen youth networks for marginalised young people</td>
<td>Leadership and advocacy/ strategic partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliver initiatives/programs that recognise and celebrate the achievements and contributions of a diverse range of young people</td>
<td>Leadership and advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support local organisations who work with marginalised or at risk young people</td>
<td>Strategic Partnerships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
our young people are healthy and well

prevention and early intervention
Having good physical and mental health, as well as access to appropriate services when needed, can help young people to grow, thrive and cope with the pressures of everyday life.

the issue

Similar to young people right around Australia, the main health and wellbeing issues highlighted by Wodonga youth are:

- Mental health;
- Physical health;
- Alcohol and other drugs; and,
- Family functioning and peer relationships.

contributors

Mental health

For 43 per cent of the Australian population, research indicates that mental health is the number one issue facing young Australians today. This concern has been supported through our consultation with Wodonga youth, with bullying and mental health being noted as their top two key issues.

In Wodonga, 50 per cent of young people report being recently bullied with 16 per cent saying they are bullied most days. This will often lead to psychological distress, with 15 per cent of Wodonga young people reporting higher levels of psychological distress.

Research indicates that young people who experience mental health concerns are more likely to turn to drugs and alcohol and other risk-taking behaviours. It is, therefore, no surprise that drug and alcohol issues were identified by young people of all age groups in our consultations.
Drugs and alcohol

“Young people are more at risk of alcohol related harm than adults. Teenagers are more likely to drink to excess and take more risks when drinking compared to older people.” - Australian Alcohol and Drug Foundation.

Misuse of these substances can contribute to:

- Frequent absences from and decline in performance at school or work;
- Mood swings and explosive outbursts;
- Social withdrawal and decreased family interaction; and,
- Impaired memory and other psychological issues.

Family supports

While there are families in Wodonga that report healthy levels of functioning, there are many who struggle. Local statistics highlight various concerns, especially the impact of family violence on young people.

- Wodonga’s youth service providers estimate that 75 per cent of young people seeking support have a history of violence in the home.
- Forty per cent of family violence in Wodonga occurs in front of children. This leads to trauma and negative impacts on development, health and wellbeing. Furthermore, can result in acceptance or normalisation of violence for solving problems and becoming perpetrators of violence themselves as adults.

In addition to this, 30 per cent of young people report they don’t have a trusted adult in their lives. This suggests a break down in family functioning and relationships.

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15 Yes Youth and Family Services, 2015
Access to services

Local services report there are often waiting lists for various services which makes it difficult for young people to seek help when they need it most. Only 19 per cent of young people report being able to access mental health services when needed.17

Other barriers exist that make it hard for young people to seek help and access services when required:

- Fear or embarrassment (62 per cent);
- Cost (38 per cent);
- Transport (28 per cent); and,
- Don’t have anyone to go with (21 per cent).18

In addition to these barriers, our local young people report the need to raise awareness about what is available.

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priority: our young people are healthy and well – prevention and early intervention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support primary prevention initiatives for young people and families</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support implementation of initiatives that seek to prevent alcohol and drug misuse in young people</td>
<td>Capacity building</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support local efforts to create a more gender equal Wodonga through respectful relationships campaigns and initiatives</td>
<td>Capacity building</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support programs and initiatives that promote and strengthen family connections</td>
<td>Capacity building/ programs, events, activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work with headspace and other providers to improve resilience in our young people</td>
<td>Capacity building/ programs, events, activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support initiatives that seek to improve health and wellbeing of young people (LGBTIQ+, disability, Aboriginal, CALD)</td>
<td>Capacity building/ programs, events, activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support parents, carers and young people with new knowledge on a range of issues that impact health and wellbeing (such as safe use of technology, gambling)</td>
<td>Capacity building/ programs, events, activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply for funding opportunities as they arise to address health priorities</td>
<td>Leadership and advocacy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Encourage help seeking behaviour of young people

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Leadership and advocacy/Capacity building</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work with young people and the sector to identify gaps and opportunities to strengthen service delivery and break down barriers, for example, the Wodonga Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identify and facilitate the knowledge and format young people need to increase use of available services</td>
<td>Leadership and advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with educational institutions and young people to raise awareness of available services to encourage help seeking behaviour</td>
<td>Capacity building/ programs, events, activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with council services and providers to improve cross promotion of services</td>
<td>Leadership and advocacy</td>
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our young people are prepared

life skills, education and employment
In a constantly changing environment, having life skills is an essential part of being able to meet the challenges of everyday life. Life skills are defined as “psychosocial abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life”\(^{19}\).

Life skills enable young people to:

- Strengthen their sense of self, and build and manage satisfying relationships;
- Build resilience and make the right decisions needed to take appropriate actions to promote their health;
- Develop and use critical inquiry skills to research and analyse knowledge;
- Learn to use resources for the benefit of themselves and for the communities with which they identify and belong\(^{20}\); and,
- Assist in finishing education and gaining employment.

Young people who complete school and get their Year 12 certificate (or equivalent vocational qualification) are more likely to complete further study or training, get a job, have significantly higher wages and be better placed to tackle future challenges.


Unemployment was a key concern, especially for the 18 to 24 year old cohort. We know there are currently more people completing Year 12 than ever before; however, many of these young people are unable to find employment afterwards.

- 13% of young people who want employment can’t find any
- 10.4% of young people are not employed or engaged in education
- 90% have completed Year 12, however, many fail to find employment
In addition, young people report they struggle to find employment in the field they studied and trained for. This indicates a mismatch between study decisions and employment opportunities.21 With changing job markets, the traditionally reliable pathways to a permanent job aren’t providing young people with the same employment outcomes they once did.22 This is resulting in “a large proportion of young people engaging in unpaid work just to get a foot in the door, which makes it more difficult for those young people who cannot afford to work for free”23.

Service providers, schools and young people in Wodonga have all emphasised the need to focus on developing life skills, completing education and finding employment for young people.

contributors

Changing job markets

Many young people state that entry level jobs they want to apply for require a certain amount of experience, which can be very difficult if they haven’t had a job before. Furthermore, many unskilled or semi-skilled jobs have been replaced by machines, robots or computers, which further limits employment options for young people. Research indicates that 60 per cent of the jobs our young people are training for are unlikely to exist in 10 to 15 years24.

Wodonga’s young people between the ages of 18 and 24 voiced concerns that schools placed too great of importance on obtaining university level qualifications, rather than directing students to areas of interest and employment availability.

Given changing job markets, it’s important to enable innovation and new approaches to future employment, while equipping our young people with the soft skills that are transferable to various sectors and opportunities.

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Decline in employability skills

The skills of communication, teamwork, problem solving and interpersonal skills are important to gaining various employment opportunities.

Youth industry professionals suggest that, in Wodonga, there has been a steep decline in employability skills with the integration and use of technology. This can mean that regardless of school results, many young people are going to struggle to gain employment, and lack the skills necessary to gain employment and live independently.

The specific skills that have been highlighted include navigating the rental market; budgeting and handling of finances (such as bills and tax returns); resume writing; and, managing intimate relationships.

“Education that helps young people develop (life skills) has transformative potential” – UNICEF

These skills enable and empower young people to become independent as they transition and integrate into society. This includes gaining employment, accessing housing, being socially competent and taking on responsibilities.
**actions**

**priority: our young people are prepared - life skills, education and employment**

| Support opportunities that better equip young people in developing life/employability skills |  |
| Work with young people, schools and the sector to identify gaps and opportunities for life/employability skills development | Leadership and advocacy |
| Work with funding bodies and partners to deliver a series of workshops/events focused on building life/employability skills | Capacity building/Programs and events |

| Support improved pathways into education, training and employment for young people |  |
| Work with local partners to identify opportunities to create new or strengthen existing pathways | Leadership and advocacy |
| Support and deliver initiatives, events and workshops that connect students with employers in the region | Leadership and advocacy |
| Explore and promote volunteering and work experience opportunities for young people | Leadership and advocacy |
| Explore the feasibility of a Youth Foyer in Wodonga with the education first model | Leadership and advocacy |
**Promote and support the sector and young people to adapt to changing job markets and trends**

| Work with funding bodies and industry partners to assist young people to be work ready and prepared for the changing landscape of employment | Capacity building/ Programs and events |
| Facilitate initiatives that connect students, teachers and parents with contemporary and innovative approaches to learning, education and employment | Leadership and advocacy |
| Work with the Economic Development team on the entrepreneurial/ innovation hub to support youth engagement opportunities | Leadership and advocacy/ strategic partnerships |
This strategy will be implemented and evaluated over a five year period.

The successful implementation and evaluation of this strategy relies on ongoing commitment from young people and strategic partners as well as relevant measures and reporting mechanisms.

To achieve the strategic objectives outlined, a detailed action plan will be developed annually. The action plan will clearly set out the activities that will be undertaken in alignment with our role as a local government, the timelines for actions and any budgetary considerations of these actions.

The implementation of this plan will take a ‘whole of council’ approach to the delivery of each priority area. This ensures that strategies and actions are implemented by appropriate business units and encourages integrated planning and action.
An action research approach will be taken to continually review and track progress against annual measures. This will allow initiatives to be responsive, targeted, adaptive and more effective. This method ensures the Youth Development team is continually reviewing and refining its actions to maximise local opportunities for young people, and aligning opportunities and work with other parts of council business and external partners.

Every two years a formal review and evaluation of the Wodonga Youth Strategy will be undertaken and reported to the councillors. This will include consultation and provide young people and stakeholders with the opportunity to provide feedback.


