

# Darebin Families, Youth and Children Strategy

A Framework for  
Collective Action



## Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities in Darebin

Darebin City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung people as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land we now call Darebin and pays respect to their Elders, past, present, and emerging.

We pay respect to all other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Darebin.

We recognise, and pay tribute to, the diverse culture, resilience, and heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We acknowledge the leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and support their right to self-determination.

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# Thankyous

This strategy was developed with the support of many people. Council would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the development of this strategy including:

The **850+ children**, young people and adults who participated in stage 1 and stage 2 community engagement.

The **Strategy Reference group representatives** from Your Community Health, Merri Outreach Support Service, Darebin Information, Volunteer & Resource Service (DIVRS), Anglicare, the Inner North Local Learning & Employment Network and the Darebin Young Citizens Jury.

The **Darebin Young Citizens Jury** for their input at multiple stages of the strategy process including Raf, Max and Thomas for writing the Jury's foreword to the Strategy.

All the **young people** who participated in the Youth Roundtables and Jury members Max, Hunter and Sakshi for co-designing and co-hosting the Roundtables.

The **50+ partner organisations** who participated in the Stakeholder summits and other stakeholder discussions.

'**Sensemaking Team**' members from Bridge Darebin, Victoria Police, Westgarth Primary School OSHC and Anglicare.

**Geoff Brown** from Tangent Consulting and **Chelsey Cooper** from Hatrick & Co for designing and facilitating the Stakeholder Summits and Youth Roundtables, and support with sensemaking.

**Dr Robyn Cochrane** from Cochrane Research Solutions for background research.

# Forewords

## Foreword from the Mayor

The Families, Youth and Children Strategy is a vitally important strategy for Council and our partners. The Strategy provides the foundations and directions for powerful and effective collaboration between Council, our partners and the community to improve outcomes for all children, young people and their families in Darebin.

I was delighted to have the opportunity to participate in the process of developing this strategy alongside inspirational young people and dedicated professionals who are working hard every day to deliver great outcomes for children, young people and families in Darebin. It was a privilege to see the passion that everyone who works in this area has for this vital work.

This Strategy seeks to build on that passion and dedication, by providing a framework and platform for transformation and continuous improvement in how we work together and how we respond to the needs of our community.

We know that many children, young people and families in Darebin are facing challenges. We also know that the Darebin community has fantastic strengths and tremendous resilience.

In developing this Strategy, we heard from more than 1000 children, young people, parents, guardians, grandparents, other family members and stakeholders. We heard about what makes life hard for children, young people and families in Darebin, what's working well and where people need support.

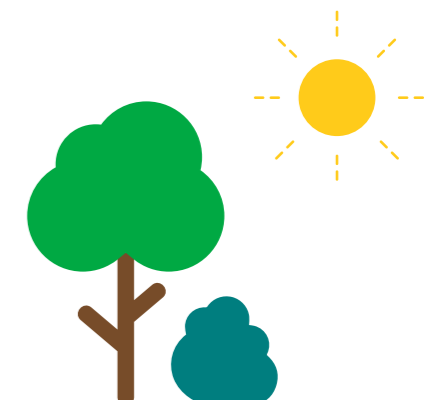
The Guiding Principles and Action Areas in this Strategy respond directly to what we have heard from the community and stakeholders, outlining a plan to:

- Ensure children, young people and families have their basic needs met,
- Make Darebin a place where everyone belongs and can find their people,
- Support good mental health and wellbeing,
- Create safe environments for children, young people and families that also support young people's independence,
- Support learning and growth through formal and informal education.

Action in all these areas will be underpinned by the guiding principles of community leadership, cultural safety, equity and a collaborative and responsive support system.

This is an aspirational strategy, underpinned by a belief that by working together we can deliver transformational change for children, young people and families in Darebin.

**Cr. Susanne Newton**  
Mayor



## Foreword from the Young Citizens Jury

The youth jury is a group of young people who meet to advise council on community issues from a youth perspective. We have been closely engaged in every stage of strategy development, by co-designing and facilitating youth engagement, collaborating with council officers, and reviewing and providing feedback on drafts.

We believe that youth voice was crucial for the development of the strategy, and we felt that our voices and the voices of other young people engaged in the process were listened to and valued. Throughout the youth engagement process we appreciated the diversity and range of voices that we encountered, and that we hope are reflected in the final strategy document.

This is an incredibly difficult time for young people, and we feel that the strategy reflects youth concerns around cost of living, lack of access to mental health supports, employment and housing struggles.

We believe in this strategy and look forward to seeing the impact it will have for young people in the Darebin community. We call on Council and related organisations to continue engaging young people in decision making processes, valuing youth voice and creating meaningful action for Darebin's young people.

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**“With the foundation of this strategy and continued youth engagement, outcomes for Darebin’s young people will be better.”**

**RAF**

**“I feel that I can see my fingerprints and the input of my peers in this document. We shaped this strategy, now it’s up to you to action it!”**

**MAX**

**“I believe the work that the youth jury has done on the strategy has been vitally important and I hope that young people who read the plan or experience its impacts can see how powerful youth voices can be. Through this, I want young people to feel empowered to have input on issues that affect them and their communities”.**

**THOMAS**

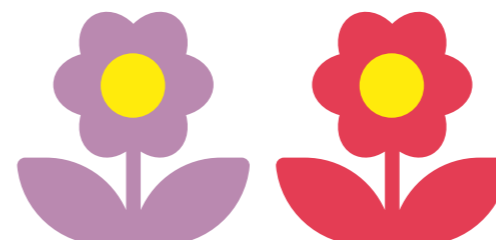
## Foreword from the Families, Youth & Children Strategy Reference Group

The Families, Youth and Children Strategy Reference Group formed in early 2024 to support the development of this partnership Strategy. We represent a sample of the hundreds of organisations from a diverse range of sectors that support children, young people and families in Darebin.

The stakeholder engagement process for this Strategy brought together representatives from many of these sectors including schools, early childhood education and care, health, employment, welfare, homelessness, Neighbourhood Houses, police, philanthropy, community groups, family services, youth services, drug and alcohol, mental health, family violence and many more. Importantly, young people were also represented on the Reference Group and in the stakeholder discussions.

Throughout this process we saw the power of people with diverse perspectives coming together in good faith to share ideas, listen to each other and collaborate to develop solutions to complex problems. We are pleased to see the perspectives of many different partners represented in the Strategy.

Collaboration is a strength of Darebin's Families, Youth and Children sector, and, now more than ever, collaboration is essential to address the issues that impact the lives of children, young people and families in Darebin. We believe that this Strategy will further strengthen our ability to collaborate on the most important issues for children, young people and their families. We are looking forward to continuing this journey as we move into the next phase of action planning and delivery.



# Families, Youth and Children Strategy Action Areas

## Essentials for life

### Priorities

- Supporting all children, young people and families to have their basic needs met, particularly those experiencing poverty and facing cost of living pressures.
- Supporting young people to access secure and rewarding employment and career pathways.



## Inclusion & belonging

### Priorities

- Making Darebin a community where everyone feels included, valued and connected.
- Welcoming and inclusive places and services for all.
- Opportunities to participate and connect.



## Health & wellbeing

### Priorities

- Supporting physical activity for health, wellbeing and connection.
- Improving mental health and wellbeing, and strengthening mental health supports.
- Connection to nature and access to thriving natural environments that support wellbeing.
- Affordable and accessible health services and supports.



## Safety & independence

### Priorities

- Physical, cultural, and emotional and psychological safety in all settings and services.
- Safe streets and public spaces for all children, young people and families.
- Preventing family violence and keeping children safe from abuse and harm.
- Respecting and supporting young people's independence, self-determination and right to make choices and take risks in order to learn, grow and build resilience.



## Learning

### Priorities

- Ensuring access to inclusive, safe, supportive and high-quality learning opportunities for all.
- Increasing active participation and engagement in learning across the lifespan.
- Supporting children and young people through their education journeys including through critical transition points.
- Preparing children and young people for the future.



# Introduction

**This Families, Youth & Children Strategy aims to enable Council and partners to take an integrated, long-term, and strategic approach to improving outcomes for children and young people aged 0-25 and their families.**

Nearly 30% of Darebin residents are aged between 0 to 25 (an estimated 44,099 people in 2024), and the number of children and young people is forecast to increase over the next twenty years as the Darebin population grows.

Supporting the health, wellbeing, care and education of children and young people in Darebin is a vital priority for Council and our community. Childhood and youth are critical times in life. The experiences that people have from birth through to 25 have profound and lasting effects on their health, wellbeing and life chances. By creating the social and environmental conditions for children and young people in Darebin to thrive, we can give all children and young people the best chance of health and wellbeing throughout life. This includes tackling systemic and structural inequalities and barriers. If we fail to do this, we put children and young people at risk of serious negative consequences over the course of their lives.

Council's aim is that this strategy will provide a platform for powerful and effective collaboration to improve outcomes for all children, young people and their families in Darebin. The strategy has been developed through engagement and collaboration processes that have involved more than 1000 children, young people and adults from across the Darebin community, including representatives from more than 50 organisations who all have a

stake in improving outcomes for children, young people and families. We hope that the strategy will provide a framework for action that supports Council, community and a wide range of partners to work together to leverage the strengths in our community and address the challenges that impact the lives of children, young people and families.

This strategy focuses on the 0-25 age group, in recognition of the fact that many of the factors that children and young people need to thrive are consistent throughout childhood and into young adulthood. Whilst children, young people and families have specific needs at various stages of development from conception through infancy, early childhood, the middle years, the teenage years and young adulthood, many of the fundamentals are consistent, such as the need to be loved and safe, material basics such as housing and food, being healthy, learning, participating, and having a positive sense of identity and culture. By developing a strategy that cuts across the age cohorts from 0-25 we aim to ensure that no age cohort is neglected, and to facilitate greater collaboration and integration across organisations and groups that work with specific age cohorts so that everyone receives the support they need throughout their first 25 years of life.

# The Strategy in Practice

**This Strategy is a starting point for action improve outcomes for Darebin's children, young people and families.**

It is intended to guide Council and our partners as we develop collaborative responses to the action areas and priorities.

This Strategy is a snapshot of the issues and priorities that community and stakeholders have identified as being most important for children, young people and families at a particular moment in time. We recognise that these issues and priorities will change over time, and our responses will need to change as this happens.

The Guiding Principles outline essential considerations that need to be addressed across all of the Action Areas of the Strategy. Our Principles for Collaboration and Action outline how Council and partners will work together flexibly and responsively, underpinned by a commitment to listening, learning, sharing and holding each other accountable.

This Strategy is a reference and a tool which we will use in our collaboration going forward to:

- Align action towards the issues that are most significant for children, young people and families,
- Develop Action Plans to guide the actions that Council and partners will take to deliver on the aims outlined in this strategy,
- Hold ourselves collectively account to deliver on the priorities that the community has identified,
- Advocate for action by others where they are in a position to influence change,
- Extend and strengthen our collaboration, bringing in new partners who can help us address the action areas and priorities.

# Next Steps: from Strategy to Action

An initial two-year Action Plan will be developed to accompany this Strategy. This first Action Plan will outline the key actions that Council and partners will take to work towards the aims outlined for each action area in this Strategy.

The Action Plan will be developed collaboratively with the partners and stakeholders who have helped develop this Strategy, including young people and community members. It will include actions, measures of progress, timeframes and responsibilities for leadership and contribution to each action. The Principles of Collaboration and Action outlined in this Strategy will guide the development and delivery of the Action Plan as a shared responsibility amongst Council and partners.

In line with the principles of holding ourselves accountable to get things done and valuing learning, monitoring and evaluation of progress will be critical to ensure that we stay focused on the issues that are important to children, young people and families in Darebin and track progress on our aims. The monitoring and evaluation of progress will be an ongoing process, with progress reported annually to Council and the community.

## Guiding Principles

Four guiding principles have been identified as critical underpinnings of our work to improve outcomes for children and young people from 0 to 25 and their families.

These guiding principles emerged from the engagement discussions with community and stakeholders as key areas of focus across each of the five themes in the strategy. They will be used as a guiding reference point for all the actions that flow from this strategy.

### Community leadership

A collaborative and responsive support system

### Cultural safety

### Equity

## GUIDING PRINCIPLE

### Community Leadership

<b>Core focus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supporting youth and community leadership.</li> <li>Valuing lived experience and centering the voices of children, young people and families.</li> <li>Authentic and meaningful community engagement.</li> </ul>
<b>Why is this important</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engaging authentically and meaningfully with the community, and placing a high value on the voices of lived experience, are essential to delivering on all aspects of this strategy.</li> <li>Authentic engagement builds trust, improves the strategic responses to the community's needs, creates belonging and ownership, and improves accountability.</li> <li>For children and young people, having a voice, being listened to, and taken seriously within their community is crucial to feeling that they are full and valued members of the community.</li> <li>Young people have made it clear that they want to have influence over the decisions that impact their lives and they want the chance to lead.</li> </ul>
<b>What we've heard from community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Young people want to have a say over the issues impacting them, they want to be involved in all stages of strategy development and decision making and they want the chance to lead.</li> <li>Many adults also put significant effort into facilitating opportunities for children to participate in the development of this strategy, suggesting that many adults recognise the importance of children having a say.</li> </ul>
<b>What this looks like in practice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children and young people are empowered and supported to lead and to take action on the issues that are important to them.</li> <li>The voices of children, young people and families are embedded and influential in decision-making and co-design processes in Council and other organisations.</li> <li>Children, young people and families who engage with Council and other organisations feel respected, listened to, valued and taken seriously.</li> <li>Peer support models, peer leadership and lived experience advocacy are strengthened.</li> </ul>

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

## A collaborative and responsive support system

<p><b>Core focus</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessible and engaging services.</li> <li>• Connected and responsive services.</li> <li>• Collaboration across the system.</li> <li>• Collaborative advocacy for broader systems and policy change.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Why is this important</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many of the priorities across this strategy require a service response to ensure that children, young people and families get the support they need when they need it, regardless of socioeconomic status, disability, cultural or religious background, gender, sexuality, neurodiversity or other factors.</li> <li>• To meet the needs of children, young people and families, services need to be high quality, accessible, affordable, available when needed, safe, welcoming, and inclusive.</li> <li>• Collaboration is essential to improving outcomes for children, young people from 0 to 25 and their families. Stakeholders have identified that services need to be more connected and operate collaboratively as a system to ensure that children, young people and families are supported to navigate the system and find the supports they need.</li> <li>• Responsive service systems that intervene early can help address challenges for children, young people and families at an earlier stage to reduce harm and promote better outcomes over the long-term.</li> <li>• Research on the key aspects of service systems for supporting children and families shows that children and families benefit when access to key services is simplified by integrating services and supports across different sectors.</li> </ul>
<p><b>What we've heard from community</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The community wants accessible and affordable services to be available to all children, young people and families across Darebin.</li> <li>• Services want to collaborate to improve their ability to meet the needs of the community.</li> </ul>
<p><b>What this looks like in practice</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A more connected and integrated service system in which there is no wrong door - wherever someone goes they'll get the help they need. A system that provides timely support when people need it.</li> <li>• Better communication so the community and services know what help is available and how to access it.</li> <li>• A more responsive system that is aware of the community's needs and intervenes early to improve outcomes. A system that proactively works to reach out and engage children, young people and families at risk of poor outcomes.</li> <li>• Stakeholders and community work in partnership to advocate for changes in social and political systems that are beyond our direct influence.</li> <li>• Integrated 'wrap-around' services are available to those who need them.</li> <li>• All services for children, young people and families achieve high standards for quality and clinical governance.</li> <li>• Collaboration is prioritised, resourced and guided by our <b><i>shared principles for collaboration and action</i></b>.</li> </ul>

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

## Cultural Safety

<p><b>Core focus</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing cultural safety and security for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, and families across all services and settings.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Why is this important</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having a positive sense of identity and culture is central to the wellbeing of all children, young people and families. This is important for all, regardless of background, but in Australia, especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families.</li> <li>• SNAiCC describes cultural safety as 'the positive recognition and celebration of cultures. It is more than just the absence of racism or discrimination and more than 'cultural awareness' and 'cultural sensitivity'. It empowers people and enables them to contribute and feel safe to be themselves'.</li> <li>• SNAiCC defines cultural safety for Aboriginal children as 'the child being provided with a safe, nurturing and positive environment where they are comfortable with being themselves, expressing their culture... their spiritual and belief systems, and they are supported by the carer... (who) respects their Aboriginality and therefore encourages their sense of self and identity.</li> <li>• Organisations and services need to give sustained attention to ensuring that cultural safety is created and consistently applied across all settings. This is essential to address the racism and discrimination that still exists across service systems.</li> </ul>
<p><b>What we've heard from community</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholders have been clear that cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families is an essential underpinning for all themes within this strategy.</li> <li>• Stakeholders raised concerns that cultural awareness and cultural safety is not widespread and embedded in mainstream organisations.</li> <li>• Stakeholders told us that cultural safety needs to be meaningful and authentic. It is important to recognise that cultural safety cannot be a tick-box exercise or a one-off effort.</li> </ul>
<p><b>What this looks like in practice</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All services in Darebin work towards achieving the highest level of cultural safety and security for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, and families.</li> <li>• Cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, and families is embedded as a core priority across each of the themes of this strategy.</li> <li>• Awareness, support and capacity for cultural safety is raised across the Darebin community.</li> </ul>



## Equity

<b>Core focus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reducing discrimination, disadvantage and the inequitable distribution of resources to improve outcomes for all children, young people and families.</li> <li>Ensuring equitable access to services, supports and resources.</li> <li>Understanding, respecting and responding to diverse needs through an intersectional approach.</li> </ul>
<b>Why is this important</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children and young people's experiences and life chances are impacted by a wide range of factors including socioeconomic status, cultural background/identity, language, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, family structure, disability, neurodiversity, experiences of trauma and many other factors.</li> <li>Disadvantage, discrimination, marginalisation and inequitable access to resources and opportunities have a negative impact on the wellbeing, education and life chances of many children, young people and families in Darebin.</li> <li>An intersectional approach to understanding and responding to the needs of children, young people and families recognises that people's lives and experiences are shaped and influenced by diversity – resulting in power and privilege in some cases and discrimination and oppression in others. People experience disadvantage and exclusion because their identity is made up of belonging to more than one group that experiences systemic and structural discrimination. While some people may have added layers of power and privilege, others experience compounding layers of discrimination.</li> <li>Council, our partners and our community have all expressed a belief that the inequalities experienced by children, young people and families across our community are unfair and should be reduced where it is possible to do so.</li> </ul>
<b>What we've heard from community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concerns about issues of equity and inclusion were a strong theme in community engagement and discussions with stakeholders. Issues raised include support for children and young people with additional needs due to disability, neurodivergence and experiences of trauma, addressing place-based disadvantage and inequalities across Darebin, and adopting inclusive approaches and language for all children, young people and families.</li> </ul>
<b>What this looks like in practice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Services and organisations that work with children, young people and families prioritise being welcoming, safe, inclusive, accessible and responsive for everyone including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, culturally diverse communities, people with disabilities, neurodivergent people, LGBTQIA+ people, people who have experienced trauma and anyone else who may be marginalised or excluded.</li> <li>Services and organisations in Darebin proactively seek to reduce discrimination, disadvantage and the inequitable distribution of resources to improve outcomes for all children, young people and families.</li> <li>Services and organisations in Darebin understand and measure their impact on equity, discrimination and disadvantage across the community.</li> </ul>

# Principles for Collaboration and Action

## Collaboration is essential to improving outcomes for children, young people from 0 to 25 and their families.

Hundreds of organisations and groups from dozens of diverse sectors of society play a critical role in providing the services, supports and community infrastructure that enables children and young people to thrive. Collaboration that is grounded in relationships, networks and partnerships is now more important than ever.

A wide range of organisations from many sectors helped develop this strategy, including early childhood education and care, primary, secondary and tertiary education, health, employment, welfare, homelessness, Neighbourhood Houses, police, philanthropy, volunteer groups, family services, youth services, drug and alcohol, mental health, family violence and many more areas. Together we developed these principles to guide how we work together, how we communicate and the approaches to change that we will follow to deliver outcomes for families, youth and children across Darebin.

### Listening and learning, relationships, trust

1. We take action in partnership with our community, based on our commitment to listening, responding and championing community leadership.
2. We value learning, and work to create safe spaces to learn from each other and our community.
3. We value relationships, and work to build trust across our partnerships and with community.

### Sharing power and resources

4. We share information, resources and power across our partnerships and with our community to achieve our goals.

### Aligning our efforts, staying adaptable

5. We are flexible, dynamic and adaptable as the needs of our community change.
6. We work cohesively and holistically towards a shared vision and clear goals.

### Taking action, being courageous

7. We hold ourselves accountable to get things done, and report transparently to our community on our progress.
8. We have the courage to take risks, innovate and try different approaches across our partnership.

# Council's Role

As the initiator of this strategy and convenor of the collaboration that brought this Strategy into being, Council has a key role to play in the Strategy's delivery and in supporting children, young people and families across the work that Council does.

The five key roles of local government in supporting children and their families outlined by the Municipal Association of Victoria in their Municipal Early Years Planning Guide provide a useful framework for thinking about the roles that Council

can play in supporting children, young people and families. These five roles align closely with the roles partners have said they want Council to play in progressing the focus areas of this strategy.

Five key roles outlined by the Municipal Association of Victoria	Roles partners have asked Council to play
<b>Planning and coordination</b> – acting as a key coordination point and community planner for services and activities that support children, young people, and their families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide platforms for collaboration and community action.</li> <li>• Facilitate connections and information sharing between services to improve service coordination and access.</li> <li>• Provide coordination and support to facilitate collaboration and action.</li> <li>• Data collection and analysis.</li> <li>• Provide funding to services, groups and programs for Families, Youth &amp; Children.</li> </ul>
<b>Service provision</b> – delivering a range of programs, activities, and initiatives for children, young people, and families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement the ideas put forward by community and stakeholders</li> </ul>
<b>Facility planning</b> – planning, providing, and maintaining a range of infrastructure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain and improve buildings, facilities and parks.</li> </ul>
<b>Advocacy</b> – lobbying and advocating to state and federal governments and other key stakeholders on behalf of children, young people and their families, and the services that support them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate for funding and support from other levels of government.</li> </ul>
<b>Strengthening community capacity</b> – facilitating community connections and community participation in decision-making, including supporting children and young people's role as active citizens.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Genuine and meaningful engagement, listen to the community and stakeholders.</li> <li>• Provide platforms for collaboration and community action.</li> </ul>

# Partners' Roles

Partner organisations who participated in the Stakeholder Summit in February 2024, articulated a set of key roles that they can play in improving outcomes for children young people and families in collaboration with Council and each other.

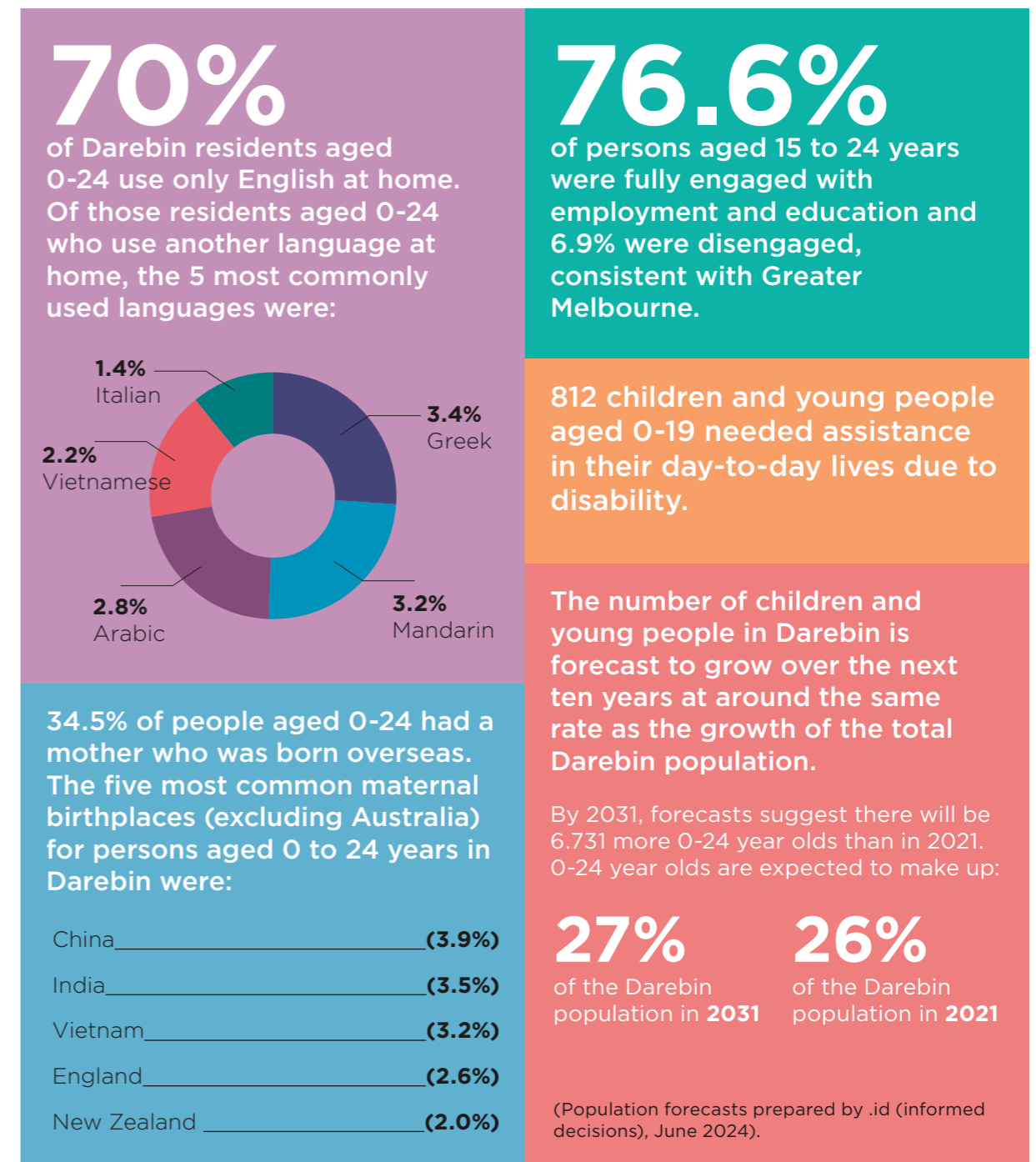
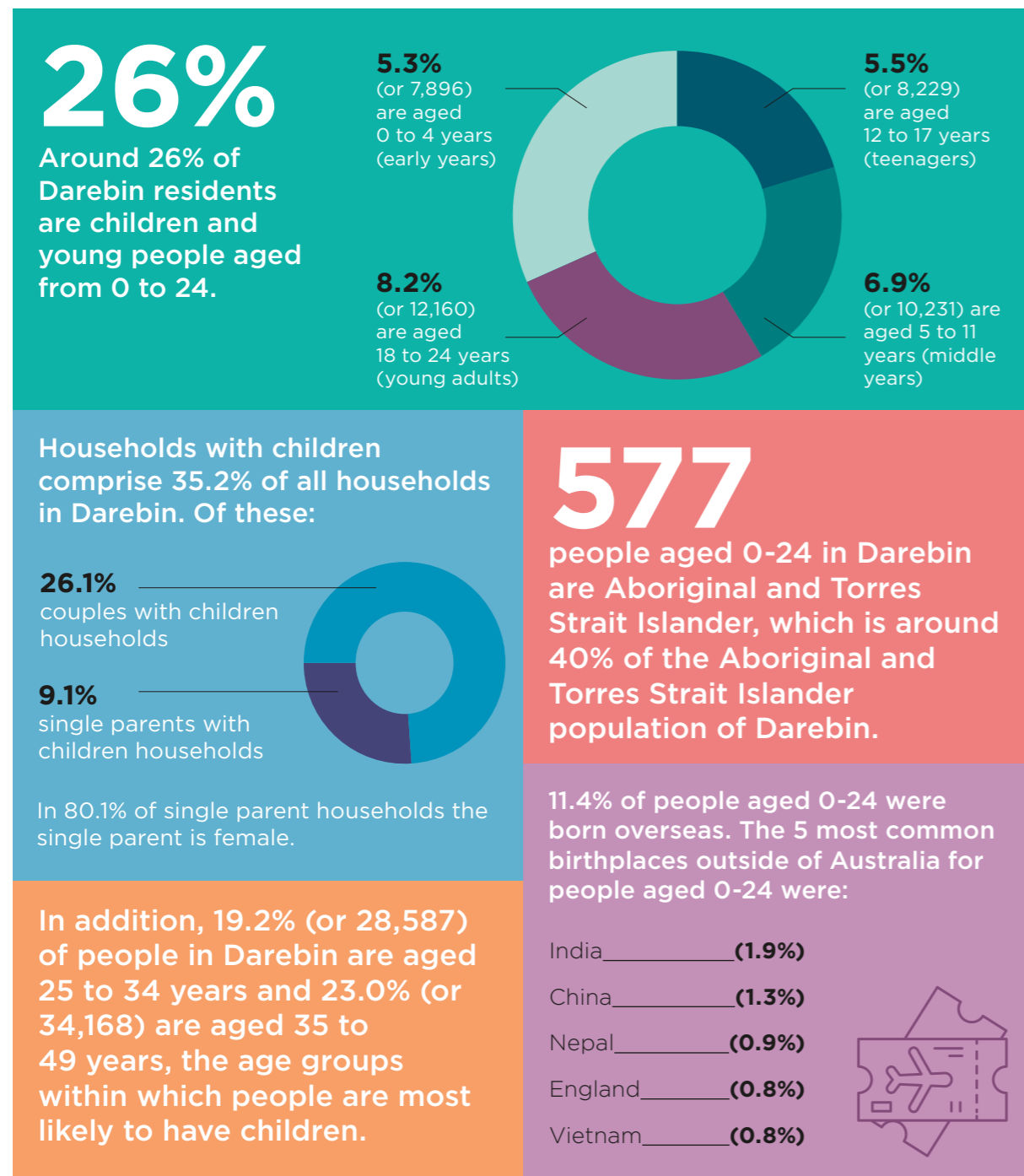
- Continued engagement in strategy development: raising issues and sharing information
- Holding Council and other partners to account.
- Supporting or providing inclusive services and spaces for all children and families.
- Building connections, sharing information and collaborating across sectors.
- Listening to young people, creating more space for their voices to be heard.
- Advocating for the needs of children, young people and families.
- Implementing agreed actions.



# A snapshot

SOURCE: 2021 CENSUS DATA

Children, young people and families comprise a significant proportion of the Darebin community and the numbers of children and young people are forecast to increase.



# How this Strategy was developed

## Stage 1 Community Engagement

We heard from over 650 children, young people and adults what's important to them and where they need support.

From 9 October to 26 November 2023, we asked the Darebin community four questions to help us understand what's important to children, young people and families.

- 1. What are the most important things that children, young people and families need to have a good life?** What do you or your family need to be healthy, happy and to live a good life?
- 2. What is working well for children, young people and families in Darebin right now?** What helps you or your family to be healthy, happy and reach your potential?
- 3. What makes life hard for children, young people and families in Darebin right now?** What makes it hard for you or your family to be healthy, happy and reach your potential?
- 4. What should Council and our partners focus on to help children, young people, and their families across our diverse community?** What are the things you would most like Council and our partners to do something about for you or your family?

**For children, we adapted the questions and created an activity sheet that asked:**

1. What makes you happy and healthy?
2. What do you like best about the area where you live?
3. What would you change to help all children in Darebin to be happy and healthy?

We also asked people to post on our engagement website their vision or big idea for what would make Darebin a great place for all children, young people and their families.

### Engagement activities

- Online & hard copy surveys for young people and adults.
- Engagement sessions with children and young people at six kindergarten & childcare services, six primary schools, three secondary schools and several community settings.
- Engagement through Council services including Youth Services, libraries, immunisation sessions, Toy Library.
- Engagement at shopping centres, markets, train stations & community events.
- Stakeholder meetings.

### Who did we hear from?

**262 young people and adults completed an online or hard copy survey (71% online, 29% hard copy)**

- Age: 30% 10-19, 4% 20-29, 29% 30-39, 24% 40-49, 5% 50-59, 2% 60+.
- Postcode: 26% Reservoir, 23% Preston, 17% Northcote, 10% Thornbury, 16% others.
- Connection to Darebin: 77% live, 18% work, 18% study, 10% visit.
- Gender: 65% woman, 27% man, 3% non-binary/gender diverse.
- 30% spoke a language other than English at home.
- 2% were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders.
- 8% reported having a disability.

### 387 children completed an activity sheet

- The children's ages ranged from 2 to 13 years old. 18% were aged 2-5 years, 38% were aged 6-9, 31% were aged 10-13, 13% of children did not give their age.

### Stakeholder engagement

#### Stakeholder meetings

- Young Citizens Jury, Youth Workers Network, Darebin Education Network, Best Start Aboriginal Reference Group, Darebin Information, Volunteer & Resource Service, Dardi Munwurro, Aboriginal Housing Victoria, Melbourne Polytechnic Koorie Services Unit.

#### Stakeholder Summit

- 96 people from 46 organisations participated in a full-day Families, Youth & Children Stakeholder Summit in February 2024. This included representation from organisations that work across the child, youth and family spectrum including early years, middle years, teenagers, young adults and families. The summit was designed collaboratively with stakeholders through the Families, Youth & Children Reference Group. We invited participation from all levels within organisations - from strategic decision makers to frontline service delivery workers, as well as community members including young people.
- At the Summit stakeholders reviewed the feedback received from the community in the stage 1 community engagement, identified principles for collaboration, explored Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations and Results to inform the Strategy and then developed proposed Strategic Focus Areas for the Strategy.

### Youth Roundtable

- 14 young people participated in a half-day Youth Roundtable workshop in March 2024. The Roundtable was co-designed and co-hosted by members of the Young Citizens Jury.
- At the Roundtable young people developed a vision of a 'Future Perfect' Darebin that met all the needs of young people, mapped out the assets that currently support young people in Darebin, the things that are missing and identified their priority actions to improve Darebin for young people. They also reviewed the Strategic Focus Areas that stakeholders had identified at the Stakeholder Summit.

### Sensemaking Workshop

- 13 people including representatives from six partner organisations, Darebin Young Citizens Jury members and Council officers participated in a facilitated sensemaking workshop to review outputs from the Stakeholder Summit and Youth Roundtable to synthesise the key principles and focus areas/themes for the Strategy.

### Young Citizens Jury: Our Vision

- The Young Citizens Jury independently developed a document entitled 'Our Vision' which outlined their proposals for action on key priority areas identified at the Youth Roundtable.

## Stage 2 Community Engagement

From 29 May to 23 June 2024 we invited the community and stakeholders to provide feedback on a draft strategy and help us finalise this Strategy. This included the following activities:

- Online survey on the draft themes, focus areas and aims of the strategy. Promoted through Council communications and tailored invitations to special interest groups.
- Workshops with over 200 children and young people at 5 primary and 2 secondary schools.
- In-person with 45 parents and grandparents at community events and services.
- A second Youth Roundtable with 10 youth leaders
- A second Stakeholder Summit with 55 partners and stakeholders.
- A workshop with the Best Start Aboriginal Reference Group.

## Action Areas

### Essentials for life



### Inclusion & belonging



### Health & wellbeing



### Safety & independence



### Learning





# Essentials for life

## Priorities

- Supporting all children, young people and families to have their basic needs met, particularly those experiencing poverty and facing cost of living pressures.
- Supporting young people to access secure and rewarding employment and career pathways.

## Why is this important

- All children, young people and families need the material basics of life. This includes suitable, secure, stable housing, appropriate clothing, nutritious food, access to education, access to transport and services, enough money for all of life's necessities and to be an active member of society.
- Many families and young people in Darebin are experiencing significant cost of living pressures, which can place significant stress on families and individuals. The number of people seeking material and financial support services is on the rise.
- Many other issues have an impact on a person or family's ability to access the essentials for life, including physical or mental health issues, disability, experiences of trauma or violence. Family violence is a significant cause of homelessness.

## What we've heard from community

- Cost of living was an area of significant concern in community responses to our engagement survey. Community members noted that it puts pressure on families, and many described it as a crisis. This theme was particularly strong in the responses from young people and adults, but it was clear that many children are also aware of cost of living pressures.
- Housing was the most commonly mentioned cost of living pressure, but many other things were also mentioned including food, childcare (early years and out of school), petrol, rates, utilities and children's activities.
- Employment opportunities, career prospects and rights at work are key issues for young people.

## Key data

- 76.6% of persons aged 15 to 24 years are fully engaged with employment and education. 12.8% of persons aged 15 to 24 were unemployed (1,232 people in total). (2021 census data)
- 28.8% of households living in rented accommodation in Darebin (6,547 households in total) pay more than 30% of their income on rent, a commonly accepted indicator of rental stress. 14.2% of households with a mortgage (2,499 households in total) pay more than 30% of their income on their mortgage. (2021 census data). These figures are likely to have been impacted by interest rate rises since 2022.

## Aims

- Supports with basic needs including child care, education, housing supports, food relief and financial supports are available and accessible when needed, including wrap-around supports for those who need them.
- Darebin has strong partnerships and advocacy to improve access to affordable housing for young people and families in our community.
- The causes of youth homelessness are addressed so that no young person ends up homeless.
- Young people understand their rights as workers and those rights are respected by employers.
- Young people are supported to identify and achieve their employment and career aspirations.
- Young people and families know what benefits and supports they are entitled to and are supported to access them.



# Inclusion & belonging

## Priorities

- Making Darebin a community where everyone feels included, valued and connected.
- Welcoming and inclusive places and services for all.
- Opportunities to participate and connect.

## Why is this important

- Connection and belonging are fundamental human needs. Having loving, trusting relationships with family and friends, and feeling valued and cared for by teachers and other adults in their life is one of the core needs for children and young people.
- For all people, feeling like you belong to a community is vital for mental health and positive identity. It is particularly important for children and young people to feel this sense of belonging and connection in their lives as they develop their identity and transition through key life stages.
- Feeling lonely, isolated or excluded is damaging to mental and physical health.

## What we've heard from community

- Responses from children, young people and adults all suggest a strong recognition of the importance of relationships and community for supporting children, young people and families. Friendship and family were amongst the strongest themes from children's responses to the question "what makes you healthy and happy?".
- Adults want children to feel supported and loved, and they want their children and themselves to feel part of a supported and connected community.
- The community wants more opportunities for children, young people, parents and families to connect including through activities, events, support networks/groups, and spaces to connect.

## Key data

- In 2020, 17.5% of adults surveyed in Darebin said they talked to friends a few times a month or less often, compared to 18.3% across Victoria (Victorian Population Health Survey).
- In 2020, 16.9% of adults surveyed in Darebin said that most people could be trusted 'never' or 'not often', compared to 14.2% across Victoria (Victorian Population Health Survey).
- Across Australia 24% of young people aged 15-19 surveyed by Mission Australia in 2023 identified relationship challenges with family, friends or significant others as their biggest personal challenge (Mission Australia Youth Survey 2023).

## Aims

- Increasing places, spaces and activities that support connection for children, young people and families.
- Working together to activate our places, spaces and services to create more opportunities for connection and belonging.
- Making Darebin a community where everyone can find a group or community where they feel they belong, whatever their interests.
- Places, spaces, activities and services that are safe, welcoming and inclusive for all children, young people and families, including neurodivergent people, LGBTQIA+ people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, culturally diverse communities, people with disabilities and anyone else who may be marginalised or excluded.
- Increased connection across generations and cultures - weaving the community together.



# Health & wellbeing

## Priorities

- Supporting physical activity for health, wellbeing and connection.
- Improving mental health and wellbeing and strengthening mental health supports.
- Connection to nature and access to thriving natural environments that support wellbeing.
- Affordable and accessible health services and supports.

## Why is this important

- The mental health of children and young people is a major concern for young people and the community more broadly.
- Mental health problems that emerge in childhood can have impacts across the life-course: it is estimated that about half of adult mental problems begin before the age of 14.
- Suicide is the leading cause of death among Australians aged 15–24. Young people also have the highest rates of hospitalisation for intentional self-harm.
- A wide range of issues can impact mental health including the pressures of navigating significant life transitions, social isolation, discrimination and social exclusion.
- Protective factors include access to mental health care when required, social connection and connection with nature, community and land.
- Access to high quality open space is also essential to support physical activity and wellbeing.
- Health and wellbeing outcomes are unequal across different groups in our community. For example, there is evidence to indicate that people with autism have a life expectancy 20–36 years shorter than the general population (Australian Parliament Select Committee on Autism Report).

## What we've heard from community

- Parks, playgrounds and open spaces were probably the single biggest theme across community engagement responses from children, young people and adults. All groups identified parks, playgrounds and open space as being important for health and happiness, and identified access to these spaces as a current strength or a feature that they like about their local area. However, many children also identified parks and playgrounds as an area for improvement, both in terms of the level of provision across all parts of Darebin and improvements they would like to see such as more shade. Other themes in relation to the environment include concerns about cleanliness and litter, support for walkable and cyclable environments (as reflected in the safety theme), and support for enhancing Darebin's natural environments and biodiversity.
- A significant number of responses from children, young people and adults emphasised the important of opportunities to be physically active for children's wellbeing. Darebin's sports clubs and sport and recreation facilities were seen as a

strength, but the cost of accessing sports and recreation opportunities was reported as a challenge that many in the community face.

- Young people have identified access to mental health support as a key priority.

## Key data

- In 2021, 16.1% of children in Darebin were developmentally at risk or vulnerable at the time of starting school in the physical health and wellbeing domain, compared to 19.1% across Victoria. 20.8% of children were developmentally at risk or vulnerable in the emotional maturity domain, compared to 21.5% across Victoria (Australian Early Development Census).
- Mental health conditions are the most commonly diagnosed long-term health conditions amongst people aged 15-24 in Darebin, with 13.7% of people in this age group reporting that they had been diagnosed with a mental health condition in 2021. (2021 census data). Across Australia 24% of young people aged 15-19 surveyed by Mission Australia in 2023 identified mental health challenges such as stress, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, diagnosed disorders or self-harm as their biggest personal challenge (Mission Australia Youth Survey 2023). 32% of young people were personally extremely or very concerned about mental health.
- 7.4% of households in Darebin don't have access to a public open space within 500 metres of their house. The areas with the highest proportion of households that don't have this access are Preston West (25.4%), Reservoir South (17.1%) and Kingsbury (15.3%) (Breathing Space: Darebin Open Space Strategy 2019).

## Aims

- Mental health support is available when and where children, young people and families need it.
- Children, young people and families have equitable access to a wide range of affordable physical activity opportunities to match their interests.
- Children, young people and families have access to thriving natural environments that support wellbeing.
- Children, young people and families have access to the health services they need.
- Services and organisations across Darebin work together to promote social and emotional wellbeing and mental health for children, young people and families.





# Safety & independence

## Priorities

- Physical, cultural, emotional and psychological safety in all settings and services.
- Safe streets and public spaces for all children, young people and families.
- Preventing family violence and keeping children safe from abuse and harm.
- Respecting and supporting young people's independence, self-determination and right to make choices and take risks in order to learn, grow and build resilience.

## Why is this important

- Everyone has the right to feel safe at home, in the community and in all settings, at every age.
- For children and young people feeling safe and secure is vital for their emotional and psychological development.
- Feeling safe is foundational for mental health and wellbeing, inclusion and participation in community and for people to be able to embrace who they are regardless of their cultural or religious identify, gender, sexual identity or any other factors.
- For young people feeling safe and being safe in public spaces and in all forms of transport is essential for their independence and autonomy.

## What we've heard from community

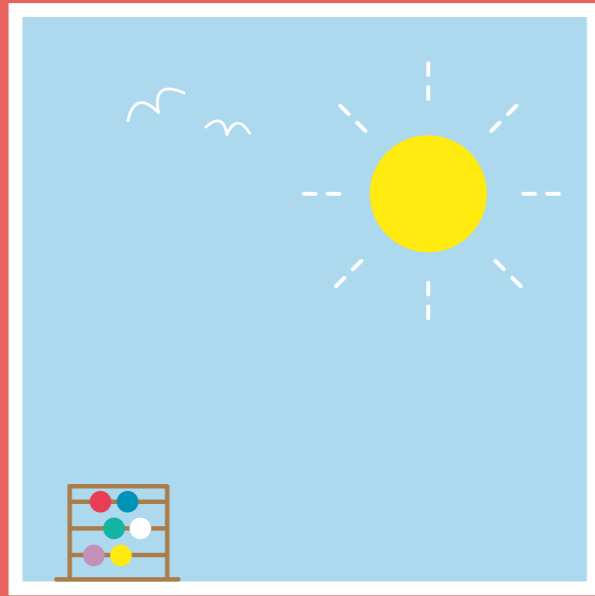
- Road safety, particularly for pedestrians and cyclists, was a strong theme that came through in responses from children as well as adults.
- Being and feeling safe in public spaces also came through, particularly in responses from adults and stakeholders.
- Stakeholders identified cultural safety as key priority for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Children's safety online is another important priority flagged by stakeholders.

## Key data

- In 2023 the family-related incident rate for Darebin was 1,100 per 100,000 population, compared with the Victorian rate of 1,385.
- The rate of family violence incidents against females in Darebin in 2022-23 was more than three times higher than the rate against males.
- In 2017 there were 18.3 fatalities or injuries from road accidents per 10,000 residents in Darebin, compared to 19.3 per 10,000 people across Victoria as a whole.

## Aims

- Darebin is a place where everyone feels physically, culturally, emotionally and psychologically safe, at home and in the community.
- Prevention of family violence and all forms of violence against women, gender diverse people and children.
- Children are safe and protected from harm online.
- Public spaces and places are safe and welcoming for all children and young people.
- All services are culturally safe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families.
- Child Safe Standards are a high priority for all Darebin services.
- Accessible and safe active and public transport supporting independence and wellbeing.
- Children, young people and families are more aware of the supports available to assist them to be safe in their community.
- Reduce unnecessary barriers and restrictions on children and young people's independence and autonomy to enable them to access the services and supports they need.



# Learning

## Priorities

- Increasing active participation and engagement in learning across the lifespan.
- Supporting children and young people through their education journeys including through critical transition points.
- Preparing children and young people for the future.

## Why is this important

- From birth to adulthood, learning is essential to enable people to realise their potential. Learning starts at home during the first years of life and continues through Early Childhood Education and Care, and then at school, and also in wide variety of settings beyond formal education.
- For children and young people's learning to be supported, the formal and informal education services and settings they encounter from the early years right through to their young adulthood need to be high quality, inclusive and safe. This includes childcare services, kindergarten, primary, secondary and specialist schools, vocational education and training (VET) providers including TAFEs and registered training organisations (RTOs), university and non-university higher education providers, and informal learning settings such as libraries.
- Many community organisations provide important learning opportunities for children, young people and families, including for example cultural and religious groups and Scouts Victoria groups.
- Disengagement from education or difficulties attending school (often referred to as 'school refusal') have been seen to be on the rise in recent years, in a trend that has been attributed to the disruptive impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Learning is not just about academic skills and knowledge. Children and young people also need to acquire essential life skills in areas such as financial literacy, emotional intelligence and regulation, cooking and driving, as well as useful work experience opportunities, to support their transition to adulthood.
- For many children and young people socioeconomic barriers can affect their ability to access to the technology and other resources they need to fully engage at school or in other learning settings.

## What we've heard from community

- Viewed in broad terms, learning featured strongly in the responses to both the children's activity and adult/young people's survey. Children's response indicated that they value reading, books, libraries and school as well as creative activities.

- Adult's responses placed a high value on education, and emphasised access to childcare, kindergarten and school as being important.

## Key data

- Childcare provision in Darebin shows a clear North-South divide, with 35% of children in Darebin-North living in a childcare desert, compared to 0% in Darebin-South.
- 89% of four-year-olds in Darebin participated in kindergarten in 2022, the highest participation rate in Darebin in the last five years. Across Victoria, the four-year-old participation rate was 92% in 2022.
- In 2021, 68.4% of people aged over 15 years in Darebin had completed Year 12 schooling (or equivalent), compared to 59.4% across Greater Melbourne.
- 74.2% of students who completed Year 12 in Darebin in 2020 were in further education or training in 2021, compared to 49.4% of Year 12 non-completers (based on Department of Education On Track survey responses)
- Across Australia 49% of young people aged 15-19 surveyed by Mission Australia in 2023 identified school challenges, such as high workload, academic pressure, challenges with teachers or learning difficulties, as their biggest personal challenge (Mission Australia Youth Survey 2023).

## Aims

- All children and young people in Darebin have access to high quality care, education and learning opportunities from the early years through to young adulthood. Access to education and learning is not limited by socioeconomic or structural barriers.
- Increased active participation and engagement in learning across the lifespan including kindergarten, school and other education and training.
- Children, young people and their families are well supported throughout their education journeys including through all of the critical transition points.
- Children, young people are equipped with the skills they need to succeed in life, are aware of the pathways available to them and receive the support they need to make choices about their next steps.

# Appendix: Policy Context

## Council's plans, strategies and policies

Many of Council's strategic documents present commitments, principles, priorities, and topics that have been considered in the development of this C Strategy including:

### Darebin 2041 Community Vision:

Darebin is an equitable, vibrant, and connected community. Darebin respects and supports First Nations People, values country, our diverse communities, and places. Darebin commits to mitigating the climate emergency, creating prosperity for current and future generations.

### 2021-2025 Council Plan (Incorporating the Darebin Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan):

Commitment to promoting, protecting, and improving the wellbeing of our community, and addressing health inequality. Priorities are modifiable health risks and determinants of health. Approach involves ensuring health equity, focusing on environments for health, and taking a life course approach (targeting modifiable health risks). 10 Big Actions include: plan infrastructure for decades to come, support community members experiencing vulnerability, and expand our delivery of quality universal services.

### Breathing Space – The Darebin Open Space Strategy:

Human health and wellbeing are directly affected by the built and natural environments. Safety, including cultural safety, in open spaces is important. Making the distribution of open space equitable. Recognising local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, particularly traditional owners.

Designing for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. Engaging with users, residents, and community groups to help inform the designing, planning, and managing of open space with particular emphasis on diverse communities. Enhancing women's visibility and representation in open space. Increasing opportunities for children to engage with nature.

Engaging the community as partners in biodiversity protection. There are concentrations of households with limited access to open space particularly in Preston and Reservoir as well as parts of Alphington. Regional open space to have a play space while District open space to have, or may have, a play space.

### Community Engagement Policy 2023:

Commitment to building a fair, inclusive, and equitable city by placing residents, business owners and the community sector at the heart of decision-making. Engagement principles are: respectful; action oriented; focused on justice and equity; inclusive; and integrity. Commitment to supporting the rights of people and groups who experience discrimination and disadvantage, including Aboriginal

and Torres Strait Islander peoples; children; young people; culturally and linguistically diverse people; migrants and refugees; women and girls; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ+) people; people with a disability; and people experiencing poverty, including intergenerational disadvantage and inequalities.

### Darebin Libraries and Learning Strategy 2020-2024:

Four goals are: to improve equity of access; to support our thriving and resilient community; to create welcoming, safe, inclusive, and flexible spaces; and to deliver responsive services.

### Disability Access and Inclusion in Darebin – A community plan of access and inclusion 2021-2026:

The six goals are accessible and inclusive communication; getting around Darebin – transport, footpaths, and parking; places we live, work and play; accessible and inclusive activities and events; pathways to employment for people with disability; and changing attitudes and raising awareness about disability.

### Early Years Infrastructure Planning Framework 2021-2041:

Planning principles are equity, access, diversity and inclusion, connection to culture and Country, truth-telling, choice, quality and safety, integrated services for the whole community, community engagement and collaboration, environmental sustainability, access to natural environments, arts and creative culture, and economic development.

### Gender Equity and Preventing Violence Against Women Action Plan 2019-2023:

Vision is a gender equitable, safe, and respectful Darebin community. Priority action areas are organisational leadership; safe, inclusive, and respectful communities; women's participation in community life; research and advocacy.

### Statement of Commitment to Traditional Owners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

Council respects and recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities' values, living culture and practices. Council respects the human, cultural and spiritual rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and organisations, Council is committed to working towards a future based on justice, respect, understanding and the elimination of disadvantages and barriers to equality, notably in health, education, housing, and employment, in the spirit of the Close the Gap Statement of Intent 2008. Darebin is a significant gathering place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the homeland of a number of significant Aboriginal peak bodies, organisations, and businesses. Council affirms the positive forward movement towards equality and equity, race relations, institutional integrity, historical acceptance through truth-telling and unity.

### **Towards Equality – Darebin City Council's Equity, Inclusion and Human Rights Framework 2019-2029:**

Long-standing commitment to social justice, we consider the principles of equity, diversity, inclusion, and human rights in everything we do. Framework guides and helps us strive for a just society by reducing disadvantage, standing against discrimination, and sharing resources equitably, in partnership with the community, local agencies and organisations. It puts equity, inclusion, and human rights at the heart of all our work and will help us build a stronger, healthier, and happier community where everyone is welcome, valued, and respected.

### **Future Council plans and strategies**

This Strategy will be a key reference for future plans and strategies that Council develops, to ensure that the needs of children, young people and families are addressed in an integrated way by Council across the breadth of its work. The flow of influence between this Strategy and future plans and strategies will be two way, with this Strategy also being responsive to issues and needs that are highlighted in those future plans.

Some of the upcoming plans and strategies that this Strategy will intersect with include:

- Aboriginal Action Plan
- Council Plan and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025-29
- Cultural Diversity Action Plan
- LGBTIQ+ Action Plan
- Prevention of Violence Against Women Action Plan
- Disability Action Plan
- Economic Development Strategy
- Property Strategy
- Community Infrastructure Plan

### **State and Federal Government policy and regulations**

Some of the key state and federal policies, strategies and legislated requirements that have implications for specific themes and focus areas within this strategy include:

- Best Start, Best Life: Early Childhood Education That Works **(State of Victoria, 2022)**
- Child Safe Standards **(Commission for Children and Young People, 2022)**
- Closing the Gap **(National Indigenous Australians Agency, 2020)**
- Early Childhood Reform Plan: Ready for kinder, Ready for school, Ready for life **(Department of Education and Training, 2017)**
- Healthy kids, healthy futures (Victoria's five-year action plan) **(Department of Health, 2021)**
- Information sharing and MARAM reforms **(State of Victoria, 2018)**
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy **(National Indigenous Australian Agency, 2021)**
- National Action Plan for the Health of Children and Young People 2020-2030 **(Department of Health, 2019)**
- National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy **(National Mental Health Commission, 2021)**
- Our promise, Your future: Victoria's Youth Strategy 2022-2027 **(Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, 2022)**
- Roadmap for Reform: Strong families, safe children **(Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, 2021)**
- Supporting Children and Families in the Early Years: A Compact between DET, DFFS (previously DHHS) and Local Government (represented by MAV) 2017-2027 **(Department of Education, Department of Health and Human Services, and MAV, 2017)**
- The First 1000 Days: Conception to two years ( **Department of Social Services, 2023)**
- Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities **(Parliament of Victoria, 2006)**
- Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework **(Department of Education and Training, 2016)**

### **International policy and agreements**

- Sustainable Development Goals
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child



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