

Child and Family Plan

'Celebrating children aged up to 12 and their families'

19/01/2015

My right as a child is to:

- have someone I love with me whenever possible.
- be told what is happening to me.
- ask questions and be given answers I understand.
- not be alone if I am sad.
- be able to play even if I have to stay in bed.

And that:

- people are honest with me.
- the people who care for me understand children's needs.
- I am safe, and my body is my body.
- I am respected as a real person with feelings and rights of my own.
- my wellbeing is the most important thing.
- I am part of a family!

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Executive summary

There is strong evidence and broad community recognition that investing in the early years (birth to eight years) and middle years (9–12 years) is critical to ensure the health and wellbeing of the whole community, now and into the future, and that working in partnership with families is crucial for the future planning of services for children.

There has been significant change in the early years sector at an international, national and state level and it is now timely to introduce and implement a new Cardinia Shire Council Child and Family Plan.

Data analysis carried out for the development of this plan has enabled Council to conclude that there are key considerations for all services operating or wishing to operate in the Shire.

Key areas for consideration for Cardinia Shire:

- number of births will increase significantly over the next 7–10 years
- family violence is escalating at a considerable rate
- financial hardship is emerging as a concerning trend
- greatest increase in the population in the future will be in the 0–4 and 5–9 age cohorts
- Demand for Centrelink benefits are increasing
- there are no obstetrics services, hospitals, TAFEs or universities in the municipality.

This learning was taken out to local agencies, organisations and children and families to assess where best to place our collective efforts over the next two years. As a result, five long-term outcomes for children aged up to 12 and their families were agreed, and four key strategic areas of action developed as follows:

The five long-term outcomes are:

1. Children and families have health and happiness.
2. Children and families connected.
3. Children and families realise potential.

4. Children and families are safe.
5. Children and families achieve economic wellbeing.

Four key strategies:

1. Parenting support
2. Early learning development and education
3. Access to services
4. Support for vulnerable families

Through this plan, Cardinia Shire Council and its local service partners will be better placed in municipal planning for the early and middle years. The plan will provide Council with a seamless strategy that supports our collective work with other agencies and organisations in their planning and delivery of service; and that links across children's services and youth services to ensure all children but in particular the most vulnerable in our community have access to coordinated early childhood education, care and health programs. In addition it will provide strategic direction and inform planning to advocate for additional resources to meet the needs of Cardinia Shire's growing community.

Background

Welcome to the Child and Family Plan 2014–16. The two-year timeframe allows Council the opportunity to align the review period with that of our Youth Strategy. This will ensure that:

- the issues affecting young people can inform the work of Council's children's services unit and help place preventative approaches at the heart of their work.
- Council's youth services unit is aware of the strategies being put in place with children's services and can identify any synergies with their work with the 'middle years' group.
- Council can think strategically across the continuum of child, youth and family services ensuring resources are maximised.

This plan highlights how Council will ensure that children in the Shire stay healthy and happy, connected, realise their potential, are safe and achieve economic wellbeing. It sets out everything that the Shire wants for its children, the outcomes that Council and its partners are striving towards and the actions to be taken to achieve this.

Over the life of this plan, children will be involved in key decisions that will create long lasting positive changes throughout Cardinia Shire in coming years. They will have opportunities for greater participation in services they receive. For services and agencies this means respecting children's rights and developing more relevant services based on and depending on need.

We also recognise that families and the community play a significant role in the enrichment of children's lives and through the work of Cardinia Shire. We will endeavour to support community cohesion through appropriate consultation and activities with solutions found at a local level.

We want Cardinia Shire to be a great place to grow up, learn, train, work, live and play. It is also important for children to be safe and to thrive. Children and families expect services that will work with them to meet and respond to their needs – the challenge is to work together with children and families to make even greater long lasting improvements.

Research and policy context

Research

Early childhood literature provides substantial evidence that:

- the early years are crucial in setting the stage for later life
- young children’s development is achieved through relationships with others
- children’s development is shaped by the balance between risk and protective factors
- supporting families effectively requires a comprehensive, co-ordinated service system.

Research shows that the early years of development from conception to age six, particularly the first three years, provide the basis for developing competence, coping and emotional skills that affect learning, behaviour and health throughout life. There is growing evidence that good nutrition, nurturing and responsive care giving in these early years, combined with high quality early childhood development programs, can improve the long-term outcomes for all children’s learning, behaviour and physical and mental health.

All young children’s learning and development occurs in the context of their relationship with their caregivers. These early experiences form characteristic ways of relating to other people and coping with the ebb and flow of emotions.

Experts continue to use the language of risk and protective factors. The balance between factors that impact positively and negatively on children’s development, health, and wellbeing are determinants of vulnerability. Children exposed to multiple risk factors become vulnerable to developmental problems whereas those exposed to protective factors are more likely to be resilient in the face of adversity. To ensure that children develop well, we need to reduce the factors that place them at risk and promote those that are protective. Among other things this means building more supportive communities.

Current policy direction

Council of Australian Governments (COAG)

In 2006, COAG endorsed the National Reform Agenda, which embodies a new collaborative approach to the Australian, State and Territory governments working together towards agreed outcomes.

The reform agenda around early years included a focus on addressing disadvantage and its impact on the health, and wellbeing of children.

The COAG early childhood reform agenda included:

- development of Belonging, Being and Becoming – the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia
- initiatives to address early childhood workforce issues
- a National Quality Framework
- development of Investing in the Early Years – *A National Early Childhood Development Strategy 2009*.

The above meant a period of considerable change in the early years landscape across Australia, which had considerable implications for Victorian Government policy and the support/coordinating function of local government.

In addition, COAG committed to and achieved Universal Access to Early Childhood Education by 2013.

Productivity Commission

Since the change of Federal government in late 2013, the Productivity Commission was asked to undertake a public inquiry into future options for childcare and early childhood learning, with a

focus on developing a system that supports workforce participation and addresses children's learning and development needs.

The commission has been asked to specifically report and make recommendations on:

- the contribution of childcare to workforce participation and child development
- current and future need for childcare in Australia, particularly given changes in work patterns, early learning needs, childcare affordability and government assistance
- the capacity of the childcare system to ensure a satisfactory transition to schools, in particular for vulnerable or at risk children
- alternative models of care, including those overseas, which could be considered for trial in Australia
- options – within existing funding parameters – for improving the accessibility, flexibility and affordability of childcare for families with diverse circumstances
- impacts of regulatory changes, including the implementation of the National Quality Framework, on the childcare sector over the past decade.

The report is due to the Australian Government in late October 2014 and will inform the future direction of children's services in Australia.

Victorian Government

Early Childhood Development has become a key policy focus for the Victorian Government over the last decade. Fuelled by the formation of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), the government released a range of reports and policies, including:

- *State of Victoria's Children Report* produced annually.
- Victoria's Plan to *Improve Outcomes in early childhood 2007*, which sets out a framework for reform within COAG policy directions.
- *Blueprint for Education and early childhood development 2008*.
- *Victorian Early years and development framework 2009*.
- *Transition – A Positive Start to School: A guide for families, Early Childhood Services, Outside School Hours Care Services and Schools 2009*.

Successive governments are also working on systemic improvements to the service system that provides support and services for vulnerable children, youth and families. The policies and plans informing these reforms include:

- *A Fairer Victoria*
- *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*
- *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*
- *Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry 2011*.

Note that the above lists are not exhaustive – there are numerous other state government policies and strategies that deal directly and indirectly with children and young people.

In Victoria, the system is transforming from one where services are separate and have individual functions to integrated models using the Universal Services as a platform towards supporting outcomes for children.

In April 2014, the *Victorian Early Years Strategic Plan* was launched. The plan outlines directions and actions from 2014–20 to continue to improve all children's outcomes and has a focus across three areas:

- supporting parents and communities to give children a great start.
- early and sustained support for those who need it most.
- all children benefit from high-quality early learning.

Local context

This plan outlines our vision, ambitions and key priority outcomes for children and is the key driver helping us move towards early intervention, prevention, integrated working and ensuring we target the most vulnerable groups.

Equality and diversity is implicit throughout the plan and we measure the success of whether we are meeting our outcomes through our service plans, performance monitoring and quality assurance frameworks. This plan is the lever for all organisations working with children to help attract and reform services for children and families in Cardinia Shire.

The plan has been developed through strong partnership working and a shared knowledge of the Shire's children. It is underpinned by shared values and principles which are reflected throughout the plan.

Who we are and what we stand for

Our vision

The vision for Council's Child and Family Plan is that:

"Together all agencies who work with children will enable them to be healthy, safe and valued. They will encourage them to make the most of learning opportunities, appreciate their environment and make a positive contribution to their communities." This collective vision is embedded across children's services.

Our ambition for children in Cardinia Shire is to:

- be safe and protected, free from fear and danger and not involved in risk taking activities.
- be brought up and cared for within their own family wherever possible.
- have the best possible start in life.
- receive support and advice to be physically, mentally and emotionally healthy.
- enjoy their childhood and have positive experiences of social engagement with each other and their communities.
- be able to access a wide range of leisure activities.
- have every opportunity to achieve and reach their potential and enjoy their school and learning experiences.
- be valued, respected and listened to.
- have a say in the services they receive – to see meaningful participation as their right.
- be valued as individuals in their own right.
- receive services which meet their needs.
- be supported in transitioning into young people and adulthood.

Our service principles

To help us achieve our ambition and vision for children, services will be:

- centred on the needs of the child and family
- family orientated recognising the importance of parents/carers

- high quality and evidence based
- equitable and non-discriminatory
- integrated on design and delivery
- based around sound local needs
- inclusive
- empowering
- focused on prevention and early intervention
- delivered by highly motivated and appropriately skilled workforce
- designed and delivered to ensure that children are safe.

Our long-term outcomes for children and families

We have arrived at our long-term priority outcome areas following an extensive and ongoing process which has comprised:

- consultation with children, parents, carers and communities
- ongoing analysis of Cardinia Shire's needs
- A process of regular and ongoing performance management workshops through the Best Start Partnership for all partners throughout the year
- consultation workshops, formal performance monitoring, partnership meetings and focus groups on each of the key priority areas.

The five long-term priority outcomes are:

- Children and families are healthy and happy.
- Children and families are connected.
- Children and families are safe.
- Children and families realise potential.
- Children and families achieve economic wellbeing.

A profile of Cardinia Shire

Cardinia Shire comprises 1,280 square kilometres of land and is situated 50 kilometres south-east of Melbourne. With a population estimated at 80,709 living in 28,919 households, this is one of the fastest growing Victorian municipalities expecting to almost double to about 155,618 people living in 57,441 households by 2031. The Shire is one of eight 'interface councils' forming the perimeter of metropolitan Melbourne and providing a transition between urban and rural areas. Cardinia Shire is home to 27 communities including the urban growth corridor of Beaconsfield, Officer and Pakenham. By 2031, 67 per cent of all households in the Shire will live in the growth area. The growth rate is expected to peak once the availability of land for urban development in the City of Casey begins to decrease.

Accompanying this rapid population growth will be changes to community composition, the physical appearance of townships, and the development of infrastructure such as roads, schools, shopping centres and recreation venues. Many municipalities in metropolitan Melbourne are experiencing an increase in one- and two-person households, an ageing population and greater ethnic diversity. In contrast, Cardinia Shire is forecast to continue to attract young families who are first and second home buyers. Given the geographic location of the Shire, car-dependence has the potential to rise, unless significant levels of public transport are provided.

The Shire's population is growing by an average of four families per day in addition to 28 new babies born every week.

The main population groups in the Shire comprise couple families with child(ren) and lone-person households.

Cultural diversity is gradually increasing; almost 1,300 (1,294) primary migrants settled in Cardinia Shire between 2006 and 2011. The most common countries of origin for these migrants include United Kingdom, India, Philippines, Sri Lanka, South Africa, China, Sudan, Mauritius and Fiji.

People in Cardinia Shire report a higher level of community willingness to support one another than the Victorian average; indicating a level of cohesiveness in the community. Making sure residents are not socially isolated is particularly important given the geography of Cardinia Shire; rural residents have fewer support services and facilities readily available to them in comparison to those residing in our urban centres. Being socially connected is integral to the support and resilience required to effectively manage and recover from natural disasters, such as fires and flooding, which are known to have major impacts on the health and wellbeing of residents.

Victoria Police crime statistics 2011–12 (measured at rates per 100,000 people) have reported a 71 per cent increase in the number of incident reports of family violence in Cardinia Shire over the reporting period from April 2011 to July 2012. Family violence is a key community safety concern. The connection between family violence and its impact on mental health problems has been firmly established in numerous studies.

Families experiencing varying levels of financial stress are evidenced through a high population of couples with child(ren), higher housing tenure with a mortgage, and 35 per cent of the population deemed to have earned low income.

Within the Shire, areas of relative socioeconomic advantage and disadvantage are evident. A small area of the Shire has a Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA) of disadvantage score in the lowest 10 per cent in the state. More than 7 per cent (7.4%) of people living in Cardinia Shire ran out of food and could not afford to purchase more on at least one occasion in the previous 12 months.

The community placed high importance on having a skilled community which facilitates employment opportunities and the subsequent development of our economy. About 13 per cent of Cardinia Shire residents had a bachelor or higher degree, compared to the metropolitan Melbourne average of 57 per cent. Approximately 9 per cent of residents aged 20 to 24 years old had a TAFE qualification.

Sixty-three per cent of employed residents leave the municipality to access employment; 95 per cent of these residents drive to work. In comparison to the rest of metropolitan Melbourne, more Cardinia Shire residents are employed as managers, technicians and trades workers, machinery operators and drivers, and labourers.

Key areas for consideration for Cardinia Shire:

- number of births will increase significantly over the next 7 to 10 years.
- family violence is escalating at a considerable rate.
- Financial hardship is emerging as a concerning trend.
- Greatest increase in the population in the future will be the birth—4 and 5-9 years age groups.
- Centrelink benefits are increasing.
- There are no obstetrics services, hospitals, TAFEs or universities in the municipality.

Developing the Child and Family Plan

In Cardinia Shire, we recognise that improving outcomes for children and families requires commitment to a continuous program of change. The starting point for that process is an understanding of the needs of our children and families now. There are many sources of information and the challenges for us are to bring together our knowledge of needs in a way that provides a comprehensive and integrated understanding of the everyday lives of children and families today.

We understand the importance of this task and continue to work towards advocating and developing partnerships to strengthen our approach to strategic needs assessments.

Council's Child and Family Plan relates to the key performance area of 'Our People' in the *Council Plan*. It has a number of common themes in particular with the *Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan* and the *Youth Strategy*.

Research and policy directions guide the Child and Family Plan and support Council's commitment to the early years and middle years.

Community engagement

Consultation on the plan has taken place through partnership workshops, formal performance monitoring structures and meetings and focus groups discussing the key outcomes. Children, parents, carers and communities have been consulted throughout and have added their views to the priorities and content of the plan.

Findings

Summarised below is a holistic overview of the current landscape for children in relation to the five outcomes. As such the plan is able to reflect the key issues for children and families and the resourcing and service delivery priorities that need to be in place to help meet that need over the next two years. In some instances we have supplemented our data with direct statements from children and families as they convey to us some of the clearest and most direct understanding of the needs.

Being healthy and happy – where are we now?

- The proportion of infants fully breastfed is below the Victorian state average with 43.2 per cent of babies fully breast fed at three months in Cardinia compared to 51.7 per cent state-wide and 27.5 per cent of babies fully breastfed at six months compared to a state average of 34.8 per cent.
- In 2012–13 the proportion of children fully immunised by five years of age in Cardinia Shire was 91.4 per cent, below the state average of 92.6 per cent.
- Severity of tooth decay is concentrated according to disadvantage with approximately 20 per cent of children experiencing 80 per cent of tooth decay.
- 37.3 per cent of children aged up to 16 years eat at least the minimum recommendation for vegetable servings per day with 86.5 per cent of children 4–12 years eat at least the minimum recommendation for fruit servings per day
- 8.7 per cent of adults meet the recommended five serves of vegetables per day (Department of Health, Victoria, 2012)
- 7.4 per cent of people living in Cardinia Shire ran out of food and could not afford to purchase more on at least one occasion in the previous 12 months (Department of Health, Victoria, 2008)

- 11 per cent of young people do the recommended amount of physical activity per day

What children, parent and carers say

- “We’d like fruit trees along nature strips.”
- “Community gardens where we can connect grow food and eat together.”
- “Affordable activities for children and families to attend.”

Information about opportunities to be active

- “There was a good Farmers Market but it stopped.”
- “The doctor’s services are expensive and no specialist services are in Cardinia [Shire] you always have to travel out.”
- “We live in a farming area – how can we support local farmers and growers so there produce is more accessible to the local community.”
- “Children’s voices should be heard and children should be more involved in decision making.”

Being connected – where are we now?

- 88.9 per cent of children in grades 5 and 6 in Cardinia Shire in 2013 felt connected with their school, by years 7, 8 and 9 the number decreases to 48.7 per cent.
- Improving social connection was one of the most important health and wellbeing issues in Cardinia Shire through consultation for our Municipal public health and wellbeing plan (MPHWP) 2013–17. There are 11 issues in total.

What children, parent and carers say

- “Community mobilised to deliver community initiatives and activities.”
- “We need local playgroups.”
- “Importance of father inclusiveness.”
- “I didn’t know what school to pick for my child – how do you know what to look for and what’s a good school?”
- “Walking groups at Kinder for parents would be good; you could get to know other parents without the ‘clickiness’ of the committee.”
- “As a grandparent of young children looking after them in the day is tough – I don’t know what’s available.”

Realising potential – where are we now?

- Children who are developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains increased 7.3 per cent in 2009 to 8.9 per cent in 2012. Across Victoria during the same period the number has decreased from 10 per cent to 9.5 per cent.
- The proportion of children whose parents report one or more concerns with child speech or language on entry to primary school in 2012 was 13.8 per cent in Cardinia Shire and across the state and this has reduced from 15.5 per cent in Cardinia Shire in 2010.
- 95.6 per cent of grade 3 children achieved the national minimum literacy standard and 97.2 per cent achieved the national minimum numeracy standard in 2011.

What children, parent and carers say

- “Celebrations are important, supporting children and bringing families together.”
- “Lunch time clubs for children – supporting them to catch up.”

- ‘I really enjoyed the book making project.’
- “Celebrate all achievements – there is a strong focus in this community on sport – what about other interests e.g. performing arts.”
- “There is a perception that school isn’t compulsory.”

Being safe – where are we now?

- During grades 5 and 6 in Cardinia Shire, 1 in every 10 children report being bullied which is below the state average but increases by year 7, 8 and 9 to 1 in every 4 report being bullied compared to 1 in every 5 state-wide.
- Children in out-of-home care aged up to 17 increased in Cardinia Shire from 2.9 per cent to 4.1 per cent – this is below the state average of five.
- In 2011–12 children and young people witnessed 42 per cent of family violence incidents in Cardinia Shire.

What children, parent and carers say

- “Families only want to tell their stories once.”
- “Community transport so that children can be active citizens across the Shire.”

Achieving economic well-being– where are we now?

- There were 22,630 jobs located in the Cardinia Shire in the year ending June 2012.
- Approximately 36,270 persons (95.4%) were employed from a labour force of 38,008.
- Approximately 4.6 per cent of Cardinia Shire residents were unemployed which is less than Greater Melbourne (5.5%).
- The number of employed people in the Cardinia Shire increased by 9,072 between 2006 and 2011.
- The median weekly household income in Cardinia Shire (\$1,303) is slightly lower than the Greater Melbourne median (\$1,333).

What children, parent and carers say

- “Volunteer opportunities with training that is relevant for jobs.”
- “Community bank would be good.”
- “Social enterprises, which create value beyond economic gain.”
- “Reduce access to pokies.”

Delivering the Child and Family Plan

As a result of the extensive consultation and analysis the 2014–16 Child and Family Plan will aim to improve outcomes with a focus across four key areas:

- parenting support.
- early learning development and education.
- access to services.
- vulnerable families.

All sector involvement

Council values the contribution from non-government and faith sectors in Cardinia Shire engaging with and providing services to children and families across the community. The opportunity offered by this sector providing services to children and families are crucial if we are to deliver the outcomes.

However, we know that we can improve outcomes by further engaging with this sector and supporting them in building capacity within the sector and locating themselves in our community.

If we are to succeed in our aims and make the planned improvement in the priority outcome areas, we recognise the need to further develop our management, planning and change processes and our capacity for further improvement.

In particular we need to develop the following areas and embed them into the direction of the plan and the way in which we work:

- partnership working
- involvement of children
- involvement of parents/carers and the wider family
- strengthened needs assessment
- a sustained focus on local integrated working
- future integrated children's centre builds
- change management
- workforce development
- performance management
- promotion of equality and diversity
- quality assurance

A summary for each area is given below:

Partnership working

Parents/carers, children and community are our key stakeholders in what we do. This includes schools, a range of services (government, non-government and community organisations, early learning provides and care services. We recognised that in order to make an impact on outcomes for children and families we need to work with others who are best placed to deliver particular services.

Involvement of children

We are wholly committed to ensuring that children's experiences, ideas and opinions influence and shape decisions that affect their lives.

They are involved in decision making and making a positive contribution to their communities. The challenge is to build on these solid foundations to secure consistently excellent practices across all our partner agencies.

Council has been actively involved in the development of *The Victorian Child Friendly Cities and Communities Charter*. The charter has been developed specifically for local governments, organisations and individuals to take action. The charter is a statement of the principles and actions that underpin the right to be considered child friendly.

The charter is consistent with state, national and international protocols and embraces rights that are embedded in the *Convention of the Rights of the Child 1990*, the *Chiba Declaration for a Child Friendly Asia Pacific 2009*, UNICEF's *Building Blocks for Developing a Child Friendly City 2004* and the *Victorian Rights and Responsibilities Charter 2006*.

Recognising the need for increased participation by children in decision making forums and creating child friendly environments, we support the following principles:

- freedom for children to experience environments that considers their needs.
- respect and dignity for children to express their individual opinions, participate in and contribute to decisions about their communities and their wellbeing.
- equitable access to supportive environments and services for children regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion or ability.

Involvement of parents/carers and the wider family

We acknowledge that children sit at the heart of their families and that decisions about children's involvement in services should be made jointly.

Our vision is to support parents to:

- make confident and informed choices which they feel are right for their family.
- shape services to respond to the family's needs.
- work in partnership with services to reinforce the benefits for their children's outcomes and access additional support when they need it.
- enable us to achieve this we need to increase the parent/carer participation in decisions about their children and the services they receive.

We have some examples of good practise in terms of listening to parents and carers but we know we can improve on this as part of our parenting strategy. We will establish a parenting Forum to give parents the opportunity to participate in, inform and influence services. We will establish a clear parenting pathway so they will know and understand where and when their particular need can be appropriately supported and addressed.

Council offers a wide range of support to parents. Alongside the well-established and effective support programmes such as Maternal Child Health and Family Connections programs we are developing new initiatives including web based support with links to web based parenting programmes.

Strengthened needs assessment

A thorough and robust is the starting point for services we deliver as well as services moving into Cardinia Shire. The development of this plan has informed our priorities and for each outcome there is information about local need and some examples of the views of children and families.

We plan to build the process of integrated needs assessment into our annual planning, we will:

- bring together the various strands of needs assessment in a more comprehensive way.
- more systematically collect, record and act on what children and families tell us.
- develop our needs assessment on an area basis so that we are more sensitive to the needs of children and families in individual communities.

A sustained focus on local integrated working

All partners within Cardinia Shire have a responsibility to operate in the framework of the Child and Family Plan. The plan enables Cardinia Shire to have a strategic vision for children and families and inform other plans and strategies operating or commencing service in our community with:

- seamless referral pathways model
- safeguarding children and better exchange of information to keep children safe.

Future integrated children's centre builds

Future Integrated Children's centres in Cardinia provide all children in our community with high quality access to early years health and education services. Cardinia Shire is committed to providing early intervention and early year's services to all children in our Shire. Continuing to build these centres will enable services to respond to children and family's needs as new challenges emerge. The universal platform will embed the expectation of services in our community.

Change management

Cardinia Shire will take the lead in coordinating a cross-agency partnership to challenge a whole of system reform by establishing effective strategies, systems and processes to support multi-agency working around the needs of children and families.

The work will:

- Ensure children and families are at the heart of change and are involved in decision making and service delivery ensuring that they have a voice in the development of services.
- Improve multi-agency working by frontline services through common processes for early assessment.
- Develop a multi-agency *Information and Advice Strategy*.
- Ensure that all children have access to a range of rich stimulating play environments, which are free from unacceptable risk, embrace diversity and encourage inclusion of all children.
- Build resilience in children and families through the development of a robust parenting strategy.

Workforce development

The impact of services for Children and families is largely dependent on the quality and skills of the people who provide them and that makes the Maternal Child Health and Early Years workforce a key vehicle for delivering the plan.

A *Workforce Development Strategy* will be developed that promotes a coherent and joined up approach to development planning for children and family services.

The strategy will set out a vision of a workforce that is both competent and confident, that people aspire to be part of and want to remain in; where they can develop their skills and build satisfying and rewarding careers and one that children, parents and carer's trust and respect. To deliver our children and families plan we need visionary leadership, organisational flexibility and people capacity to deliver improved services for children and families.

The delivery of integrated frontline services to improve outcomes will be supported by more integrated processes which drive multi-agency working. The development of the strategy will involve re-engineering of existing local processes and procedures to support rather than distort joint working and integrated delivery of services with the needs of children and families central to this.

In order to achieve this we will build a comprehensive profile of our workforce including an analysis of capacity and skills and ensure that the views of the workforce and children, parents and carers are used to inform workforce planning.

A multi-project team will be established to develop and drive reform, remodelling and develop and increase the capacity and motivation of the workforce as well as promoting effective teamwork across the services and organisations.

Performance management

In addition to our internal monitoring and evaluation of our services and the impact on our identified outcomes we will publicise this information annually.

Promotion of equality and diversity

The promotion of equality and diversity is central in providing a first class service for children and families. It involves building on the statutory requirements within legislation and through consultation developing strategies to meet the needs of individuals who have traditionally faced discrimination and exclusion. Through a greater understanding and inclusion of equality standards throughout the development of children and family services we intend to increase presence, participation and achievement of all children placing an emphasis on those children and families at risk of marginalisation, exclusion or underachievement. For example:

- **Presence** – reduce the incidence and impact of bullying on children through effective anti-bullying strategies.
- **Participation** – ensure children and families are consulted on their experiences in order to develop services.
- **Achievement** – all achievements are celebrated.

Improvement in equality and diversity is essential to building social cohesion, allowing individuals to reach their full potential and in turn economic success. The promotion of equality and diversity standards creates challenges for children's services providers to develop equitable provision in relation to individual need.

Quality assurance

Quality assurance is an integral part of the COAG agenda with a number of systems being developed in Children's Services.

Given the strong commitment to the development and implementation of a systematic approach it is recognised that a more integrated approach to quality assurance is required in order to inform local service decisions.

We will continue to be vigilant and diligent in our responsibilities around ensuring that those adults working with children are safe to do so and that our recruitment of children's service staff takes account of the key qualities that children say are important to them.

Evaluation of our services will be embedded into our services so that we can measure our children's outcomes and ensure that the evidence informs and influences our planning, resourcing and ongoing quality improvement.

Using the plan

This plan sets out the outcomes for Cardinia Shire's children and families for the next two years.

All partners have a shared responsibility to contribute to the development of the organisational issues and achieving the outcomes for the children and families. Each organisation is accountable for delivering against the outcomes in line with the vision and values detailed in the plan.

Responsibilities of all partners:

- **Planning**
Organisations within Cardinia Shire have a responsibility to consider the strategic plan when

formulating their business plans to ensure that priorities are aligned within and across services for children and families

- **Aligning resources**

Resources should be aligned against the outcomes as a priority for each partner. Organisations should deliver their services according to the vision laid out within the plan and should be able to demonstrate how this has been incorporated

- **Monitoring and measuring**

Monitoring based solely on numbers can distract from measurement of outcomes and partners are encouraged to measure the impact of their service as well as gathering quantities information. This is imperative if we are to assess how we have ‘made a difference’ to the lives of our children and families.

Review and evaluation of the plan

This plan is very much a live document. As progress is reviewed over its life the priority outcomes will be kept under constant review to ensure that they continue to focus on the areas of greatest need for our children and families.

The Child and Family Plan has been developed in line with Australian and Victorian governments guidance, legislation and local policy and sets out how all partners working with children and families:

- have agreed the key priorities for children and families living in Cardinia Shire.
- will ensure that State, Federal and local expectations are met.