



Early Years Plan

our community begins with our children

Mayor's forward

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The significance of children's early years on their long term development and overall health and wellbeing is well documented. The services and environments children experience in their early years have the potential to influence their development and the abilities they will bring to adult life.

Local Government in Victoria is a significant provider of multiple services, resources and environments that are utilised by children and their families and is well placed to have an influence on the development of children.

Over the last few years Council has partnered with a number of other providers of early years services to better understand many of the positive and negative forces that can impact on a child's wellbeing and development.

The vision for the *Colac Otway Early Years Plan 2015-2017* is a seamless early years service system built around the wellbeing and development of children and the common needs of families.

To achieve this vision will require strong effective partnerships with families and other local service providers and the engagement of community to raise each child.

This plan will focus on strategic goals to deliver high quality contemporary services to meet local needs, integrated early years services, planning for the improvement of early years facilities and developing earlier interventions to support vulnerable families.

Council looks forward to putting this plan into action.

Frank Buchanan

Mayor, Colac Otway Shire Council

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What is an Early Years Plan?

Colac Otway Shire Council has developed its *Municipal Early Years Plan 2015 - 2017*, a key strategic document which sets the direction for improving integrated services and facilities that focus on the wellbeing and development of children and the common needs of families.

This Early Years Plan sets a strategic direction for improving early years services, facilities and environments in Colac Otway Shire for the next 2 years. It focuses on the collaboration and integration of traditional early years services and activities for children 0-6 years of age and their families. There is a recognition and understanding of our vulnerable and disadvantaged families and the importance of earlier interventions to support families to provide the best possible start for their children.

Issues raised in the *Council Plan (2013-2017)* and Council's *Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (2013-2017)* have been considered in this Plan. These include:

- The need for affordable and accessible early years services and buildings that support and enable quality of life
- Reducing significant levels of disadvantage in early years
- Supporting mental health and connectedness
- Preventing violence against women and children
- Promoting gender equity and equal and respectful relationships
- Supporting healthy behaviours
- Reducing harm from alcohol, tobacco and other drugs

Actions being considered in this Plan have been developed in partnership with other early years service providers through a number of different programs, alliances and networks. All of this work focusing on better ways to support improved outcomes for young children and their families.

The references used to develop this Plan (page 26) are from local projects and research; evidence based data; and the most recent state, national and professional research documents on understanding today's young family needs. They provide information on the importance of early years planning, and future direction for early years services to meet community needs.

The reporting mechanism back to Council will be an Annual Review and Report of this Plan.

This Plan builds on the success of Council's previous Municipal Early Years Plan and recent projects that have been undertaken to improve outcomes for children and families. Some of these successes include:

- The *Advancing Country Towns - Better Early Years and Family Services* project had a number of early years service providers working together to plan and develop integrated research and service approaches.
- An Early Years Directory of all the services and groups has been developed and is available on Council's website.
- Barwon Child Youth & Family (formerly Glastonbury) is now providing invaluable support to the community as a cluster manager for a number of kindergartens in Colac.
- Council has introduced an SMS reminder system for appointments; partnered with other early years service providers to provide an alignment of care for families and increased breastfeeding support. These were key recommendations which have been implemented following Maternal and Child Health consultation with 273 parents and focus groups attended by 19 mothers.
- The *Let's Read* program has provided approximately packages of books to 800 families to support providing a positive early years environment for children.
- There are two networks of early years professionals within Colac Otway known as the Southern Otways and the Colac KEYS (Kids Early Years Services) networks. Their roles have been to provide support through professional development opportunities and early years networking.
- Council's Maternal and Child Health service has improved its 3.5 year participation rate by over 22% in 2014/2015.

Early years service providers have continued to introduce coordinated community based strategies that will promote early years development.

Why are early years so important?

There is academic consensus that a loving, healthy and intellectually stimulating early childhood – from infancy to kindergarten and starting school – is critical to a person’s wellbeing and success throughout their life.

The brain has the greatest capacity for change during the first three years of life making this a period of opportunity and vulnerability. It is more effective, and less costly, to support children’s development during their early years than it is to try to intervene or “fix” issues at an older age.¹

Getting it right in the early years reduces the need for remedial education and the likelihood of school failure, poor health, mental illness, welfare dependency, substance misuse and crime. It is most cost effective to invest in early intervention that resolves issues as they emerge and are malleable, rather than responding to crisis, toxic stress and trauma, which is both more challenging and more expensive to resolve.⁶

It is important that protective factors within 0-3 years such as adequate birth weight, attachment and nurturing relationship with caregivers, material wellbeing, adequate nutrition and breastfeeding, a stimulating home learning environment, and access to health and social care are supported by early years service providers. Whilst risk factors such as low birth weight, difficult temperament, insecure attachment and harsh responses from carers, inadequate housing, low parental aspirations for a child, parental substance misuse, and toxic stress are reduced whenever possible.⁶

In the 4-5 years protective factors include self-regulation, secure attachment, cognitive skills, early mastery of skills, planning and problem solving ability, communication and language skills, positive peer relationships, material wellbeing, a stimulating home learning environment, adequate nutrition, access to health and social care, and access to high quality early learning. Risk factors include difficult temperament, insecure attachment, harsh and inconsistent discipline, poor peer relationships, toxic stress, obesity, parental substance misuse, and low parental aspirations.⁶

Planning for key transitions in an early years is the best way to support each child’s development.

At each life stage there are critical periods of susceptibility and vulnerability, as well as opportunities to build resilience and capabilities. Key transitions during a child’s early life can include child care, and the start of kindergarten and primary school.

With the importance of early years in mind, Regional Development Victoria funded a 3 year project in 2012 called *Advancing Country Towns - Better Early Years and Family Services*. There were a number of local early years service planners and providers, including Council, involved in this project. There were two key areas that were focused on.

1. It was understood how disadvantage and vulnerability were limiting the impact of core services capacity to more effectively address the needs of children and families in order to:
 - Support early years planners and providers in providing a better start for vulnerable children and young people
 - Improve continuity of prenatal care for mums
 - Support vulnerable children and their families to be better prepared for primary school
2. Fragmented services and gaps are making it very difficult for providers to reach the most needing groups effectively. What is required is:
 - A more responsive and accessible joined up services delivered locally
 - An improved access to services
 - An increase in joined up services
 - An increase in services managed locally



Planning for service improvement



Research and planning to improve early years services happens at all levels of government with input and support from the medical, academic, economic and social professions.

Victorian Government

The Victorian Early Years Strategic Plan 2014-2020 aims to improve outcomes and better support for all Victorian children from pregnancy up to eight years of age with a focus across three areas:

1. Supporting parents and communities to give children a great start
2. Early and sustained support for those who need it most
3. All children benefiting from high-quality early learning

This Plan aims to strengthen the responsiveness of the early childhood sector and promote a seamless learning experience for children across early childhood and school to improve children's outcomes. Its key initiatives include:

- Linking children's learning from birth to primary school
- Growing parents and community capacity to support children's development
- Expanding the reach and value of the Maternal and Child Health Service
- Implementing an early years parenting strategy
- Strengthening local planning
- Improving engagement of children in out-of-home care with early childhood services
- Promoting speech and language as the foundation for later literacy

The Education State - Early Childhood Consultation Paper (August 2015) proposes five areas of reform to build on. These are:

1. Earlier engagement in learning
2. Boosting educational quality
3. Providing more support for parents
4. Providing more support for vulnerable children and families
5. Better connections between services

Colac Otway/Corangamite Child & Family Services Alliance

This Alliance was originally established to support the effective operation of Family Services, Child FIRST and Child Protection through a number of key functions including:

- Coordination of service delivery at the catchment level
- Provision of operational management; and
- Catchment planning

In 2015 the Alliance made a number of changes to its structure and membership as it sought to become more closely aligned with the principles of collective impact. The approach calls for multiple organisations or entities from different sectors to identify, and work collaboratively towards the achievement of, mutual goals through a common agenda, shared measurements and alignment of effort.

Membership has been expanded and includes Colac Otway Shire, Corangamite Shire, Colac Area Health, Department of Health and Human Services, Barwon Child Youth & Family, ChildFIRST and Child Protection.

The common agenda of the Alliance is to:

'....Improve the safety, stability and wellbeing of vulnerable children, young people and families through strong partnerships and collaborative effort that benefits and responds to community need.'

The Alliance has identified 2 key priority areas for action; Earlier Intervention and Family Violence. An interim Catchment Plan has been drafted for April 2016 to June 2017. This Plan is based on analysis of local catchment data, and takes into account recent and anticipated changes to the service environment in response to key reports and recommendations. This Plan will be implemented and evaluated collaboratively in line with the stated agenda for collective impact.

Advancing Country Towns - Better Early Years and Family Services project

The Final Report of *Advancing Country Towns - Better Early Years and Family Services* project (funded by Regional Development Victoria) in July 2015 made a number of recommendations around:

- Governance and community leadership
- Infrastructure
- Addressing vulnerability
- An Integrated service system framework
- Communication and information
- Best Practice pilot projects

Playgroups

Playgroups provide an opportunity for:

- Children to learn and develop through play activities and social interaction with their parents and caregivers and other children and adults.
- Parents and caregivers to establish social and support networks to encourage and assist them in their valuable parenting role.
- Families to experience improved family functioning through increased parental well-being and capacity.
- Community development through enhanced social capital and the potential for networking between families and local businesses and services.

Council's Role in Early Years Services

Council directly provides universal services such as Maternal and Child Health, Family Day Care and immunisation services. In 2014/2015 there were 3467 maternal and child health consultations; 116 families, with 173 children, used Family Day Care; and over 200 infants received immunisation courses. In 2013/2014 there were 147 vulnerable families who received Enhanced Maternal and Child Health Services.

There are a number of facilities and services, such as Bluewater Leisure, that Council manages which have broad target groups that are also used by families and children such as respite services in the Home and Community Care Program and the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

Council also provides and maintains libraries, fitness and leisure centres and services, paths and retail centres, and parks and playgrounds which are used by families in multiple ways.

It is important that Council considers and enhances 'child friendly' aspects and opportunities to ensure these areas are welcoming, stimulating and safe for children. Festivals, events and entertainment, relevant to young children and their families, are important for developmental and cultural identity.



Planning for facilities improvement

The current facilities for early years services meet the needs for individual service types, with ageing infrastructure. Some progress has been achieved, but to facilitate contemporary practice requirements and better cater for universal, primary, and secondary services, a new approach to infrastructure is required.



Facility Use Overview

Contemporary practice in early years is best facilitated by coordinated services in integrated facilities, such as early years hubs which cater for local and visiting early years specialists. Council has worked with Colac Area Health and BCYF on a number of opportunities to improve current facilities within Colac towards this objective.

Some progress has been achieved since Council's previous early years plan by private and community operators, cluster managers and local government to improve and expand facilities, with the support of State Government capital funding. Examples include Apex Preschool Centre, Birregurra Preschool Centre, Millville Childcare Centre and Wydinia Kindergarten & Occasional Child Care Centre. However, the opportunity to provide for other universal and secondary services within these facilities has not been fully realised.

There remain many facilities in the Shire which house single or multiple early years services. These include kindergartens and schools, maternal and child health centres, health services, community health centres, halls, churches and family day care homes. Many of these facilities are ageing and require ongoing maintenance and renewal (see *Appendix A which lists these services available within Colac Otway*).

This plan highlights the commitment of Colac Otway Shire to partner with others to deliver new facility models for coordinated early years services and to advocate for government funds to realise this vision.

ACT – Better Early Years and Family Services Final Summary Report (July 2015)

This report came to the following conclusions about facilities for early years and family services, supporting the intentions outlined above:

- Placements for children and kindergarten placements are currently meeting population demand, yet the infrastructure is ageing and in some cases does not provide for the new child/teacher ratios which change in 2016.
- Currently most early years settings are not set-up to have visiting secondary services.
- There is no united position across agencies as to the mix of Early Years infrastructure in Colac, their locations and the capacity to provide universal, primary, and secondary services. There needs to be clear consensus and direction on the development of an Early Years Hub or Shop Front or other facilities that best serve Colac family needs. (Note: BCYF has recently provided a room that caters for some of this need at their Bromfield Street office).
- Council's previous Early Years Plan identifies need for different services to be set-up in different areas.
- Council's 2050 Plan is currently being prepared. It is looking at future social infrastructure needs, including those for early years services, to cater for future growth.
- Funding is currently available to support infrastructure.

Children's Centres

Children's Centres are a widely utilised strategy for facilitating access to coordinated health, parenting, early learning and referral services.

Children's Centres are among the most promising models for improving access to health and social care for families with young children, and there is emerging evidence that when appropriate outreach and engagement strategies are in place, they increase service access by vulnerable families. There are also indications that the antenatal and perinatal period are windows of opportunity for service engagement.⁶

In addition to providing integrated health, parenting and learning services, they provide a clear point of contact for families and provide a non-stigmatising point of access to information and support.

Opportunities for facility rationalisation and improvements

Over the last few years Council has reviewed its maternal and child health facilities in a number of locations due to lack of usage. These centres include Beech Forest, Cressy, Gellibrand and Swan Marsh which are no longer used. Families from these districts are still able to access close-by centres such as Lavers Hill, Beeac and Colac.

Kindergartens and childcare centres operate throughout the Shire. Council owned centres include Colac East, Winifred Nance and Wydinia in Colac and the Apollo Bay Preschool and Children's Services Centre. With supervision support from BCYF (cluster manager) and funding from the Department of Education and Training (DET) an extension and fit out of Wydinia occurred in 2015. This included an extensive storage room, a meeting room/office and an accessible toilet. Colac East kindergarten has been successful in receiving recent funding from DET to redevelop, with support from BCYF, its floorplan to increase its floor space to allow for more children and to include a meeting room for specialist services and an enhanced kitchen, storage and office. Winifred Nance has undergone minor renovations but requires further improvements to increase functionality.

Discussions are occurring on the feasibility of developing an integrated children's services centre at the Apollo Bay P-12 School to replace the Apollo Bay Preschool and Children's Services Centre.

Forrest Primary School is the site for multiple early years services which currently meet local needs. Lavers Hill K-12 School is seeking State funding to relocate its kindergarten service within the main school building.

The opportunity for population growth in Birregurra has been enhanced with the sewerage of the town. There are dedicated facilities within town, including a recently extended kindergarten, a soon to be upgraded primary school and a relatively new community health centre, with has dedicated space for childcare services. These facilities could provide the opportunity for providing early years services to meet the needs of a growing population.



Brand new storeroom at Wydinia Kindergarten





Facts & figures

Colac Otway Shire has a total population size of around 21,000 people. 8.8% (or 1,835 residents) of the Shire's population is aged 0-6 years. This compares to 6.4% for Victoria.

- Id Profile estimates that the early year's population (0-6 years) will increase from 1835 in 2014 to 1965 in 2036. This is an increase of 7%. However, the G21 *Regional Growth Plan* projects growth may be greater than Id Profile estimates and indicates that Colac will reach 20,000 by 2050. This is an increase of 62%, which equates to 1,777 children aged 0-6 years.
- According to the SEIFA index of socio-economic disadvantage, Colac Otway Shire is the 19th most disadvantaged of the 80 municipalities in Victoria. Colac East is the least advantaged community whilst Elliminyt is the most advantaged within Colac Otway. The median weekly household income in Colac Otway is \$914, significantly lower than the amount for Victoria of \$1,216.
- The proportion of lone parent families living in the Shire is increasing. Many of the lone parents are young females aged under 24 years. A significant number are aged 15-19 years.
- Colac's teen pregnancy rate has been amongst the highest in the state.
- Compared to other local government areas in the G21 region, Colac Otway has the smallest proportion of families with children aged 0-8 years who have an internet connection at home.
- A lower proportion of babies are fully breastfed at 6 months compared to other local government areas in the G21 Region.
- Colac Otway had a lower level of participation in the Maternal & Child Health key ages and stages assessments for 3.5 year olds compared to Barwon/South West and Victoria overall.
- There has been a 340% increase in reports of family violence in Colac Otway Shire between 2010 and 2015.
- Children starting school in Colac Otway are, in a number of ways, less prepared and significantly more developmentally vulnerable than similarly aged children within Victoria and Australia (see page 12 and 13 for further information).

Area	SEIFA Index	Ranking in Victoria in order of disadvantage (out of 1520)	Ranking in Colac Otway Shire in order of disadvantage
Colac East	642	2	1
Beeac	890	67	2
Colac	919	115	3
Forrest	940	174	4
Gellibrand	950	210	5
Cressy	970	308	6
Beech Forest	983	397	7
Apollo Bay	984	406	8
Wye River	1009	608	9
Swan Marsh	1013	651	10
Colac West	1014	664	11
Birregurra	1024	760	12
Elliminyt	1029	819	13

- The early years facilities in the Shire have sufficient capacity to meet current demand. However, the target group populations for preschool and the M&CH service will increase across the Shire and in all local areas.
- There are a number of ageing early years facilities which require ongoing maintenance and improvements to meet current standards and support to ensure they can provide integrated services to meet local demands.
- There has been a push for some time for the development of an integrated children's and family services centre in Colac.

Mapping childhood development



The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) (formerly AEDI) compares the level of development of prep year students across Australian communities. The Index measures five developmental areas (called domains):

Physical health and wellbeing

Language and cognitive skills

Social competence

Emotional maturity

Communication skills and general Knowledge

- Colac Otway performed significantly worse in 2015 than it did in 2012 in all the development areas/domains with the exception of communication skills and general knowledge.
- Between 2009 and 2015 the results for all geographic regions deteriorated in most domains. However, there were significant improvements for Colac and Elliminyt in the communication skills and general knowledge domain.
- In 2015, compared to Victoria and Australia, children within Colac Otway started school having a greater level of vulnerability in every domain with a significantly greater vulnerability across two or more domains.
- The domains with the three highest levels of vulnerability, as observed by prep teachers, had the following characteristics.
 - ⇒ Physical health and wellbeing vulnerability means experiencing a number of challenges that interfere with their ability to physically cope with the school day. This may include being dressed inappropriately, frequently late, hungry or tired. Children are usually clumsy and may have fading energy levels.
 - ⇒ Social competence vulnerability means experiencing a number of challenges with poor overall social skills. For example children who do not get along with other children on a regular basis, do not accept responsibility for their own actions and have difficulties following rules and class routines. Children may be disrespectful of adults, children, and others' property; have low self-confidence and self-control, do not adjust well to change; and are usually unable to work independently.
 - ⇒ Emotional maturity vulnerability means experiencing a number of challenges related to emotional regulation. For example problems managing aggressive behaviour, being prone to disobedience and/or easily distracted, inattentive, and impulsive. Children will usually not help others and are sometimes upset when left by their caregiver.

This table provides AEDC results by geographic regions in Colac Otway Shire

Domain	% vulnerability											
	Apollo Bay / Colac Otway South			Colac			Elliminyt			Colac Surrounds		
	2009	2012	2015	2009	2012	2015	2009	2012	2015	2009	2012	2015
Physical health & wellbeing	8.3	18.8	16.7	11.8	10.7	15.6	3.3	1.8	10.6	14.3	8.5	8.9
Social competence	0.0	15.6	16.7	18.5	9.8	15.6	3.3	3.5	14.9	16.1	5.1	5.4
Emotional maturity	0.0	18.8	20.0	9.2	14.3	15.6	3.3	0.0	14.9	8.9	5.1	3.6
Language / cognitive skills	2.8	3.1	6.7	5.9	5.4	9.0	0.0	7.0	8.5	7.1	1.7	8.9
Communication skills / general knowledge	8.3	15.6	16.7	16.0	16.1	8.2	3.3	12.3	4.3	10.7	6.8	10.7
Vulnerable in one or more domains	13.9	34.4	36.7	29.4	28.6	28.7	10.0	14.0	21.3	25.0	11.9	21.4
Vulnerable in two or more domains	5.6	15.6	16.7	15.1	16.1	19.7	3.3	8.8	12.8	17.9	8.5	10.7

This table is a comparison comparing Colac Otway to Victoria and Australia

Domain	Colac Otway			Victoria			Australia		
	% vulnerable			% vulnerable			% vulnerable		
	2009	2012	2015	2009	2012	2015	2009	2012	2015
Physical health & wellbeing	10.8	9.2	13.3	7.7	7.8	7.9	9.3	9.3	9.7
Social competence	13.3	8.1	13.3	8.4	8.1	8.7	9.5	9.3	9.9
Emotional maturity	7.1	9.6	13.3	8.3	7.2	8.0	8.9	7.6	8.4
Language/cognitive skills	5.0	4.6	8.6	6.1	6.1	6.3	8.9	6.8	6.5
Communication skills/ general knowledge	12.0	13.1	9.0	8.3	8.0	7.6	9.2	9.0	8.5
Vulnerable in one or more domains	23.7	22.4	26.7	20.3	19.5	19.9	23.6	22.0	22.0
Vulnerable in two or more domains	12.9	12.7	16.1	10.0	9.5	9.9	11.8	10.8	11.1

What do you say?

As part of the *Advancing Country Towns "Better Services Early Years and Families" project 2012–2015* focus groups were held with seven groups of parents with children ranging in age from under 12 months to primary school age over a period of 6 weeks. These parents included parents of children with a disability or developmental delay and parents with a CALD background. In total 38 parents attended the focus groups. In addition surveys were also sent to committee members of the cluster managed kindergartens. See *Ganly N. (August 2014) Advancing Country Towns Program, Early Years Services Project Report²* for full details of these consultations.

Positive themes emerging from the consultations were that:

- Parents obtain their information from a range of sources including other parents, the internet, and Facebook, however for new parents Maternal Child Health nurses were the main source of information.
- Most parents had positive experiences with services that they had accessed and thought that services in Colac were relatively easy to access except for long waiting times to see a paediatrician and a waiting list for public speech pathology.
- Parents liked the small town feel of Colac and felt that people knew each other and that made information exchange easier.
- Parents all considered it important to have their children immunised.

In 2013 Council's Maternal & Child Health nurses consulted with 273 people attending open and individual sessions. Further to these consultations were focus groups attended by 19 mothers and a questionnaire completed by 97 parents. Key findings were around phone reminders for appointments; further professional support; breastfeeding and sleep settling support; and social activities. Many of these recommendations have been implemented.



Your suggestions

How we acted

Most people said they would prefer a text or reminder phone call for Maternal Child & Health Services

"I use this with the hairdressers and dentist and it's great"

MCH User Survey 2013



We are now sending text message reminders for all Maternal Child & Health appointments

Most people would like a sleep settling and breastfeeding clinic in Colac

"Definitely would support - we have been to Terang"

MCH User Survey 2013



We now have a Maternal and Child Health Nurse with lactation consultant qualifications and experience to provide advice, support and equipment for mothers

Most people would like more social activities

"Great for new parents in Colac to meet new people"

MCH User Survey 2013



We will continue to run a number of new parent groups each year

Most people would like to see other visiting health professionals located at the Maternal & Child Health Centre

"Any extra health professionals is always a bonus"

MCH User Survey 2013



We now have a number of additional health professionals at the Queen Street Maternal & Child Health Centre including postnatal depression support, and infant physiotherapy

The Ganly report identified through consultation the need for

"An early years shop front in Colac"

Advancing Country Towns "Better Services Early Years and Families" project 2012-



Barwon Child Youth & Family now have breastfeeding and change facilities at their Centre in Bromfield Street Colac.

What do the early years providers say?



Service providers within the local universal, secondary and tertiary early years support sector were asked to provide feedback on issues that affected their services. See *Appendix A* which shows these services. (*Advancing Country Towns “Better Services Early Years and Families” project 2012 – 2015*). Key themes were around information about services, and processes and procedures.

General Provision of information about services

- Providing information to the community and possible referral services was achieved by Colac Otway Shire website, Early Years Directory & brochures
- The KEYS network meetings in Colac provide early years professionals a chance to exchange information

General Processes and Procedures

- The Colac Otway and Corangamite Child and Family Services Alliance undertakes strategic planning
- Specialist School Early Education Program - involves other professionals in planning for family e.g. therapists, schools, kindergartens at transition times

Colac Schools

- A very small percentage of families each year arrive at school without having any other early childhood educational experience

- The main challenges facing families with young children relate to parenting skills and capacity to manage children's behaviour

Maternal and Child Health

- The session for new mothers on child care is very popular
- There is only a team of three nurses to cover a large area. There is concern about families that don't attend any services

Specialist School

- Main issues for parents are whether their child will cope with mainstream school

Referral Pathways into the service

- Most referrals to Child FIRST come from schools, Child Protection, and M&CH
- CAH Allied Health practitioners see children referred through the kindergarten screening program

Navigation of referral pathways

- Sometimes difficult to access services that come from Geelong but local referral pathways are relatively easy
- Access to pediatricians is very difficult - can be up to 6 months wait
- We usually don't get any feedback from services after we have referred

How can service co-ordination in Colac be improved

- Everyone needs to have a clear understanding of the needs of children and the need to support families in a consistent manner
- Information sharing is difficult
- Better Communication - Kindergartens should be in the feedback loop

Valuing children in Colac

- The Shire could have a greater focus on providing programs and supports for children and young people
- We need to develop a children's charter
- Children's services value children, however, we believe the community as a whole can benefit from having a better understanding of valuing children





Vision, principles and goals

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Vision:

An effective, seamless early years service system built around the wellbeing and development of needs of children and families

Principles:

Child centred, strengths based and family focused practice

Best Interests of the Child

Integration and collaboration with other service providers

Community inclusion and respect for cultural diversity

Promotion of community connectedness for families

Evidenced based, quality service provision

No 'wrong door' approach

Goal 1 Deliver high quality services that are tailored to meet local community needs

Goal 2 Strengthen the integrated early years local framework

Goal 3 Implement Best Practice initiatives that focus on the needs of our children and families

Goal 4 Plan for improving early years facilities throughout the Shire

Goal 5 Develop earlier interventions to support vulnerable young families

Action plan



Goal 1: Deliver high quality services that are tailored to meet local community needs

Strategies	Partners	Indicators
Promote early years services from antenatal to 6 years of age	ACT Partners - Recommendation* Alliance members	Introduce products and opportunities to communicate with and involve expecting mothers, parents, relatives and the broader community
Address vulnerability through a more integrated approach	ACT Partners - Recommendation Alliance members	Research, develop and implement integrated approaches to reduce the vulnerability of children and families
Increase our community understands and role in supporting children 0-6 years and their families	ACT Partners - Recommendation GROW Beyond the Bell	Develop an informed Committee of Leaders group to understand and support identified priorities, planning and resourcing strategies to support vulnerable children being ready for School
Build 'evidence ready' systems and use evidence to guide investment decisions and service provision	Council ACT Partners - Recommendation Alliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparison of the 2015 AEDC data to previous years • Identify areas for future investment through early years planning

*** Note:**

Goals that refer to ACT Partners Recommendations include all or some of the following partners. The Baby FAST team, BCYF, CAH, COS, DHHS, DET and the KEYS Network.

Goal 2: Strengthen the integrated early years local framework

Strategies	Partners	Indicators
Commitment of early years' service providers to an Integrated Service System Framework for Universal, Secondary and Tertiary early years services (Appendix A)	ACT Partners- Recommendation Alliance KEYS network GP's	Governance structures are developed and committed to by early years services providers
Plan for key transitions in a early years to support each child's development	ACT Partners - Recommendation Alliance members KEYS network members DET	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthened links between major intake points of services that support early years and young families Identify an agreed planning and communication tool to be used between early years services and primary school
Ensure that early years and other services that support young families are trained in and use Patchwork	Council Alliance	Work towards all agencies entering vulnerable families into Patchwork
Provide integrated education and training for early years professionals	Council – F&CS KEYS network members Alliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Calendar of Professional Development for 2016 is completed Document baseline attendance numbers and representation



Action plan



Goal 3: Implement Best Practice initiatives that focus on the needs of our children and families

Strategies	Partners	Indicators
Implement the 'Let's Read' program	Alliance ACT Partners - Recommendation KEYS networks members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of books distributed • Improvements from evidence based data (e.g. AEDC)
BabyFAST	CAH BCYF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership formed with other National FAST teams as a Victorian arm of the program • Facilitate BabyFAST programs in Colac
Support the implementation of Bush Group & Bush Kinder	BCYF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop capacity to support the development of Bush Group & Bush Kinder • Number of Bush Group & Bush Kinder
Implement the most appropriate communication and information strategy for parents and guardians	ACT Partners - Recommendation COS – M&CH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding accessed for the rollout of the CHEWS App. Strategy • Improved access to services • M&CH to identify further improvement in SMS communications to increase service usage by 10%

Goal 4: Plan for improving early years facilities throughout the Shire

Strategies	Partners	Indicators
Consider and plan for early years facilities within the Colac 2050 Plan	Council (lead) with State government agencies including RDV, VicRoads, DEWLP	Early years facilities are included in the Colac 2050 Plan
Work with key organisations and state government agencies to identify the most suitable early years hub model for Colac	COS, CAH, BCYF, DET, Kindergartens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a framework in which to investigate and plan for an early years hub in Colac Agreed outcomes for an early years hub or alternative
Work with key early years service providers, schools and state government to identify the most appropriate early years facilities for local communities	COS, DET early years and schools within Apollo Bay, Birregurra, Forrest and Lavers Hill	Meetings with all communities to further discussions on the needs of future early years services and facilities
Plan for ,and when possible, implement early years facility improvements	COS, BCYF, CAH, OH, DET, Kindergarten committees, Schools	Develop an ongoing commitment and protocol to review and plan for early years facilities that meet community needs
Plan for the provision of outreach and visiting services at Maternal and Child Health and early years centres	COS, BCYF, CAH, OH, DET, Kindergarten committees	Meet with other service early years services to map possible outreach services within each community

Action plan



Goal 5: Develop earlier interventions to support vulnerable young families

Strategies	Partners	Indicators
Conduct events for the community on early years parenting	COS Parenting Resource Service	At least two events are held for parents, family members, family services and professionals each year
Work with vulnerable families at the earliest possible stage	COS – M&CH Alliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commencement of Early Years Worker to support M&CH nurses • Measure engagement and participation in M&CH service by KAS and enhanced data
Promote gender equity and equal and respectful relationships	COS – Social Policy G21 Health & Wellbeing Pillar DET	Develop programmes for attitudinal and behavioural change in demonstrating respectful and non-violent gender relationships
Identify and focus on earlier interventions that enhance early childhood development	Alliance KEYS networks members Playgroup Victoria	Document strategies, partnerships, measurements and outcomes
Work with vulnerable families at the earliest possible stage	COS– M&CH Alliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the number of family violence checks performed at the 4 week KAS consultation and other KAS assessments • Link into Child FIRST monitoring and support services
Improving engagement of children in out-of-home care with early childhood services	COS– M&CH	Collect data and information around the needs of carers and children in out-of-home care programmes

References & acknowledgements

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Children's Resource Worker - Karen Glennan

Glossary



ACT	Advancing Country Towns
AEDC	Australian Early Development Census
AEDI	Australian Early Development Index
Alliance	Colac Otway and Corangamite Child and Family Service Alliance
Baby FAST	Baby - Families and Schools Together
BCYF	Barwon Child Youth & Family
CAH	Colac Area Health
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CHEWS	Colac Health Education Wellbeing Services
COS	Colac Otway Shire
DELWP	Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning
DET	Department of Education & Training
F&CS	Family & Children's Services (COS)
GP's	General Practitioners
GROW	Geelong Region Opportunities for Work
K-12	Kindergarten to Year 12
KAS	Key Ages and Stages (M&CH Service)
KEYS	Kids Early Years Services Network
M&CH	Maternal and Child Health
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
P-12	Prep Grade to Year 12
SEIFA	Socio-Economic Indexes fNDISor Areas
SMS	Short Message (or Messaging) Service

*** Note:**

Goals that refer to ACT Partners Recommendations include all or some of the following partners. The Baby FAST team, BCYF, CAH, COS, DHHS, DET and the KEYS Network.

Appendix A

Early Years providers in Colac Otway

Universal Services

Primary Health Medical Care
Private GPs

Midwifery
Colac Area Health (CAH)

Maternal and Child Health and Enhanced Home Visiting Service
Council

Playgroups
Parent run and facilitated by BCYF and CAH

Child Care Services
Otway Health, Private, Family Day Care (Council) & cluster managed by BCYF

Kindergartens
A mix of parent run & cluster managed by BCYF

Primary Schools
(State and Catholic)

Parenting Resource Service
COGG council

Secondary Service Providers

St John of God Hospital (Geelong)
Raphael Centre

Minerva (Geelong)
Family Violence Services

Barwon Child Youth & Family

- HIPPY
- PLAY
- Supported playgroup delivering Small Talk
- Bush Play Group
- NDIS early intervention service
- Lets Read
- Baby Fast

Colac Area Health

- Paediatric Allied Health
- Dental service
- Continence nurse
- Child FIRST & Family Services
- Family violence children's counsellor
- Children Counsellors

Colac Specialist School
Early Education Childhood Development program

Gateways Support Services

- Early childhood intervention
- Preschool field officers
- Kindergarten inclusion support

DET Catholic Education
School support

Private Providers

- Paediatricians
- Allied Health practitioners

Barwon Health (Geelong)

- Peri-natal Emotional Health Program
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health

Barwon CASA
Child and sexual assault counselling and support

Scope (Geelong)
Early childhood support and intervention

NDIA
Disability Support services for young people

Tertiary Service Providers

Barwon Health (Geelong)
Acute health & emergency care

Colac Area Health
Acute health & emergency care

Out of Home Care

- Foster care (BCYF)
- Kinship care (Bethany)



Department of Health & Human Services
Child Protection Service



Justice System
Police and courts



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