

Moreland Early Years Strategy

2016–2020



MOR  **LAND**



Moreland City Council

Executive Summary:

The Moreland Early Years Strategy 2016–2020 provides a framework to improve the wellbeing of children aged 0–12 years living, studying and playing in Moreland. It aims to improve outcomes for Moreland’s children by utilising evidence-based methods to achieve the following:

- 1. Improved health, wellbeing and education outcomes for children in Moreland, especially for those children who are vulnerable.**
- 2. An integrated and responsive family and child focused service system in Moreland.**
- 3. Moreland becoming a more child friendly city and community.**

This strategy is for all organisations, services and programs that work with families and children in Moreland. It provides opportunities for us to work together and identifies those areas that we need to prioritise in order to achieve the best possible results for children.

Outcome 1: Improved health, wellbeing and education outcomes for children in Moreland, especially for those children who are vulnerable.

We will do this by:

- Strengthening and supporting families;
- Increasing breastfeeding rates;
- Increasing immunisation rates;
- Preventing family violence;
- Improving oral health;
- Encouraging healthy eating, play and physical exercise;
- Increasing kindergarten participation; and
- Focusing on early developmental domains.

Outcome 2: An integrated and responsive family and child centred service system in Moreland.

We will do this by:

- Increasing collaboration, partnerships and improving communication systems;
- Implementing strategic directions for Early Years Infrastructure Planning in Moreland; and
- Having a highly qualified Early Years Workforce and high-quality services.

Priority 3: Moreland becoming a more child-friendly city and community.

We will do this by:

- Consulting with children; and
- Taking actions that are guided by the principles of the Victorian Child-Friendly Cities and Communities Charter.

Mayor's Foreword

I am proud to present the *Moreland Early Years Strategy 2016–2020*. There is widespread evidence that the experiences of children in their early years have consequences throughout the course of their lives. Supporting parents from the time their child is an infant and having high-quality learning and development programs for children in Moreland's early years settings are priorities for Council.

Births in Moreland have increased by 40 per cent since 2001 and this trajectory is expected to continue. Council plays a pivotal role in the planning, delivery, advocacy and support of a range of early years services, and is well-placed to contribute to positive outcomes for all children living, studying and playing in Moreland.

The *Moreland Early Years Strategy 2016–2020* provides Council and its community partners with a comprehensive framework to better address the needs of Moreland's children, especially those who are vulnerable.

Moreland's Maternal and Child Health Nurses, immunisation nurses, early years educators, allied health professionals, primary school teachers – and those working in government and community services for children – can support families, and therefore child-development, by adopting a multi-service and multi-discipline approach that crosses health, education and the community service sectors.

This strategy has been informed by widespread consultation with children and early years professionals and guided by the Moreland Community Vision:

Diverse, healthy and connected people live and flourish in our neighbourhoods, which are attractive, safe, clean and accessible. As a community we share a rich history and celebrate our diversity and cultural vibrancy.

The *Moreland Early Years Strategy 2016–2020* is for all organisations, services and programs that work with families and children in Moreland. It provides opportunities for us to work together and identifies the areas that we need to prioritise in order to achieve the best possible results for our children.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S. Ratnam". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Cr Samantha Ratnam
Mayor of Moreland

Introduction

The Moreland Early Years Strategy 2016–2020 provides a framework to improve the wellbeing of children aged 0–12 years living, studying and playing in Moreland. It uses principles and outcomes that have been identified at a national and state level and focuses on practical, preventative action to benefit children and families in Moreland. It has been informed by widespread consultation with children and early years professionals and guided by the Moreland Community Vision:

Diverse, healthy and connected people live and flourish in our neighbourhoods, which are attractive, safe, clean and accessible. As a community we share a rich history and celebrate our diversity and cultural vibrancy.

The Moreland Early Years Strategy 2016–2020 aims to improve outcomes for Moreland’s children by utilising evidence-based methods to achieve the following:

- 1. Improved health, wellbeing and education outcomes for children in Moreland, especially for those children who are vulnerable.**
- 2. An integrated and responsive family and child focused service system in Moreland.**
- 3. Moreland becoming a more child friendly city and community.**

Council together with other organisations that provide early years services in Moreland will work collectively to better address the needs of Moreland’s children, especially those who are vulnerable. Our approach to implementation includes actively involving children in decision-making forums and advocating for the importance of creating child friendly environments in the municipality.

Moreland has seen a dramatic increase in the number of births in the municipality. Since 2001, births in Moreland have increased by 40 per cent and this trajectory is expected to continue. Moreland City Council plays a pivotal role in the planning, delivery, advocacy and support of a range of early years services to Moreland families and is well placed to contribute



to positive outcomes for all children living in Moreland. The Council Plan 2013–2017 identifies the following outcomes and strategies:

- Moreland community members feel connected to others and have access to the necessary services;
- Delivery of Council facilities, services and programs to be inclusive and accessible across all life cycle stages;
- Partnerships are used to deliver community outcomes;
- Moreland community has access to responsive services.

This strategy is for all organisations, services and programs that work with families and children in Moreland. It provides opportunities for us to work together and it identifies those areas that we need to prioritise in order to achieve the best possible results for children.

Policy Context

The Moreland Early Years Strategy 2016–2020 is part of a national agenda to improve outcomes for children all across Australia. The Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth (ARACY) works to improve child and youth wellbeing in Australia by building collaborations with policy makers, practitioners working in the field and researchers from a broad range of disciplines. ARACY's work is organised around its flagship initiative, *The Nest*. This national action plan outlines a vision and a set of shared outcomes and measurements for child and youth wellbeing in Australia to help mobilise and align the efforts of diverse stakeholders.¹

Strategies and frameworks adopted by the Coalition of Australian Governments (COAG) to improve outcomes for children and young people have also informed the Moreland Early Years Strategy 2016–2020. These include the 2008 National Indigenous Reform Agreement and the 2009 National Early Childhood Development Strategy. These federal policy frameworks also provide a foundation for a number of Victorian Government strategies: The Early Years Strategic Plan 2014–2020, Victoria's Vulnerable Children Strategy 2013–2022, Out of Home Care Education Commitment 2014, Starting Out Strong and the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework 2009.

The importance of the early years

"When we invest wisely in children and families, the next generation will pay that back through a lifetime of productivity and responsible citizenship. When we fail to provide children with what they need to build a strong foundation for healthy and productive lives, we put our future prosperity and security at risk."²

The experiences of children in their early years have consequences throughout the course of their lives. Research suggests that intervention in early childhood is the most effective way to influence the future development of the child. The early experience of children set them on developmental paths that become increasingly difficult to change as they get older.

Supporting parents from the time their child is an infant and having high-quality learning and development programs for children, are effective and cost efficient ways to improve outcomes for children. Nobel laureate and economist Professor James Heckman states that "the highest rate of return in early childhood development comes from investing as soon as possible from birth until age 5, in disadvantaged families."³

"The early years last a lifetime. Although this statement can be dismissed as a truism, it is profoundly significant. There is now an impressive body of evidence, from a wide range of sources, demonstrating that early child development affects health, wellbeing and competence across the balance of the life course."⁴

For young children, their environments and relationships with important people in their lives are critical to their development. These people are their parents, family and caregivers. One of the most influential and enduring theories of early childhood development is Bowlby's theory of attachment. Bowlby saw attachment as the strong nurturing bond between mother and child that is formed during early infancy. The bond is well established by 7–9 months and it has been argued that this first significant attachment relationship provides the child with a secure emotional base that influences future emotional and social development. While the theory has focused on the mother-child bond, it has been acknowledged that the infant can form attachments to other key figures in their lives.

Security of attachment has been linked to a range of socio-emotional outcomes including early conscience development, emotional understanding, pro-social understandings and self-regulation and school readiness. It has also been associated with the child developing a sense of self-worth and particularly the important concept of resilience.⁵

The extent of the impact of environment on children depends on the age of the children. The younger the child the more vulnerable their brain is to the influences of their environment. Negative experiences in the early



years of a child's life are especially damaging and can have long lasting consequences.⁶ There is potential for recovery however when early childhood professionals apply developmentally informed, biologically respectful approaches to working with at-risk children and families to facilitate their healing.⁷

Environmental influences are important for families too. The level of personal support and networks, the social connectedness of the community where they live and the types of services and facilities available to them affect the functioning of families and their ability to care for and support their children.

A range of quality services and facilities need to be available to all families.

Genetic factors also play an important role in a child's development. The way genes and the environment interact to produce behaviour is the reason that children develop in certain ways.⁶

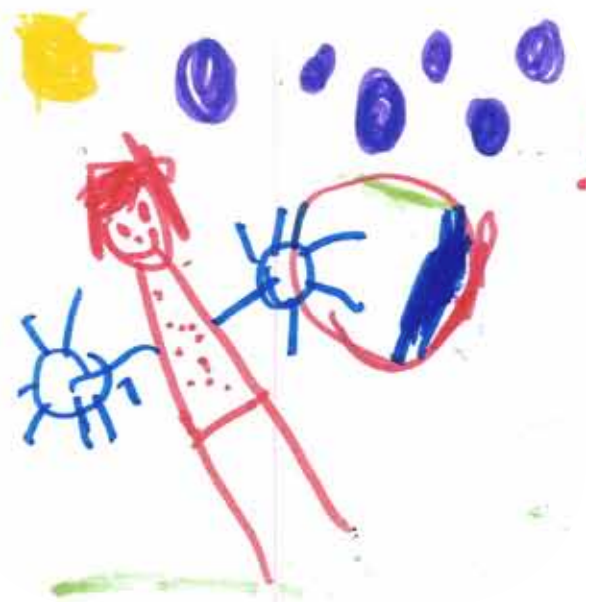
Moreland's Maternal and Child Health Nurses, immunisation nurses, early years educators, children's allied health professionals, primary school teachers and those working in government and community services for children can influence family functioning, and therefore child development by adopting a multi-service and multi-discipline approach that crosses health, education and community sectors.

The importance of the middle years

The age range from 8–12 years is often referred to as the period of 'middle childhood'. It is a time when children consolidate, extend and refine those skills that they have been learning since infancy. They have increased physical stamina and competence and their bodies are preparing for puberty. Children of these ages have an intense curiosity and a growing capacity for higher-order analysis and reflection. They are also moving towards more rational decision making and a better understanding of the effects of behaviour. They are developing, exploring and expanding their relationships with both their peers and adults, and are taking more risks and learning about the consequences of decision making and responsibilities. They have a growing interest in ethical and moral questions and like exploring real-world social issues. They are confident communicators and many want to find their place as active, emerging young citizens within Australian society and the global community.⁸

These are the years when experiencing positive relationships, being genuinely engaged in learning and developing high self esteem have a major and long-lasting impact on each young person.

The Moreland Early Years Strategy 2016–2020 focuses on building upon existing relationships with primary schools in the municipality, improving transitions to school, promoting a better understanding of the value of each service type, increasing collaboration between services and programs and broadening the engagement of children with key projects and activities in Moreland.



"When I grow up I want the world to be like a family"
Tessa 4 years

Outcomes of the Moreland Early Years Strategy 2016–2020

1

Improved health, wellbeing and education outcomes for children in Moreland, especially for those children who are vulnerable.

2

An integrated and responsive family and child focused service system in Moreland.

3

Moreland becoming a more child-friendly city and community.

The following outcomes and actions will help us achieve the best possible results for all children in Moreland.



Outcome 1:



Improved health, wellbeing and education outcomes for children in Moreland, especially for those children who are vulnerable

We will do this by:

Strengthening and Supporting Families

The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework recognises that families are children's first and most important educators. Families provide children with the relationships, the opportunities and the experiences that shape their learning and development. The Victorian Framework supports an integrated children's services system that can respond to the needs of families of children who have a disability or developmental delay. It acknowledges that the families and communities in which children live are diverse, and children's learning and development is enhanced when early childhood professionals respect their cultures and ways of knowing and being. In particular, the Victorian Framework recognises and respects Aboriginal cultures and the unique place of these in Victoria's heritage and future.⁹

Children who do not get the support they need for healthy development in their early years are more likely to develop learning, behavioural or emotional problems and have more health and welfare issues later in life. A high-quality universal service such as the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Service can prevent problems from emerging and/or escalating and improve outcomes for children and their families.¹⁵ The participation of Koorie families is lower at all Key Ages and Stages consultations and this may be due to lack of transport, lack of information and mistrust of mainstream services. Participation in the MCH Service for refugee and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) families can also be significantly lower than for other families. The causes for this include language barriers, service delivery models that do not provide culturally relevant information and support; and a limited understanding of Australia's health system.¹⁰

A small proportion of families require additional support to address specific needs to improve child and parental outcomes. The Victoria's Vulnerable Children-Our Shared Responsibility Strategy 2013–2022 provides this definition of vulnerability to service providers:

Children and young people are vulnerable if the capacity of parents and carers to effectively care, protect and provide for their long term development and wellbeing is limited.

The MCH Service plays a pivotal role in identifying and addressing risk factors for families and children from an early stage. These factors include physical and mental health, nutrition, family violence, developmental concerns and social and behavioural issues. MCH nurses are well placed to identify and engage vulnerable children and families who would benefit from more intensive support.

Regular family support programs and information sessions are provided by Council's Maternal and Child Health Service and Children's Service Unit. The sessions are specifically designed to address the needs and concerns of parents in Moreland and focus on areas such as fatherhood, parenting strategies, autism and infants and children's behaviour and development.

There are many benefits for children, parents and caregivers who regularly participate in playgroups. For children, these include improved self-confidence, cognitive and/or behavioural development, a sense of acceptance and belonging and increased opportunities for play and creativity. For parents and caregivers, benefits include enhanced parenting skills, extended social networks and social connectedness, quality time with the child and greater awareness of child needs, an understanding of services and programs that are available, addressing cultural and language barriers to access, opportunities for intergenerational connections, opportunities for cultural connections and a time for respite.

Additionally, supported playgroups provide families with personalised support from a trained facilitator who can refer them to other services. Health professionals, human services workers, bilingual workers, interpreters and education professionals can then work with children and families that might otherwise remain isolated from the mainstream. Moreland City Council recognises that playgroups are a central component of the early years landscape in Moreland.¹¹

Families, caregivers, early years teachers and school teachers all play a critical role in the development of children's early literacy skills, as well as influencing children's life-long attitudes towards reading. The extent to which families can support early literacy

depends on their level of engagement with the child, their own level of education and their socio-economic status. Studies have shown that the quality of the home and the quality of early years services' environments are the most important factors in literacy development. There are significant correlations between preschool-aged children's language abilities and their literacy environment, including access to materials such as books, crayons and paper; introduction to the local library; exposure to family, caregiver or teacher literacy-related activities such as reading newspapers and street signs; and access to environments that are language rich involving interesting conversations, stories and explanations.

Studies exploring literacy in disadvantaged families found that such homes can be limited in the provision of literacy-promoting environments. However children from low-income families that provide or participate in higher levels of literacy activity like reading or visits to the library can and do develop some emergent literacy skills.¹² Early years service providers in Moreland are committed to providing early years literacy programs that give children a platform for a better start in life and providing families with support and encouragement to implement literacy activities in the home.

'We have regularly attended Fawkner Library Rhyme Time sessions. It has put us into contact with a lot of mums and bubs from a great diversity of cultural backgrounds and has been an important social contact for me. It has also meant that I regularly get to the library to borrow books for my now 16 month old daughter, and we have established a routine of reading and borrowing books.....'¹³

Actions

- Promote the attendance of families at Key Ages and Stages consultations from four months onwards.
- Provide parenting programs as a part of the early years community education program.
- Support the facilitation of playgroups with a focus on vulnerable children in Moreland through advocacy and resources.
- Provide literacy and early experiences to increase opportunities for children to build a solid foundation.

Increasing breastfeeding rates

Exclusive breastfeeding up to six months is associated with the lowest short, medium and long-term risk of illness and mortality among infants. Breast milk promotes sensory and cognitive development, and protects the infant against infectious and chronic diseases. Breastfeeding contributes to the health and wellbeing of mothers; it helps to space children, reduces the risk of ovarian cancer and breast cancer, increases family resources, is a secure way of feeding and is safe for the environment.¹⁴

Moreland City Council received accreditation as a Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace in December 2012.

Action

- Promote and encourage the exclusive breastfeeding of infants up to six months of age.

Increasing immunisation rates

Vaccination is one of the most effective interventions to prevent disease worldwide. An immunisation target of 95 per cent has been set by the Victorian Government as necessary to halt the spread of particularly virulent diseases like measles. Under the 'No Jab, No Play' legislation, all parents or guardians seeking to enrol their child at an early childhood service (long day care, kindergarten, occasional care and family day care) will be required to provide prescribed evidence that the child is:

- Fully immunised for their age OR
- On a vaccination catch up program OR
- Unable to be fully immunised for medical reasons.¹⁵

Action

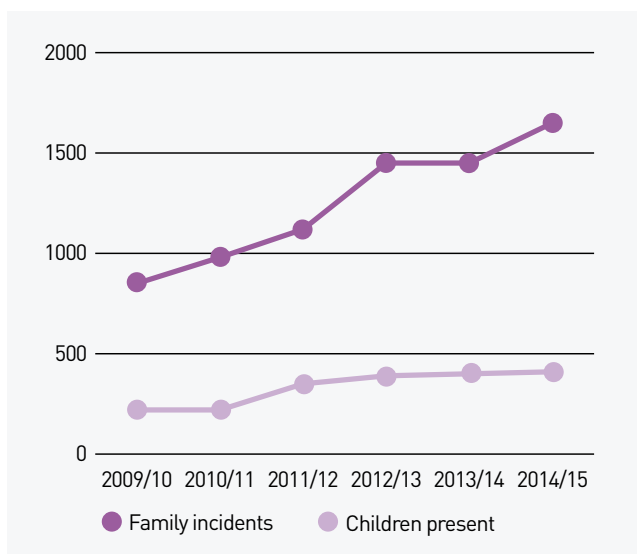
- Work towards an immunisation target of 95 per cent.



Preventing family violence

The number of family incidents reported to Victoria Police in the City of Moreland continues to climb as the chart below shows. A total of 1,663 family incidents was reported to Victoria Police in Moreland in 2014–2015, which represents an increase of 94 per cent compared to the 856 reported family incidents five years earlier in 2009–2010. The number of children present in family incidents in Moreland has increased by 72 per cent since 2009–10, from 260 to 447 incidents with children present in 2014–15.¹⁶

Reported Family Violence Incidents in Moreland 2009–2015



Moreland City Council has played an important role in promoting family violence prevention in Moreland over the last ten years. Guided by the Moreland Family Violence Prevention Strategy 2011–2015³ Council's policy position is:

Family violence is a prevalent, serious and preventable health issue in Moreland. Council does not condone the use of violence in any context.

Council has an important role to play in the prevention of family violence. Working in partnership with the Moreland community, we can create a municipality that is gender equitable, respectful and inclusive. We can do this by fostering positive and respectful attitudes between men and women, creating inclusive community settings, increasing community strength, raising awareness and providing information.¹⁷

The Parenting Research Centre's submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence (Victoria) recommended that to increase the positive impact of family violence interventions, it is important to support parents in their parenting role, for example through developing coping skills and building social connections. Interventions also need to prioritise family safety, particularly that of children.



The Maternal and Child Health Service engage families during the high family violence risk period of late pregnancy and the early postnatal period. Nurses investigate the likelihood of family violence occurring in the family, support mothers in developing safety plans and engage both parents in understanding the ways their infant communicates. Supported playgroups facilitated by qualified practitioners also have a significant role to play in the engagement of families and children experiencing family violence. Early Childhood Services like Family Day Care, long day care services and kindergartens are well placed to promote positive gender norms as a response to reports by practitioners that rigid gender stereotypes and role expectations begin before commencing school. Educational programs in primary schools and primary school based school holiday programs can play a significant role in raising awareness and addressing issues around gender based violence in our community.

Action

- Support early years services and primary schools to play a pivotal role in the prevention of and response to family violence in Moreland through training and information provision.

Improving oral health

Poor oral health is associated with poor overall health and oral disease is a key marker of disadvantage, with greater levels of oral disease experienced by:

- people on low incomes
- people with a disability
- some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- some immigrant groups from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (particularly refugees).

The impact of oral disease is not only on the individual with the broader impact on their general health and quality of life, but also on the community in general, through the health system and associated economic costs.

Oral health and particularly the oral health of young children and vulnerable families is an area of focus for Merri Health. The public dental service provides free services for eligible children with priority of access.¹⁸

Action

- Encourage good oral health knowledge and practice.



Encouraging healthy eating, play and physical exercise

Australian and international policy-makers recognise the childhood obesity epidemic to be one of the most serious threats to the future health of the population. Having a high body mass index (BMI) in childhood increases both cardiovascular risk in children and cardiovascular events in these children when they reach adulthood. A focus on early prevention and intervention in the preschool years and the early years of primary school is important to address the underlying causes of childhood obesity. It is especially important for those children experiencing family-level or neighbourhood-level disadvantage.¹⁹

Although children in Moreland currently report good health, good fruit and vegetable consumption and regular exercise, their responses to the 2012 Moreland Household Survey demonstrate a preference for sedentary recreational activities and poor food choices and few children use active transport to get to school.²⁰

Active Moreland is an initiative aimed at making it easy for 'more people to be more active more often.' It is a multi-pronged approach to increasing levels by targeting people, opportunities, places and partnerships to provide welcoming and inclusive services and programs that will contribute to making Moreland a more active community.

Action

- Encourage healthy eating, play and physical exercise by focusing on early intervention and prevention.

In the 1970s 80 per cent of Australian students rode or walked to school. Today only approximately 20 per cent of students use active modes of transport to school, with the remainder travelling to school by private car.²¹ The positive outcomes for children, parents and schools participating in and encouraging active transport are numerous.

Action

- Support primary schools and early years services to encourage children and families to use active transport to and from their services.

Increasing kindergarten participation

There are many benefits associated with attending preschool for all children including a more successful transition to school. Vulnerable children show higher levels of attainment at school if they have attended preschool when compared to children in similar circumstances who have not had access to a preschool program. A positive transition to school and an ability to cope with change is linked to future academic achievement, stable peer relationships and more consistent school attendance rates.

The Victorian Department of Education and Training has identified some groups of children that require additional support to engage in kindergarten. These children include:

- refugee and asylum seekers;
- children from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds;
- children with a diagnosed disability;
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children;
- children from a low socio-economic background;
- children whose parents have a Commonwealth Health Care Card; and
- children known to child protection (including those in out-of-home care).²²

To successfully engage these disadvantaged families and children, organisations providing kindergarten programs in Moreland must be culturally responsive and respectful and work towards cultural competence.

Action

- Increase the kindergarten participation rate.

Despite Victoria's high kindergarten participation rate, evidence suggests that some highly vulnerable children such as those in out-of-home care are missing out. These children are at risk of starting school more developmentally vulnerable than their peers and this can lead to poorer outcomes later in life. In 2012, the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry found that universal early education and care services such as kindergartens can play an important role in both identifying children and families that may be vulnerable and delivering services that meet their needs.²³

Moreland City Council is a party to this shared commitment of the early childhood sector to those children who are vulnerable and especially those who live in out-of-home-care in our community. It is important that these children have access to high-quality early childhood services particularly Maternal and Child Health services and kindergarten programs.

Action

- Prioritise services for children in out-of-home care.

Focusing on early developmental domains

The **Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)** is a nationwide data collection of early childhood development at the time children commence their first year of full-time school. The AEDC highlights what is working well and what needs to be improved or developed to support children and their families by providing evidence to inform health, education and community policy and planning. The AEDC domains have been shown to predict later health, wellbeing and academic success.

Most of Moreland's children are doing well in the developmental domains that were measured in the AEDC in 2015. However there are areas within the municipality where children are showing a higher proportion of developmental vulnerability on one or more and two or more developmental domains when compared to children in Australia and Victoria.²⁴

Results from the 2015 AEDC collection were released in March 2016.

Action

- Use the 2015 AEDC results to develop programs and strategies which will contribute to better outcomes for children in Moreland.



Outcome 2:



An integrated and responsive family and child centred service system in Moreland

We will do this by:

Increasing collaboration, partnerships and improving communication systems

There are many diverse government and non-government organisations in Moreland that work with children and families. This can lead to service fragmentation and organisations working in silos. Alignment with the national action plan, *The Nest* that outlines a vision and a set of shared outcomes and measurements for children's wellbeing in Moreland will help to mobilise and support the efforts of these various stakeholders.¹

The Victorian Department of Education and Training wants all children to benefit from a seamless learning experience and identifies the following supports for a system that links children's learning from birth to primary school:

- Shared high aspirations for every child's learning and development and a recognition that there are some families and children that require additional support;
- Effective partnerships with children, their families, their community, key providers and other stakeholders eg educators, allied health professionals, counsellors; and
- Wherever possible, co-locating early childhood services on new and existing school sites in partnership with local government.²⁵

The Service Sector Reform final report released in July 2013 also highlights a number of ways that the service providers can work together to improve outcomes for Moreland's families and children:

- Embedding partnerships and collaboration in all aspects of design and delivery of services;
- Supporting community service organisations;
- Making better use of information and communications technology;

- Enhancing online community participation;
- Supporting flexible and integrated service delivery;
- Focusing on the most disadvantaged families;
- Empowering service users;
- Improving local area governance;
- Valuing cultural competence; and
- Acknowledging community voice.²⁶

Action

- Facilitate the regular review of the types of early years services offered to the community to ensure the mix of services meets the changing needs of families and children.



Implementing strategic directions for early years infrastructure planning in Moreland

The National Guidelines for Planning and Development of Child Care Facilities acknowledge the important contribution that local governments make to ensure that existing and future communities have access to Maternal and Child Health services and early education and care.

“Local governments work within a broader context of state and national policy, legislation and regulations which govern the land use planning and service approval processes. Within this framework, access to child care can be facilitated by local governments planning in collaboration with other government agencies, child care providers and the local community.”²⁷

Moreland City Council owns and maintains a wide range of early years services including kindergartens and long day care centres and Maternal and Child Health Centres. Since 2011 Council has invested over \$13 million improving and extending existing buildings and erecting new children’s centres in Gowanbrae, Fawkner and Coburg and new Maternal and Child Health Centres in Glenroy, Fawkner and Brunswick. There are also kindergartens and long-day care centres with integrated kindergartens in the municipality owned by not-for-profit organisations or owned by private operators, which account for around two thirds of all these facilities provided across Moreland.



Infrastructure planning focuses largely on provision of facilities, the design of which is a driver of service quality. In identifying priority actions below it is acknowledged that infrastructure is also linked with other critical quality drivers, most notably professional development of carers and educators.

Moreland's total population is expected to rise by 30.5 per cent between 2014 and 2036. Social infrastructure planning is important to ensure that provision of high-quality early years facilities keeps pace with Moreland's changing and growing community. A Community Infrastructure Framework Background Paper (January 2016) prepared to inform this strategy highlights gaps in infrastructure provision that will impact on early years' services over the next 20 years. Without an effective strategic planning response these will increase pressure on existing Council services in the short term, and accelerate in line with the rate of population growth and urban density.

Council's current service model is focussed on direct provision of community-based facilities. With increasing constraints on funding and land available to Council to develop new facilities, this model alone will not be sufficient to fully meet the forecast demand. New sources of funds need to be identified and new facility models need to be scoped.

To address forecast service gaps and convert the challenges of urban growth and densification into opportunities, several options will be progressed. Service gaps are most pressing in Brunswick and East Brunswick making this area a high priority for planning in the short and medium term. Population growth is also a factor that will drive planning for the other major activity centres in Moreland – Coburg and Glenroy. These growth centres will be a primary focus for testing the feasibility of new service models and developing new facilities.

Actions

1. Council will advocate for increased investment by the Commonwealth and State Governments in publicly provided children's services:
 - i. Investment in new early years facilities at the community hub in development at the former Glenroy Primary School is the main priority.
 - ii. Provision of new facilities – including a primary school – to meet projected demand in Brunswick and East Brunswick is a medium term priority.
2. Council will work with the Victorian government to co-locate new facilities with primary schools, where appropriate. Successful partnerships developed by Council and the Department of Education and Early Years with Belle Vue Park Primary School in Glenroy, St Marks Primary School in Fawkner and Fawkner Primary School provide useful models to build on:
 - i. Addressing service gaps in the southern part of Moreland is a key focus.
3. Council will invest in integrated early years facilities and new service models that offer wider social infrastructure benefits such as education, learning, leisure and housing:
 - i. A new Glenroy community hub is the principal priority on the site of the former Wheatsheaf Road Primary School. The hub will integrate kindergarten and Maternal and Child Health Facilities with other social infrastructure including a new public library.
4. Council will explore the potential of new partnerships with not-for-profit and private sector investors to deliver quality early years facilities and services to address unmet needs:
 - i. The objective is to increase the availability of accessible, fit-for-purpose facilities that support high-quality care and education for all Moreland families.
 - ii. Opportunities will be explored at the earliest conception stage of prospective developments.
5. Council will also support and promote best practice service standards across the full spectrum of early years service providers:
 - i. Asset management of Council-owned facilities will be guided by best practice design standards.
 - ii. Information on best practice design (and service) standards will be prepared to assist potential providers of new facilities and to support families to choose suitable facilities for their children.²⁸



Having a highly qualified early years workforce and high-quality services

The quality of Early Childhood Education and Care services is fundamental to children’s development. Expanded access to high-quality early learning can increase a child’s learning and development outcomes and address disadvantage. Quality services that employ a highly qualified workforce deliver great results while low-quality services are limited in their impact. (Early Years Strategic Plan Improving Outcomes for All Victorian Children 2014–2020 DET). The National Quality Framework is a result of an agreement between all Australian governments and introduced a quality standard (the National Quality Standard) to improve education and care across long day care, family day care, preschool/kindergarten, and outside school hours care.²⁹

The early years workforce is central to children’s learning, growth and success. There are a wide range of professionals who make up this workforce in Moreland including educators, nurses and family support workers. It is important that they are able to access professional learning opportunities and effective shared professional practice forums.

Action

- Support and facilitate effective early years networks and forums to enhance the delivery of early years programs in the municipality.

Research shows that a workforce with higher level qualifications and increased numbers of educators working with children significantly improve the quality of early learning programs.²⁸ While both are key components of the national reform agenda, many services are still experiencing difficulty recruiting appropriately qualified staff. The increased staff to child ratios in January 2016 presents additional challenges to many services.

There is an ongoing role for government to enable sufficient workforce supply and support the development of the Early Childhood Education and Care workforce. Moreland City Council’s collaboration with The University of Melbourne, Melbourne Graduate School of Education has resulted in a Teaching Fellow who is based at Council and a large number of Teaching Candidates who are placed in Moreland early years services.

Action

- Develop and build partnerships with other high quality tertiary institutions that offer courses in Early Years Education.

Priority 3:



Moreland becoming a more child-friendly city and community.

We will do this by:

Consulting with children

During 2015 over 400 children from 3–12 years of age were involved in the consultation process for the Moreland Early Years Strategy 2016–2020. Some children created picture postcards depicting their experiences living in the community of Moreland and their hopes for the future. Another 60 children were surveyed by peers and asked about their activities outside of school, their feelings of safety and for suggestions and ideas about how life in Moreland could be improved. Others published their own books depicting their lives in a Moreland suburb.

Children who were involved in the consultation process for the Moreland Early Years Strategy told us what was most important to them:

- Their families and their friends;
- Having places where they can play, swim and participate in sporting activities;

- Nature and having access to natural environments;
- A clean environment with no rubbish and no pollution; and
- Being safe.

Action

- Use the information gathered in Moreland Early Years Strategy 2016–2020 consultation process to inform future Council services, projects and programs.

Taking actions that are guided by the principles of the Victorian Child-Friendly Cities and Communities Charter

In March 2015 Moreland City Council endorsed the Victorian Child-Friendly Cities and Communities Charter. The Charter is a statement of the principles and actions that underpin the right to be considered 'child friendly'.

Moreland City Council supports the following three principles contained in the Charter:

- Freedom for children to experience environments that consider their needs;
- Respect and dignity for children to express their individual opinions, participate in and contribute to decisions about their communities and wellbeing; and
- Equitable access to supportive environments and services for children regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion or ability.³¹

Action

- Increase participation by children in decision making forums and advance Council's role in creating child-friendly environments.



Acknowledgements:

The Moreland Early Years Strategy 2016–2020 was written with the assistance and guidance of the Moreland Early Years Strategy Steering Group. This group included representatives from the following organisations:

- Australian International Academy of Education
- Goodstart Early Learning
- Lentara Uniting Care
- Melbourne City Mission
- Merri Health
- Moreland Primary School
- North Western Primary Health Network
- Playgroup Victoria
- University of Melbourne
- VICSEG New Futures

Implementation

The Moreland Early Years Strategy 2016–2020 provides a framework for practice and systems across Council and for early years service providers and organisations that are working in Moreland. The Strategy's Implementation Plan will be reviewed every 2 years. The Implementation Plan will be guided and monitored by the Moreland Family and Children's Services Advisory Committee.

Monitoring, evaluation and review

Council acknowledges that monitoring, evaluation and review mechanisms are critical in measuring our performance against Strategy commitments. An annual report on achievements and a bi-annual report reviewing measures and achievements will be made available.

Further information

A background paper informed the Moreland Early Strategy 2016–2020. This document is called Background Paper for Moreland Early Years Strategy 2016–2020 and is available at moreland.vic.gov.au

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The Moreland Early Years Strategy 2016–2020 is for all organisations, services and programs that work with families and children in Moreland.



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Moreland Language Link

廣東話	9280 1910	हिंदी	9280 1918
Italiano	9280 1911	普通话	9280 0750
Ελληνικά	9280 1912	ਪੰਜਾਬੀ	9280 0751
عربي	9280 1913		
Türkçe	9280 1914	All other languages	
Tiếng Việt	9280 1915	9280 1919	