



## MEDIA RELEASE

### Won't Somebody Please Think of the Children?

14 December 2016

Buloke Shire Council's childcare discussion session held on Tuesday, 13 December enjoyed an excellent attendance and has thrown up many key points as Council looks to advocate on behalf of families.

The session was chaired by Council's Director Community Development Jessie Holmes and around 60 people attended. Rosie Pizzi (Department of Education and Training), Lois O'Callaghan (CEO Mallee Track), Nancy Drever (Children's Services Manager YMCA Ballarat) as well as Councillors were all on hand to hear stories from parents across Buloke on how they see the current childcare situation and what their townships need.

Mayor, Cr David Pollard opened the session revealing that funding for the New Early Learning Facility in Birchip has been included in the Victorian Government's newly revealed \$60 million investment to develop modern and flexible early childhood centres. The Victorian Government has committed \$315,000 along with Council's \$50,000 contribution and the Birchip community's contribution of \$35,000.

Cr Pollard also underlined services, including childcare, being fundamental to Buloke and to the **Rural Living Campaign**, to attract people to the Shire no matter their employment status. The need for affordable and sustainable childcare is integral to attracting families and economic growth.

Next came the stories of our towns. Jess McGurk outlined the situation in Charlton and their need for some sort of childcare to satisfy the needs of children from six months to 10 years of age as they currently have no options within their town.

Donald (Emma Vogel), the only major centre in Buloke with a Family Services Centre, was a very different scenario. Despite this modern facility only being officially opened in February of this year an "funding model effectively discriminating against rural areas" sees the centre only utilised to around one third capacity.

Sea Lake has a family day carer who is unable to access the government subsidies for her families despite operating under the National Framework and delivering a much needed and oversubscribed service to the community. She is too geographically isolated for a supervising agency to take on.

Sandy Richmond outlined the very real result of funding gaps in Birchip where there are 47 children between birth and four years but only seventeen in childcare due to the cost.

Christy Arnel from Wycheproof, whose children are now in primary and secondary school, recalled eight years of hard work to finally get some form of childcare so that she could return to the work force. The heavy reliance on family that is often utilised by people in small communities was not available to her and paid childcare was the only way that she could return to work.

The presentations of our town stories was followed by a productive exchange of ideas. Council is now looking to both State and Federal Governments to improve the flexibility of their funding criteria. This is vital to enable child care to work in rural settings in conjunction with Council and the Buloke community to provide better childcare outcomes.



**End release**

**For further information contact Media and Communications Officer, Travis Fitzgibbon on 1300 520 520.**