

# **Buloke Shire Council Children & Youth Strategy 2016-2019**



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Local Logic Place

## Executive Summary

Buloke Shire Council's *Children and Youth Strategy 2016-2019* is an integrated whole-of-Council approach to ensure that children, young people and their families are understood, valued, supported and included in community life.

Council, in partnership with its communities has a role to play in planning for and supporting the needs of children, young people and their families. According to the 2011 Census there are 6,384 people living in the Buloke Shire. Of these residents 855 (13%) are children aged 9-18 years old.

Significant budget constraints in 2015 resulted in a lack of continued funding for a youth specific worker within Council. This was largely due to the restrictive funding model for local government not recognising the unique needs and financial pressures of large rural shires with small populations.

Nonetheless, Buloke Shire Council undertook the planning to develop the Children and Youth Strategy so that it could identify areas for support and partnership through a whole of Council approach to supporting children, youth and their families.

Children and young people aged 9-18 years were invited via their primary and secondary schools to share what they liked about where they live, what was important to them, what concerns them and their thoughts on ways to make Buloke Shire a better place for children and young people.

In total 205 children aged 9-11 completed a drawing activity and 313 young people aged 12-18 completed a youth survey. According to the 2011 ABS Census data there were 596 young people aged 12-18 years of age living in the Buloke Shire. ***Based on these ABS figures the youth survey achieved a remarkable 52% response rate from the overall 12-18 year age group.*** The Youth Survey was designed in conjunction with young people from Charlton, Donald and Wycheproof Secondary Schools.

Parents, community members and service providers were also invited to contribute towards the development of the Children and Youth Strategy with 167 taking part by sharing their thoughts in workshops, focus groups or by completing a survey.

The community consultation process highlighted that children and young people valued:

- Caring and supportive community members
- Having access to a wide range of sporting activities
- Schools
- Living in small rural communities that are peaceful with wide open spaces
- Feeling safe; and
- Pools, playgrounds and parks.

Key challenges for children and young people (and their families) were identified as:

- Decreased funding for resources in this age group
- Boredom
- Keeping up with school work

- A lack of arts and cultural and non-competitive activities for children and young people
- Limited employment and work experience opportunities
- Underage drinking
- Mental health of children, young people and families and the lack of specialist supports available in the Shire
- Social inclusion; and
- A difficult to negotiate unorganised service system consisting of numerous visiting services that are based outside of the Shire.

A full detailed analysis of all data can be found in the succeeding section of this report. It is hoped that this comprehensive data will also be used to inform government on the needs of children and young people through avenues such as the Mallee Child and Youth Area Partnership and the Southern Mallee Governance Group's Sub-Regional Youth Plan (a combined youth plan for Buloke, Gannawarra and Swan Hill Shires that will be developed later this year) as well as community service organisations.

Buloke Shire Council's Children and *Youth Strategy 2016-2019* is focused on local government roles and responsibilities. Four key strategy areas were emphasised as a result of the consultation process:

**Strategy 1: Children & Youth Specific Activities and Events**

**Strategy 2: Children and Youth Participation and Civic Engagement**

**Strategy 3: Children & Youth Services**

**Strategy 4: Advocacy & Planning**

A number of corresponding actions have been captured for each strategy area; these actions will require the ongoing commitment of the whole of Council as well as key community organisations and groups. Importantly, the Children and Youth Strategy must continue to engage children and young people and their families wherever possible to guide actions and ensure their ongoing relevance.

## Consultation Methodology

Community consultation and engagement was seen as an essential activity to ensure that the Children & Youth Strategy truly reflected the aspirations and needs of children, young people, parents and key community stakeholders.

A range of consultation approaches were enacted to invite broad feedback from children, young people, parents and community members and service providers. The research team focussed on the following core consultation and engagement activities:

**Small Discussion Groups:** the research team conducted small discussion groups in Birchip, Wycheproof, Donald, Charlton and Sea Lake with youth, parents, councillors and relevant community stakeholders. 79 young people and 39 community members took part in small discussion groups or had one on one conversations with researchers.

**Councillors:** The draft Children & Youth Strategy was presented to Councillors to share the overall findings and seek feedback on the strategy and action areas.

**Survey:** Three online surveys were developed and implemented to invite the input of young people, parents and key stakeholders working with and planning for children and young people respectively. The surveys were circulated broadly through key community connections: e.g. the BRIC, Schools and Preschools, Neighbourhood Houses, Maternal and Child Health services, playgroups etc. Hard copies of surveys were also available for those without access to the web; and the electronic survey was formatted to enable completion via smart phones and PCs.

The surveys were designed in consultation with the Project Manager, the Project Steering Committee and young people. In total 313 young people completed a youth survey, 81 parents completed a survey and 47 service providers shared their feedback via a survey.

A **drawing/writing exercise** was designed for primary school students from across the Buloke municipality to enable the voices of younger children to be heard. 205 children aged 9-11 years old submitted a drawing/writing exercise.

A **strategic planning workshop** was held where child and youth statistics, key consultation findings and themes and guiding evidence was presented to identified key stakeholders. 22 key stakeholders took part in strategic planning workshops. Adding to this, 31 service providers attended focus groups to contribute towards the plan.

A comprehensive **community demographic profile** was compiled. Significantly these profiles and projections present all available child and youth data (for children aged 0-18 years) at both the LGA and local community levels enabling an 'at a glance' series of tables to inform and support decision making across the municipality. The broad age range allows this resource to be used for the complimentary Municipal Early Years Plan. This demographic profile has been drawn together as a companion document.

Importantly, an action research, community development process underpinned all consultation work ensuring that consultation processes were adjusted as needed to ensure the best overall outcome. Data collection included both quantitative and qualitative techniques to enable data which highlighted a sense of demand through actual numbers and proportions as well as providing the richness of stories from the rural communities involved.

## Summary of Key Findings

Community consultation revealed the following strengths, challenges and ideas for improving outcomes for children, young people and their families and the service system designed to support them.

### Strengths

- Schools are trusted and respected and were highlighted for being a significant strength in Buloke Shire by parents, community members, service providers and by children and young people themselves. 84% of youth survey respondents said that they felt connected and welcome at their school.
- There is a broad range of sporting activities on offer and many children and young people surveyed (88%) were engaged in sport.
- Children and young people felt safe and connected to their communities.
- Caring and supportive adults across the Buloke Shire was one of the key things that children highlighted that they loved about where they lived.
- 90% of young people who filled in a youth survey agreed or strongly agreed that they had adults in their life that they could rely on.
- Young people surveyed felt confident going to their friends (75%) and parents (83%) for support and advice on their most concerning issues.
- 93% of young people surveyed said they have trusted adults in their lives
- Young people who completed a survey agreed or strongly agreed that their schools (75%) and their families (95%) were helping them to explore their aspirations.
- 16% of respondents shared that they volunteer in their spare time.

### Challenges

- A lack of arts and culture and non-competitive sports activities for children and young people.
- A decline in funding and resources for young people with the cessation of Buloke Shire Council's Youth Worker and the Youth Connections program in Buloke there now aren't any youth specific services (outside of schools) based in the Buloke Shire.
- There are many visiting services and it is unclear how often services visit. This lack of service coordination makes it difficult for service providers and parents alike to negotiate the service system.
- Information sharing amongst service providers is a challenge as there isn't a formal structure that supports this.
- There are limited employment and work placement opportunities for young people.
- Boredom/nothing to do (45%) was one of the most concerning issues for young people who filled in a survey.
- Keeping up with school work in secondary school was rated as a significant concern across gender and age groups.
- Body Image was rated as a high concern (31%) for young people who completed a survey.
- Mental health was rated as a top ten concern (26%) and the difficulty of accessing specialist support for young people was raised by both service providers and parents.

- Declining populations have resulted in lowered enrolments which impacts on funding for schools and the types of programs and activities that schools can offer to rural children and young people.
- Underage drinking.
- Service providers and schools identified that there are a number of itinerant families who can be difficult to engage in the community.

## **Opportunities**

- Youth leadership
- Improving youth participation and engagement and ensuring young people have a say on matters that affect them
- Provision of arts and cultural activities
- Exploration of E-health services e.g. such as e-headspace
- Schools as hubs- strengthened partnerships between schools and service providers
- Youth clubs/spaces for young people where they can meet together
- Youth led activities and events that will build the capacity of young people and offer them things to do
- A Children, Youth & Family Work Network to connect service providers and improve collaboration and information sharing
- Promoting social inclusion so that all children, young people and their families are connected and valued in their communities



## Key Strategic Linkages

### Local Government

The Children and Youth Strategy closely aligns with Buloke Shire Council's Plan 2015-2019. **The Buloke Shire Council Plan (2016-2019)** articulates Council's focus for the next four years. The Council Plan has six overarching objectives to guide the focus of their work, they are:

#### Buloke Shire Council's Strategic Objectives for 2015 – 2019

1. Delivering our services in a financially sustainable way
2. Engaging with, and facilitating our community to identify and meet its needs
3. Supporting and enhancing our local economy
4. Working with the community and relevant agencies and groups to enhance and protect our natural environment
5. Influencing governments to improve liveability for rural communities
6. An organisation that is responsibly governed and values and supports the development of its people

In particular, the Children and Youth Strategy key strategic areas and actions closely align with:

Council Plan 2015-2019 Strategy/Objective	Children & Youth Strategy Area & Actions
All five strategies under the <b>Engaging with, and facilitating our community to identify and meet its needs</b> objective.	<p><b>Children &amp; Youth Specific Activities and Events</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Support interested community organisations to apply for Freeza funding to offer locally based drug and alcohol free events in Donald, Birchip, Charlton, Wycheproof and Sea Lake.</li> <li>▪ Identify relevant <b>Council owned</b> community spaces that could offer in kind 'youth space' for youth groups to meet regularly in.</li> <li>▪ Wherever possible support community groups and organisations to offer arts and culture and non-competitive recreation activities for children and young people.</li> <li>▪ Continue to run the yearly walk to school program across the Buloke Shire.</li> </ul> <p><b>Children and Youth Participation and Civic Engagement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identify areas within Council where young people could take part in planning and decision making.</li> <li>▪ Consult with and involve children and young people on matters that are important to them.</li> <li>▪ Visit schools to educate children and young people on the work of Local Government.</li> <li>▪ Develop a youth specific grants program that supports youth led activities, events and programs across the Buloke Shire.</li> </ul> <p><b>Advocacy &amp; Planning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Contribute to the development of a Sub-Regional Youth Plan for Buloke, Swan Hill and Gannawarra Shires.</li> <li>▪ Continue to work with the Mallee Children &amp; Youth Area Partnerships to improve supports for vulnerable children, youth and their families.</li> <li>▪ Advocate for a locally based Generalist Youth Worker position that can support young people across the Buloke Shire in a flexible and seamless way.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Action 2: Facilitate the provision of infrastructure to grow the economic development of the community</b> under the Supporting and enhancing our local economy objective</p>	<p><b>Children and Youth Participation and Civic Engagement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Consult with children and young people when planning for infrastructure that they are high users of.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Both strategies under the Influencing governments to improve liveability for rural communities.</i></p>	<p><b>Advocacy &amp; Planning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Advocate to the Federal Government for a considered 'rural' funding model for Local Government so that children, young people and their families living in Buloke Shire can have the level of servicing and supports that are afforded to their regional and metro counterparts.</li> </ul>

Given that Council's current financial constraints have impacted on its ability to resource a youth specific worker it is crucial that the work of the Children and Youth Strategy is integrated into existing Council departments and the work that they undertake.

## State Government

### Victoria's Vulnerable Children Strategy - Our Shared Responsibility 2013-2022

The **Victoria's Vulnerable Children – Our Shared Responsibility Strategy 2013-2022** is a whole-of-government strategy designed to drive broad, transformational change across government and the community to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and families.

The strategy outlines collaborative governance arrangements and a performance and accountability framework that provides a set of goals, key outcomes and indicators that aim to reduce the incidence of vulnerability.

The strategy draws together all parts of government that have a responsibility for the health, social and economic factors that can make someone vulnerable and potentially lead to child abuse and neglect. It is designed to drive the broad-based change required across government and in the community over the next decade.

### Children and Youth Area Partnerships

Children and Youth Area Partnerships are a new approach, bringing together Victorian Government departments including the Departments of Education and Early Childhood; Health; Human Services; Justice; and Victoria Police to work with local government and the community sector to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and young people.

This new approach recognises that improving outcomes for vulnerable children and young people is a shared responsibility which requires better coordination across a range of partners and a focus on improving services and practice.

The Mallee Children and Youth Area Partnership (MCYAP) which includes four local government areas; Mildura, Swan Hill, Buloke and Gannawarra, was established in September 2014; it is co-chaired by the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education.

Membership of the MCYAP Partnership Steering Group includes Australian government, state government, local government and community sector representatives and a community member. Membership of the Steering Group is listed at the end of the newsletter.

The Area Partnerships have been asked to identify local priorities to address two key areas:

1. Support the learning and development of all children and young people, particularly those who are at risk of disengaging or who have disengaged; and
2. The creation of safe and supportive communities and environments in which children live free of abuse and neglect.

### **Victorian State Disability Plan 2013–2016**

The Victorian state disability plan 2013–2016 articulates the government's view for the future and sets a clear direction for the next four years.

At the centre of the plan is the framework, which outlines the vision and principles of the plan, the long-term goals, shorter-term outcomes and four-year strategies that guide the two-yearly implementation plans. The plan describes how progress and the results of our actions will be monitored, allowing for adjustments if needed and enabling greater transparency and accountability.

## **Federal Government**

### **National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020**

All Australian governments have endorsed the first National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 and are committed to implementing the initial actions it contains. It is an ambitious, national approach to help protect all Australian children.

The National Framework represents an unprecedented level of collaboration between Australian, State and Territory governments and non-government organisations to protect children.

## Key Strategies & Actions

The key strategies and actions have been informed by comprehensive consultation with children, young people, parents, community members and service providers. The actions articulate Buloke Shire Council's role in supporting better outcomes for children, youth and their families over the next four years.

### Children & Youth Specific Activities and Events

1. Support interested community organisations to apply for Freeza funding to offer locally based drug and alcohol free events in Donald, Birchip, Charlton, Wycheproof and Sea Lake.
2. Identify relevant **Council owned** community spaces that could offer in kind 'youth space' for youth groups to meet regularly in.
3. Wherever possible support community groups and organisations to offer arts and culture and non-competitive recreation activities for children and young people.
4. Continue to run the yearly walk to school program across the Buloke Shire.

### Children and Youth Participation and Civic Engagement

1. Identify areas within Council where young people could take part in planning and decision making.
2. Consult with and involve children and young people on matters that are important to them.
3. Visit schools to educate children and young people on the work of Local Government.
4. Consult with children and young people when planning for infrastructure that they are high users of.
5. Develop a youth specific grants program that supports youth led activities, events and programs across the Buloke Shire.

### Children & Youth Services

1. Develop a Child, Youth & Family Services Network to connect service providers, improve collaboration and information sharing and enable advocacy for greater service provision to geographical areas with identified service gaps.
2. Explore possibilities and partner in the provision of a 'community connections' or 'linkages' worker to provide secretariat support to the Network, referral and advice support to families and implement broad Child, Youth and Family communications strategies.
3. Provide an in-kind meeting space for the Child, Youth & Family Services Network that will regularly connect service providers so that they can plan together for improved servicing for children and young people across the Buloke Shire.
4. Develop a monthly electronic newsletter to inform community groups and organisations working with children and young people about relevant grants and opportunities.
5. Disseminate the consultation data from the Children & Youth Strategy research and the accompanying child and youth community profile so that community organisations and groups can use it to plan and advocate for children and young people living in the Buloke Shire.

6. Council plans, implements and evaluates all services and supports provided to children, young people and their families within a framework of social inclusion

## **Advocacy & Planning**

1. Contribute to the development of a Sub-Regional Youth Plan for Buloke, Swan Hill and Gannawarra Shires.
2. Continue to work with the Mallee Children & Youth Area Partnership to improve supports for vulnerable children, youth and their families.
3. Advocate for a locally based Generalist Youth Worker position that can support young people across the Buloke Shire in a flexible and seamless way.
4. Advocate to the Federal Government for a considered 'rural' funding model for Local Government so that children, young people and their families living in Buloke Shire can have the level of servicing and supports that are afforded to their regional and metro counterparts.

## Community Consultation Summary

The extensive consultation process heard from children, young people, parents, community members and service providers. Specifically:

- 205 children aged 9-11 years old completed a drawing activity
- 313 young people aged 12-18 years completed a survey
- 79 young people took part in small discussion groups
- 81 parents completed a survey
- 47 service providers completed a survey
- 31 service providers attended focus groups and 22 service providers attended a workshop to hear about the findings and test the strategy and action areas; and
- 39 community members attended community focus groups or had one on one conversations with researchers.

### Drawing Activity Results

***Things that would make where I live a better place for children.....***

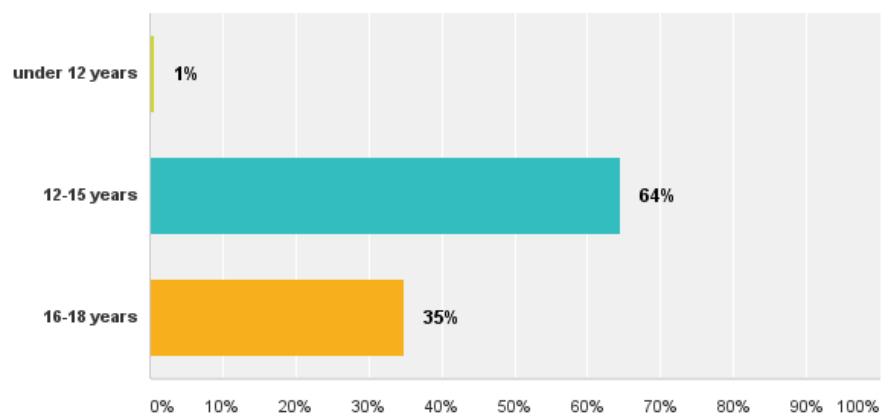
Community Infrastructure (skate parks, pools, soccer field, playgrounds, library): 78	Shops (notably pet shop): 84
Cinema: 32	Taking care of environment / rain: 17
Clean/tidy town: 9	Activities/events for children (esp pool, diving board, bike tracks): 237
Safe Communities: 2	More Food Outlets: 21
Better Transport: 10	Green grass : 10
The Parks / playgrounds: 22	Roads: 5
Free Wi-Fi: 3	Helping People in Need: 5
Anzac commemorative wall: 7	Improved Roads: 5
Good Home/Family Life: 3	Community Garden: 2



## Youth Survey Results

### Q1 How old are you?

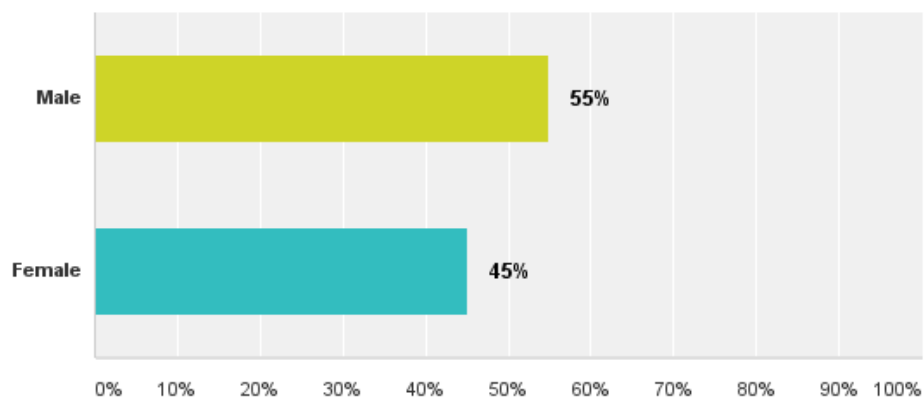
Answered: 312 Skipped: 1



64% of respondents were aged 12-15 years of age, 35% were between 16-18 years of age and the remaining 1% were under 12 years old.

### Q2 Are you?

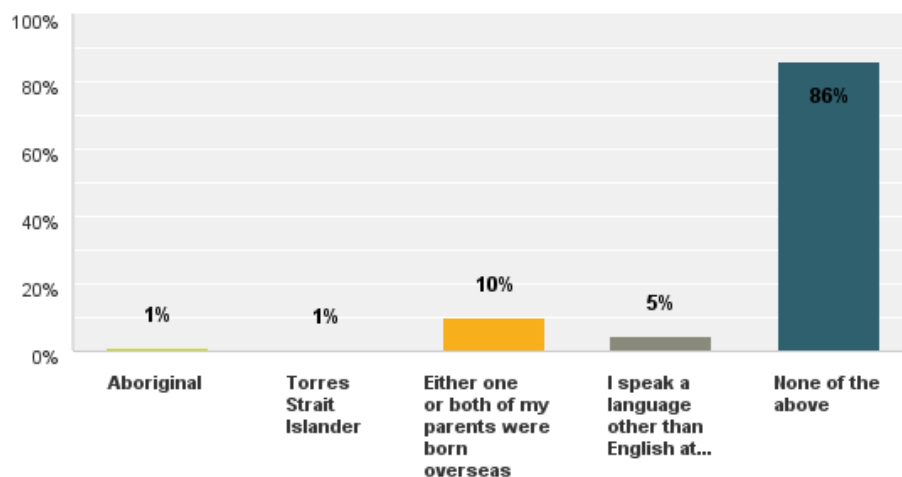
Answered: 310 Skipped: 3



Slightly more males (55%) than females (45%) filled on a youth survey.

### Q3 Cultural background? (tick all that apply)

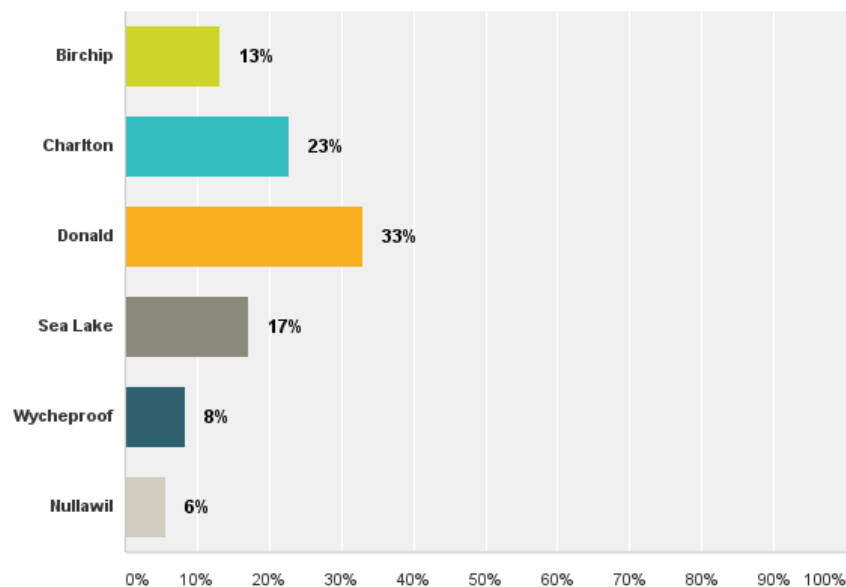
Answered: 305 Skipped: 8



2% of young people who filled in a survey indicated that they were from either Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Decent, 10% indicated that either one or both of their parents were born overseas and 5% of respondents shared that they spoke a language other than English at home.

### Q4 Which town do you live in? (select your closest major centre)

Answered: 303 Skipped: 10

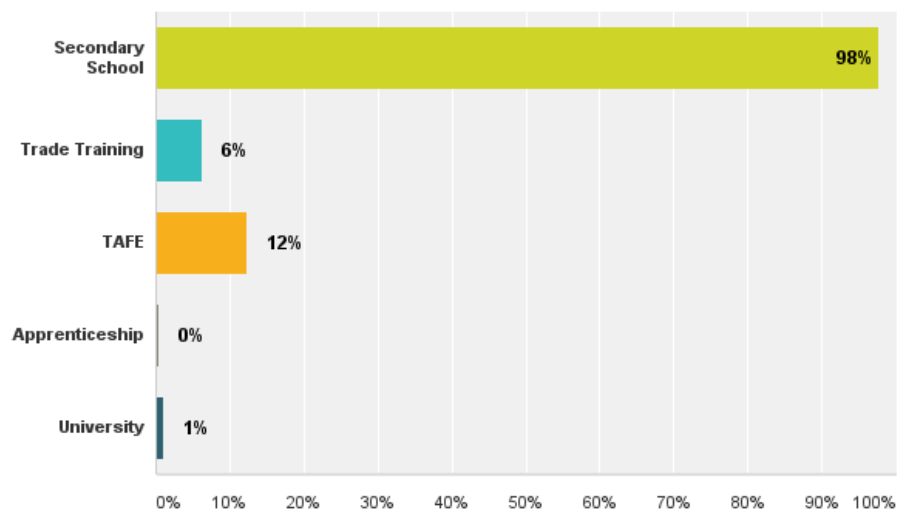


The youth survey heard the voices of young people living in or near the following major centres: Donald (33%), Charlton (23%), Sea Lake (17%), Birchip (13%), Wycheproof (8%) and Nullawil (6%).



### Q5 Are you currently studying? (tick all that apply)

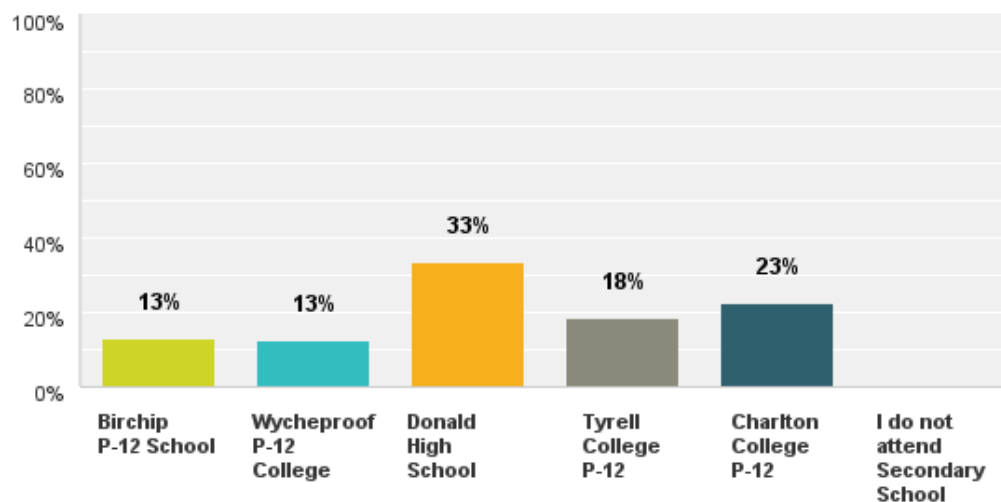
Answered: 301 Skipped: 12



98% of survey respondents were studying solely in secondary school settings, 12% were at TAFE, 6% were engaged in trade training and 1% were at University.

### Q6 What Secondary School do you attend?

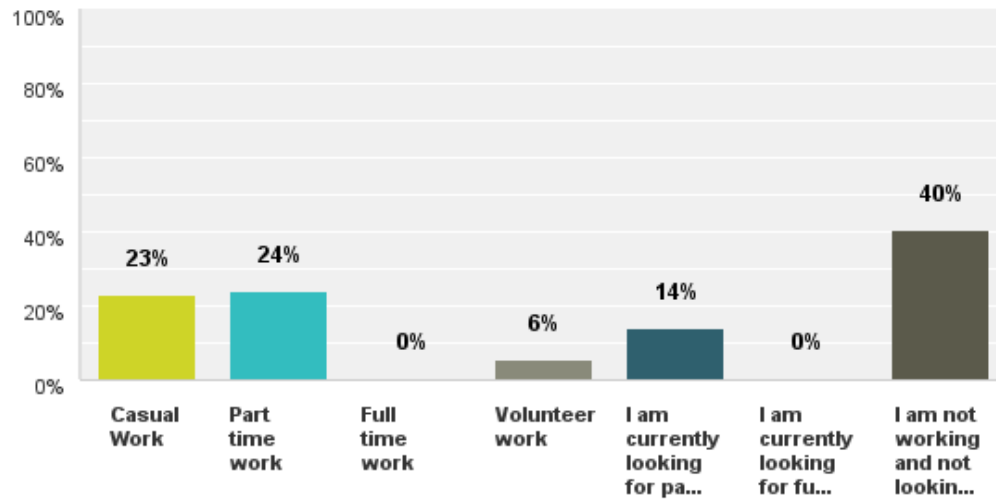
Answered: 306 Skipped: 7



33% of respondents attend Donald High School, 23% are at Charlton College P-12, 18% attend Tyrell College, 13% Birchip P-12 College and the remaining 13% Wycheproof P-12 College.

## Q7 My current work? (tick all that apply)

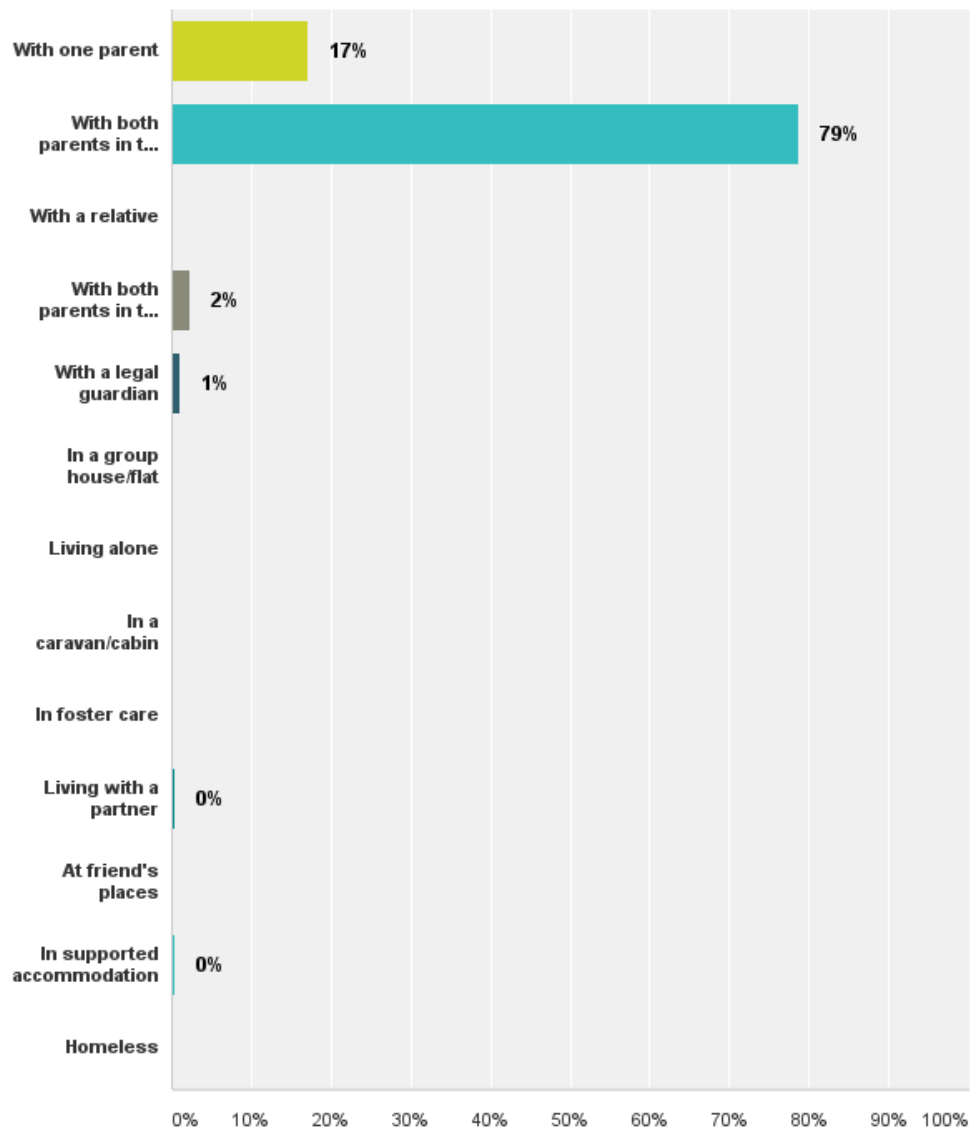
Answered: 298 Skipped: 15



47% of young people who filled in a survey indicated that they were working in casual or part time jobs, 14% were looking for part time work and 40% of young people were not working nor looking for work. 6% of survey respondents were volunteering in their community.

### Q8 Who do you live with?

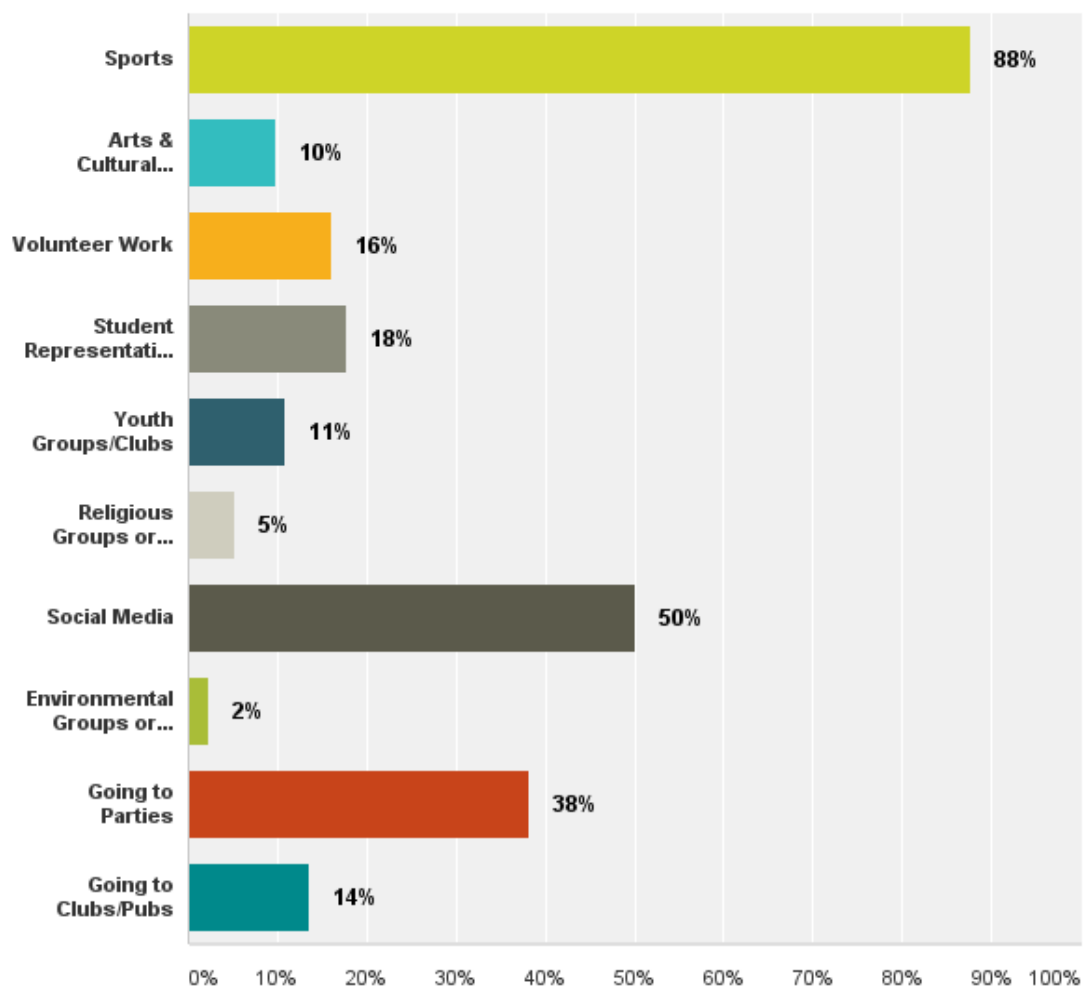
Answered: 302 Skipped: 11



79% of young people who filled in a survey shared that they were living in the same house with both parents, 17% were living with one parent, 2% were living with both parents in two different houses (shared care arrangements) and the remaining 1% were living with a legal guardian.

### Q9 What activities are you involved in during your spare time? (tick all that apply)

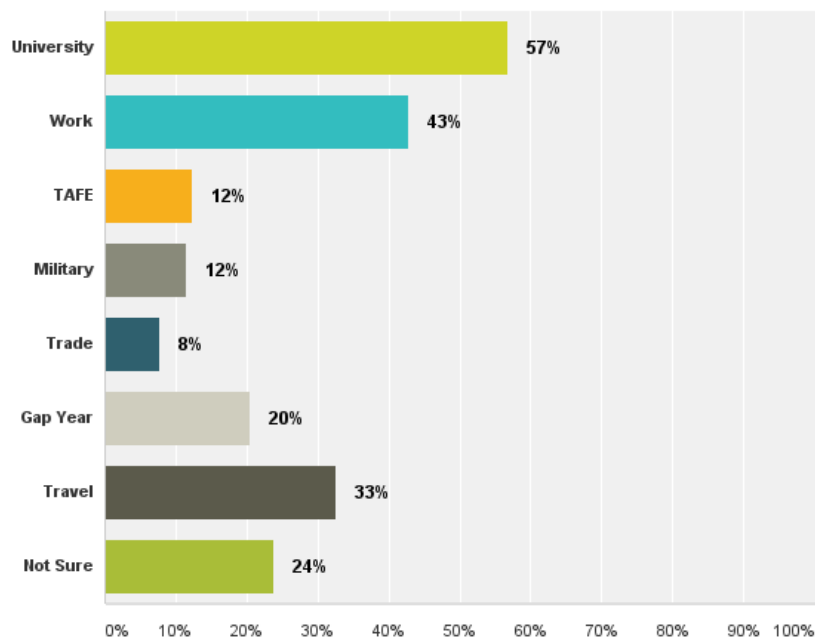
Answered: 293 Skipped: 20



Sport (88%), social media (50%) and going to (38%) were the top three ways that young people who completed a survey spent their free time. Notably 16% of respondents shared that they volunteered in their spare time.

### Q10 What are your plans for the future? (tick all that apply)

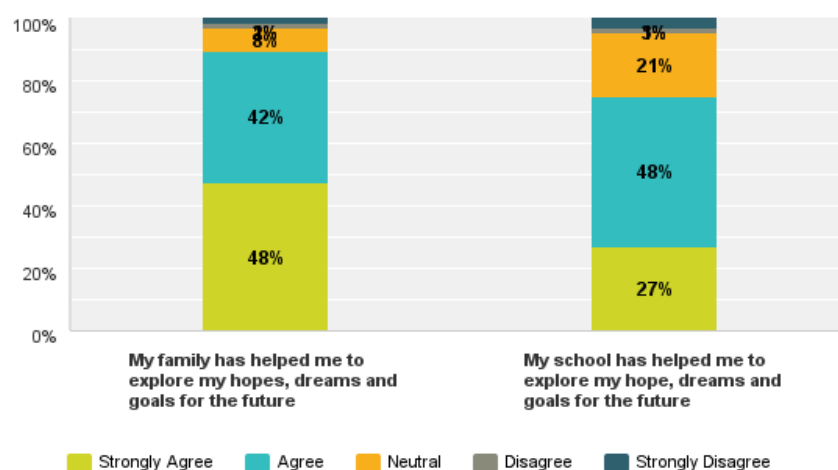
Answered: 294 Skipped: 19



University (57%), work (43%), and travel (33%) were the top three things that survey respondents indicated they had planned for the future. 24% of respondents were still unsure of their future plans.

### Q11 How well have you been supported to explore your hopes, dreams and goals for the future?

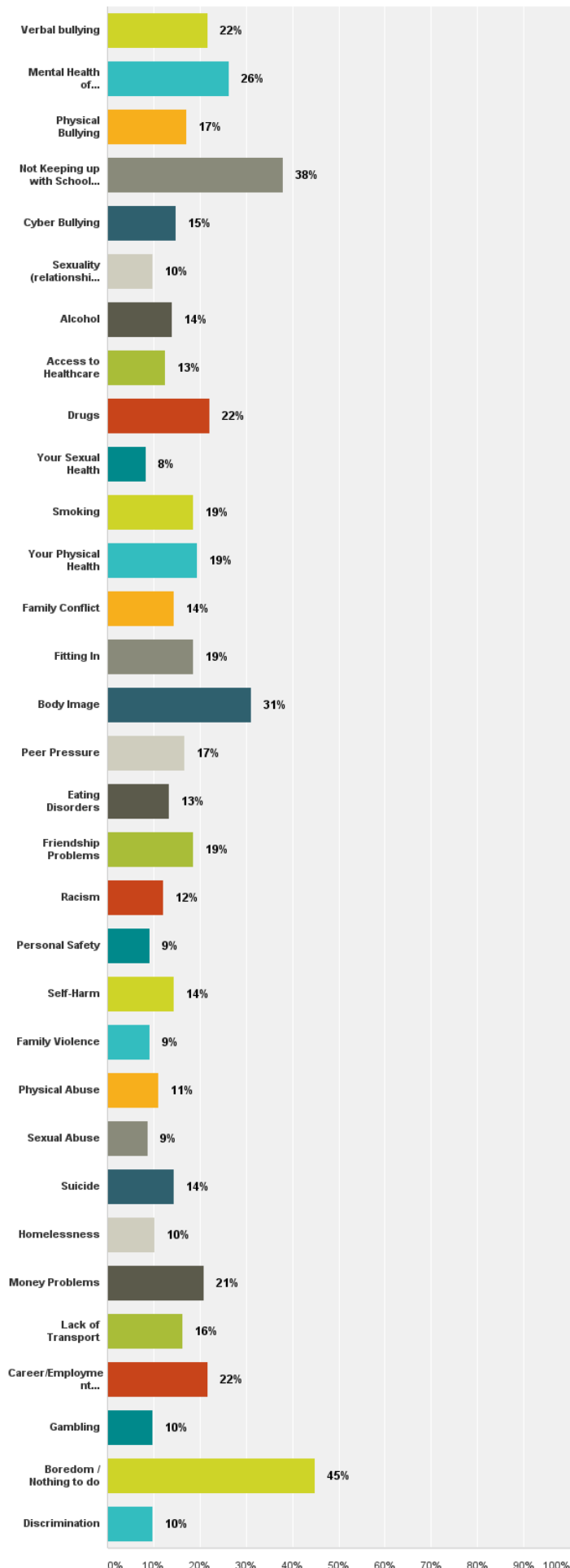
Answered: 303 Skipped: 10



90% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their family had helped them to explore their hopes and dreams for the future and 75% said that school had helped them with this exploration. 21% of young people who filled in a survey were neutral on whether school had helped them.

## Q12 What issues are of concern to you? (tick all that apply)

Answered: 216 Skipped: 97



Students were given a list of issues to choose from and asked to tick the issues that were of concern to them.

### The top five overall issues that were of concern for all respondents were:

1. Boredom/nothing to do (45%)
2. Not keeping up with school work (38%)
3. Body image (31%)
4. Mental health of yourself/others (26%)
5. Verbal bullying, drugs and Career/employment opportunities for the future (22%)

### The top five issues for 12-15 year olds:

1. Boredom/nothing to do (46%)
2. Not keeping up with school work (35%)
3. Drugs (24%)
4. Verbal Bullying (24%)
5. Body Image (24%)

### The top five issues for 16-18 year olds:

1. Body Image (44%)
2. Not keeping up with school work (44%)
3. Boredom/nothing to do (43%)
4. Mental health of yourself/others (36%)
5. Career/employment opportunities for the future (36%)

### The top five issues for females:

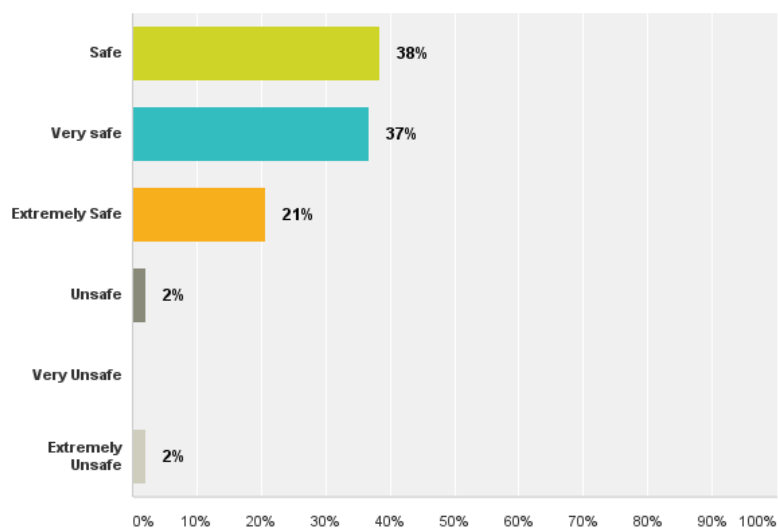
1. Boredom/nothing to do (52%)
2. Not keeping up with school work (42%)
3. Body Image (41%)
4. Mental health of yourself/others (32%)
5. Money problems (30%)

### The top five issues for males:

1. Boredom/nothing to do (38%)
2. Not keeping up with school work (33%)
3. Drugs (25%)
4. Body Image (21%)
5. Mental health of yourself/others (20%)

### Q13 How safe do you feel in your community?

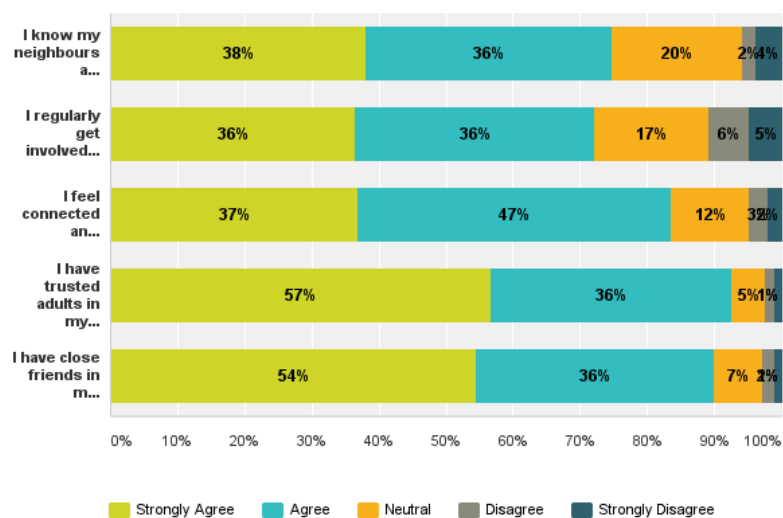
Answered: 299 Skipped: 14



96% of survey respondents shared that they felt safe-extremely safe, safe or very safe. 2% felt unsafe and 2% felt extremely unsafe.

### Q14 How connected do you feel to your community?

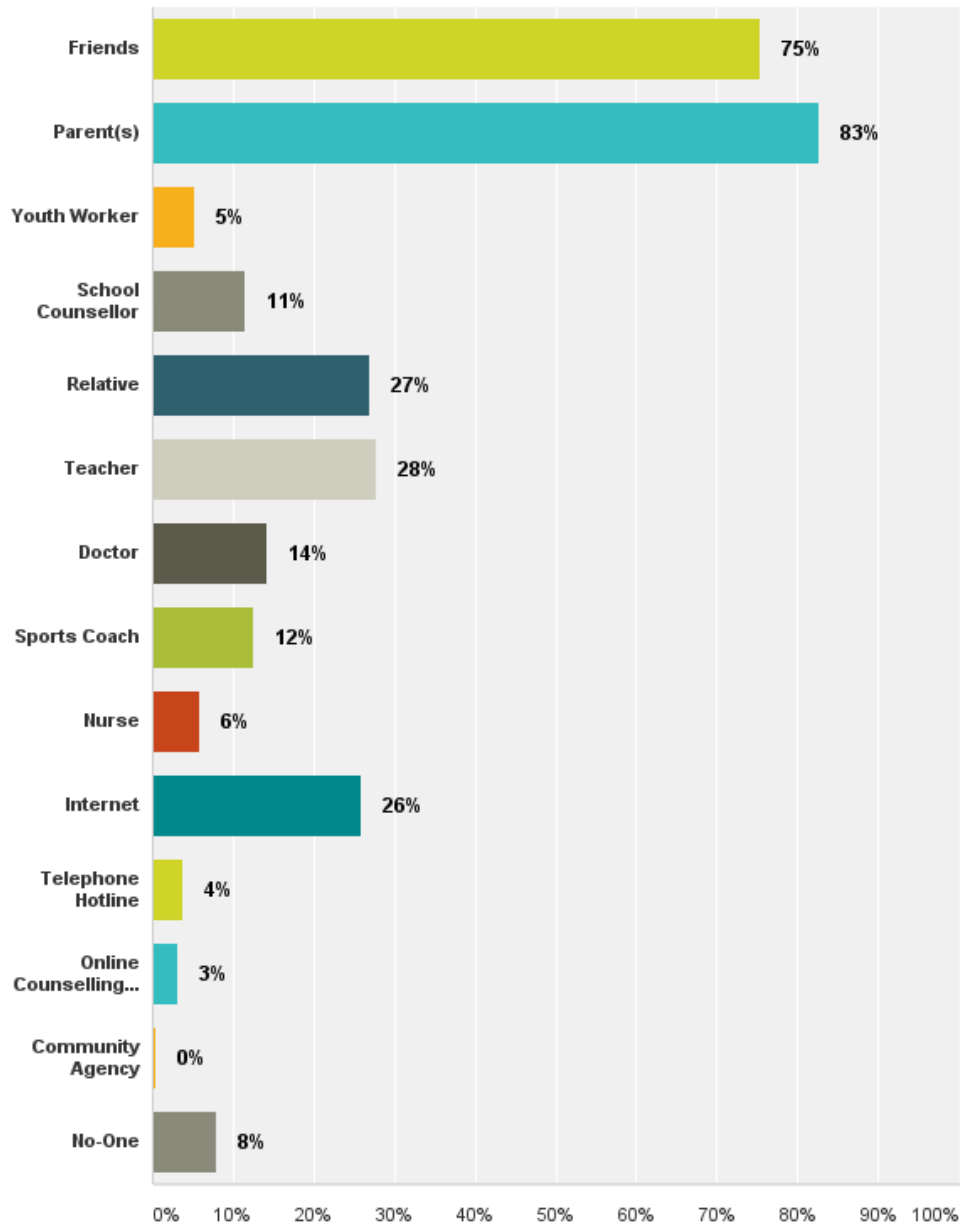
Answered: 298 Skipped: 15



74% of survey respondents knew and got along with their neighbours well, 72% of young people regularly get involved in community activities, 84% of respondents said that they feel connected and welcome at their school, 93% said they have trusted adults in their lives and 90% said they have close friends in their lives that they can rely on.

### Q15 Who would you go to for information, advice and support about your most concerning issue(s)? (tick all that apply)

Answered: 289 Skipped: 24

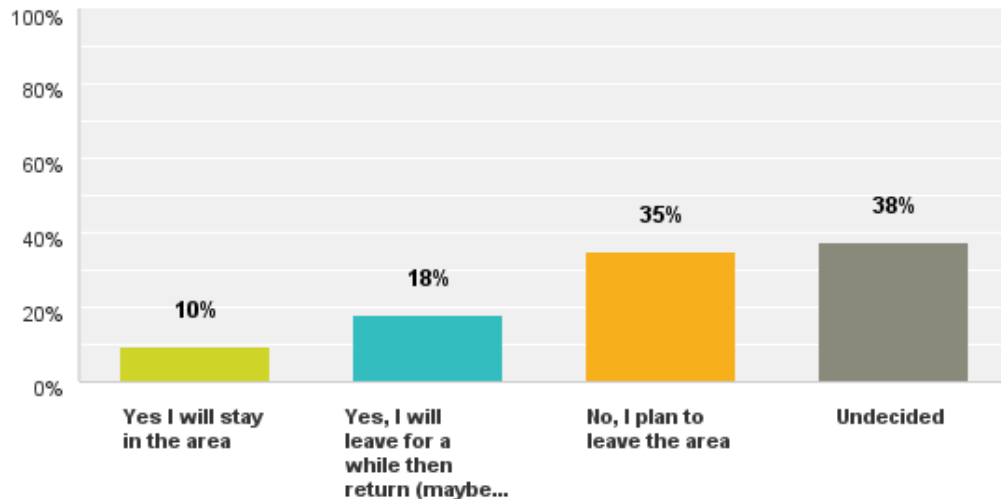


The top five places that survey respondents said they would go to for information, support and advice about their most concerning issue(s) were: parents (83%), friends (75%), teacher (28%), relatives (27%) and the internet (26%).



### Q16 After you finish school do you see yourself staying in the Buloke Shire area?

Answered: 293 Skipped: 20



38% of respondents were unsure whether they would stay in the Buloke Shire area after school, 35% said they planned to leave the area, 18% would leave the area for study, travel or work but then return and the remaining 10% plan to stay in the area.

### Q17 What community issues are important to you?

The top ten community issues of importance to young people who filled in a survey were:

1. Sports activities and clubs
2. The lack of things to do for young people
3. Drug use
4. Community connectedness
5. Limited job and career opportunities for youth
6. Community safety
7. Loss of funding for youth programs/events/activities
8. Disaster management
9. The environment
10. Roads

*“There are not a lot of resources for young people and not a lot of activities for young people to do so we're often bored”.*

*“Sports clubs need to keep going, they are the lifeblood of the community”.*

## **Q18 What are the good things about where you live?**

The top ten things that young people liked about where they lived were:

1. Friendly/caring people
2. Everyone knows everyone
3. Sporting activities and facilities
4. It's safe
5. It's peaceful and quiet
6. Farming
7. Friends
8. Community spirit/connectedness
9. It's a small community
10. Great Schools

*“The freedom of being able to play and walk safely on the streets without being afraid of anything”.*

*“Country livin' and the wide open spaces as opposed to the horrible city conditions”.*

*“Everyone is welcoming. They are nice to everyone and they include everyone too”.*

*“It's quiet and has a great atmosphere. Everyone is friends and I like knowing everyone in my town”.*

## **Q18 What don't you like about where you live?**

The top ten things that young people didn't like about where they live were:

1. A lack of things to do for young people
2. Isolation
3. Lack of shopping
4. Limited opportunities
5. Poor internet
6. Loss of youth funding
7. Lack of arts/cultural activities
8. Drought
9. Ferals
10. Lack of services

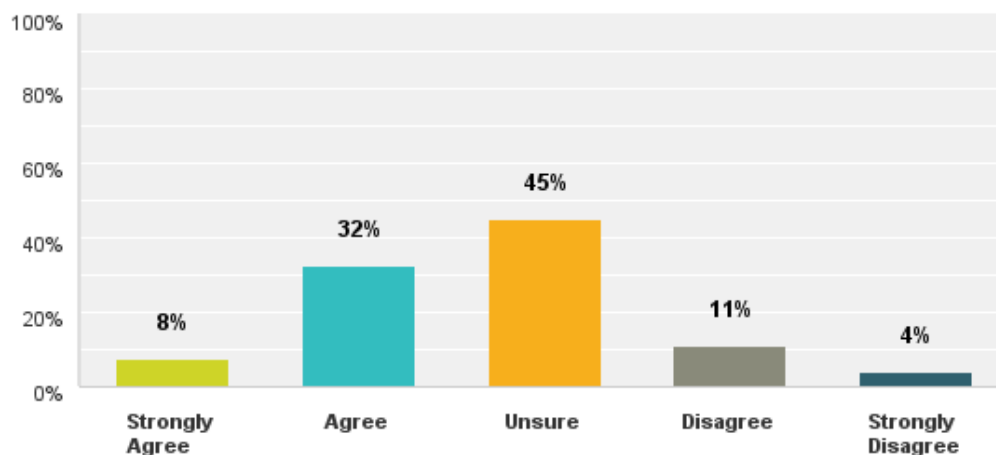
*“I don't like how there isn't really much to do around here all we really do is just stay home or go to someone's house but I would think of heaps more things to do”.*

*“There are not many places to go for kids, the park is boring. We have to go to Swan Hill or Bendigo a lot to get what we need”.*

*“There are limited medical facilities like physio, speech, community health areas, which mean that people are required to travel longer distances”.*

## Q20 Young people's voices and opinions are heard in my community?

Answered: 288 Skipped: 25



45% of young people surveyed were unsure if young people's voices and opinions are heard in their community, 40% either agreed or strongly agreed and 15% disagreed or strongly disagreed that young people's voices are heard in their community.

## Q21 If you could do one thing to improve things for young people where you live what would it be?

1. Offer more activities and events for young people
2. Provide more job opportunities for youth
3. Infrastructure (e.g. skate park, pools, diving board, community gym, motor bike tracks)
4. Build young people's leadership skills
5. Youth specific space
6. Better youth supports for those that need it
7. Create more youth groups/clubs
8. Freezas
9. A range of activities for young people other than sport
10. Tackle drugs

*"To encourage young people to be more involve in the community, i.e. lions club, rotary club, EWHS, etc. Not just letting the older generation do the work, if not these communities and its events will slowly die off".*

*"Introduce a variety of activities (e.g. clubs) for after school activities, like the Birchip Youth Centre-it could be run by young people".*

*"Run programs and activities for the young people of the community to keep them entertained and busy".*

## Youth Focus Group Results

### Buloke Shire Council- Children & Youth Strategy Focus Group SEA LAKE

2 teachers prior to the session commencing

21 students attending the focus group

#### TEACHER COMMENTS

Additional important services include:

- Baudinet Centre (delivering counselling services out of the Sea Lake Hospital)
- MFC Chances for Children
- The cohort of youth from Culgoa Berri is the biggest bus run into Tyrrell College, 80% of all students would arrive by bus.
- There is a lack of activities other than sports based
- Low socio-economic school, try to tap into the under-represented schools resources a lot
- Giving children opportunities is difficult, for e.g. to hire a 25 seat bus to take the children to Melbourne and back costs \$3,500
- NHH is good but needs more activities and services for young people
- MMLLEN are really improving, we were forgotten for a while.

#### Q1. What do you like about where you live?

- Free pool
- We know everyone
- There is some green grass
- Clubs such as tennis, footy, netball
- We don't have to travel too far to play these sports
- Green Lake – when it has water in it
- School
- Ag programme at school
- VCAL programmes (personal development programme – running canteen)

#### Q2. Is there anything that you don't like about where you live?

- Distance to opportunities
- The potential football clubs and league mergers. This raises several concerns including the increased cost of participation in sports for families because of the greater distances to travel to compete. A second concern is that as clubs amalgamate and increase the number of potential players some young people will no longer be 'picked' to play. Young people playing in small clubs now who always 'get a run' will be left sitting on the bench. Also in smaller clubs there is more opportunity for a leadership role in the running of the club for young people, this declines as the clubs increase in size through amalgamation.
- Want the diving board back at the pool
- All activities are sports focussed there's nothing to do if you're not into sport
- There is more to do for boys than girls
- No 'hang out point' – no FREEZA anymore, no socials (these were important because they also helped fundraise as well)
- Currently young people are hanging out: at a mates house, down the street, at Tyrrell College homework club (wed and Thurs afternoons)

**Q3. What would you say are the top three issue of concern for young people where you live?**

- Lack of jobs
- Distance required to travel for higher education including TAFE and Uni
- Loss of Sea Lake Youth Group – must set date to re-establish group
- Those who can afford it go to boarding school
- Shops are closing in the small communities like Berriwillock and Nandaly
- Time spent travelling on bus to school etc.

**Q4. If you could do one thing to improve things for young people living in Buloke Shire what would you do?**

- Youth Space – Re-open Thunder Alley, youth space must be in a central location ✓✓✓
- More jobs
- Water in Green Lake
- More shops
- More community events like the Mallee Rally (used to have NUTS – Night Under the Stars for NYE, Berri Family Fun day at Easter)

## **Buloke Shire Council- Children & Youth Strategy Focus Group BIRCHIP P-12 College Leadership Group**

**Monday 27<sup>th</sup> April 2015**

### **Q1. What do you like about where you live?**

- People
- Sporting community
- School, good education
- Businesses are running, no empty shops
- No violence / crime
- Health services / hospital
- Lake
- NHH offers youth space, NHH youth group meets fortnightly, youth room needs to be bigger, have more activities, maybe musical instruments (currently has Xbox, pool table, table tennis, could add pinball machines. Used by boys but not really used by girls atm. considering giving a key to youth members so it can be opened after hours more.

### **Q2. Is there anything that you don't like about where you live?**

- Distance from major centres
- Limited shopping, can't get some basic needs (like sheets),
- No major events
- Roads (quality)
- Small friendship groups, limited choice of friends to support difference
- Not much to do if you don't like sports (other than skate park and video games)
- Lack of some services for e.g. ambulances take 1 hour to arrive)

### **Q3. What would you say are the top three issue of concern for young people where you live?**

- School stress especially at year 12 level
- Lack of local employment options
- People leaving for the city (i.e. trades, uni)
- Unis include Melbourne, Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo
- Nothing for under 18s to do (especially during summer)
- Lack of mental health services
- Nothing big really, bad things don't really happen here like drugs and stuff

### **Q4. If you could do one thing to improve things for young people living in Buloke Shire what would you do?**

- More sports choices
- More local health services
- More to do – like movies
- After school activities, music, environmental groups, scouts
- More mental health services (based at hospital)
- More food choices
- More jobs
- More inter community events so you can expand friendship groups
- Cost of living is quite high
- Indoor heated pool

- More weekend events especially in summer when there is no football / netball
- More holiday events (esp. at the Lake)
  
- Most of school leadership time would be spent on student welfare issues. This is our biggest need – to have social worker/psych in the school setting 2 days per week. Departmental provided services not enough. Currently have private service coming in from East Wimmera Health for 1 student with aggression issues.

## **Buloke Shire Council- Children & Youth Strategy Focus Group Donald High School**

### **Q1. What do you like about where you live?**

- Everyone knows everyone
- Plenty of playgrounds
- Good sports ovals/sports facilities
- Lots of sporting opportunities
- Good school

### **Q2. Is there anything that you don't like about where you live?**

- Isolation
- Limited shopping
- Lack of things to do
- Medical care is lacking
- Not much diversity of choices with activities

### **Q3. What would you say are the top three issue of concern for young people where you live?**

- Boredom
- Fitting in
- Lack of employment opportunities
- Underage drinking (although this seems to be controlled and mostly happens in houses)
- Lack of transport- transport options just aren't frequent enough

### **Q4. If you could do one thing to improve things for young people living in Buloke Shire what would you do?**

- Things to do other than sport e.g. chess clubs etc.
- A community gym
- More arts and culture activities
- More employment opportunities for young people



## **Buloke Shire Council- Children & Youth Strategy Focus Group Wycheproof P-12 College**

### **Q1. What do you like about where you live?**

- Lots of space
- Great sporting facilities
- You know everyone
- Good range of local businesses
- Youth groups

### **Q2. Is there anything that you don't like about where you live?**

- Limited choices re: clothes shopping
- Grocery shopping is expensive
- Not much to do
- It's so isolated (geographically)

### **Q3. What would you say are the top three issue of concern for young people where you live?**

- Boredom
- Drugs- this is seen more to be a problem with older aged 18-25 year olds
- Alcohol- a lot of young underage drinkers
- Drinking culture
- Population decline
- Farms are getting bigger so less families living in the area
- Safety- don't feel safe walking home at night

### **Q4. If you could do one thing to improve things for young people living in Buloke Shire what would you do?**

- Increase the population
- Improve businesses
- Tackle boredom
- Diving board at pool and fix up change rooms
- A youth space
- Movie nights
- Regular Youth Freeza events
- Soccer field

## **Buloke Shire Council- Children & Youth Strategy Focus Group Charlton College**

### **Q1. What do you like about where you live?**

- Good opportunities for employment
- Sporting choices
- No drug issues
- Nice small school and VCE classes mean plenty of one to one time with teachers
- Everyone knows everyone
- No bullying
- Good community events
- Footy, netball, hockey are very social and friendships are built

### **Q2. Is there anything that you don't like about where you live?**

- Being isolated from shopping
- Politics and gossip
- Once you get a name it sticks with you
- Everybody knows your business

### **Q3. What would you say are the top three issue of concern for young people where you live?**

- Boredom
- Future opportunities
- Transport
- Young people who need support aren't getting it when they need it
- Swearing and bullying in younger age groups
- The school is very University focussed
- No youth group

### **Q4. If you could do one thing to improve things for young people living in Buloke Shire what would you do?**

- More VCAL and work placement options
- Promote options other than Uni to young people
- Need more things for young people to do because boredom is a problem
- Activity days for young people

## Community Focus Group Results

### Charlton Community Focus Group

#### MEYP & Children & Youth Strategy Consultation Summary

**Q1. What do you think helps to make Buloke Shire a positive place for children and young people?**

- Great range of sporting activities
- Charlton is a friendly community
- Improved facilities e.g. preschool and hospital
- Lots of support for the preschool
- The community itself is a positive- there are lots of family supports
- The playgroup here is a positive- shares use of preschool building

**Q2. As a parent/community members what are the issues of concern that you notice for children and young people aged birth-18 years (in your community and across the Buloke Shire)?**

- Access to specialists e.g. speech pathologists is difficult- parents often have to travel long distances for very short appointments
- The preschool field officer system doesn't work well- Charlton is often the last stop when they visit so it gets very short visits and sometimes children have already gone home for the day before the field officer arrives.
- 15 hours of preschool UAECE is uncertain for next year- unsure if government will fund this.
- The funding model for rural preschools puts lots of pressure on small communities to fundraise when student number are down.
- Ageing preschool buildings across the Shire

**Q3. What do you think is needed in your community (and across Buloke Shire) to support better outcomes for children aged birth-8 years and their families?**

- Speech pathologists that visit children in rural areas- maybe a rural specific program/model is needed?
- More GP care- common to require a 7-10 day wait to see a GP locally. Parents sometimes take children to Bendigo emergency dep't.
- Access to specialists

**Q4. What do you think is needed in your community (and across Buloke Shire) to support better outcomes for children and young people aged 9-18 years and their families?**

- Access to quality specialists to work with young people e.g. counsellors and psychologists

## Wycheproof Community Focus Group MEYP & Children & Youth Strategy Consultation Summary

### Q1. What do you think helps to make Buloke Shire a positive place for children and young people?

- It's easy to get around- kids can walk or ride to sport
- Children have more freedom in the country
- It's a dynamic upbringing with slightly different values
- Kids can do more than one sport
- Great facilities: Kinders, schools, sports facilities
- It is harder for kids to slip through the cracks as everyone knows everyone

***"There is a strong sense of belonging in Wycheproof".***

- Leadership opportunities for young people- e.g. kids can lead training
- Good links with Universities

### Q2. As a parent/community members what are the issues of concern that you notice for children and young people aged birth-18 years (in your community and across the Buloke Shire)?

- Population decline means there are less resources- the preschool will have very low numbers next year (3) and funding models make preschool difficult to run when numbers are small.
- Childcare is unaffordable as the funding model dictates that centre based long day care must be offered 8 hrs a day for 5 hrs a week or it is not eligible for childcare rebate. The community doesn't have a need for 5 days a week.
- Lack of employment opportunities for parents and for young people.
- Finding work placement for students is difficult
- Young people don't have as much access to services and supports as they should have.
- Poverty is a concern- it is difficult for families to break out of this cycle as there are very limited employment options.
- No one is moving to the area because there aren't any job opportunities
- The playgroup has folded in Wycheproof due to a lack of numbers

### Q3. What do you think is needed in your community (and across Buloke Shire) to support better outcomes for children aged birth-8 years and their families?

- A funding model that fits with rural preschools
- Childcare rebate for centre based care that meets the needs of rural areas (that isn't 5 days a week)
- Playgroup options for parents
- A focus on literacy issues- perhaps a shake, rattle and roll program (the school would be happy to partner)

***"We need more money- we can't work off the same model that large cities and town's use- we need to advocate for a different funding model for rural Councils, preschools and childcare centres".***

**Q4. What do you think is needed in your community (and across Buloke Shire) to support better outcomes for children and young people aged 9-18 years and their families?**

- A youth space
- We need more activities/options for young people who aren't sports orientated
- Employment options for young people
- Work placement options for school students- employers need encouragement
- More arts/culture activities e.g. open mic night

## Buloke Shire Council Community Focus Group-Birchip

Monday 27<sup>th</sup> April 5pm

12 adults

6 children

### **What do you think helps to make the Buloke Shire a positive place for children and young people?**

- Schooling
- People / community members support families
- Safe environment
- Sporting clubs
- Small class sizes, teacher has close contact with students, great intervention and liaison
- Safe, freedom and safety
- Low cost of being involved in the community
- There are different opportunities, for example clubs bring movie nights to town
- There are great opportunities for our children and young people to develop into young adults (i.e. the SRC, children as coaches etc)
- As adults we know all children and parents are kept informed (this can be a negative too – lack of anonymity)

### **As a parent/community member what are the issues of concern that you notice for children and young people aged birth-18 years (in your community and across Buloke Shire)?**

- Drugs are a concern (these are already causes big issues in Wyche and St Arnaud, they come along the Calder to small rural communities)
- Access to mental health services and stigma
- Underage drinking and excessive drinking culture
- Lack of health service expertise specific to children, more geared towards aged care
- Ambulatory care is a 1 hour wait
- A family could not live in Birchip if they had a child who required constant medical support / attention
- Likewise for highly talented children, you need to relocate to give the best opportunity
- All extra-curricular activities are very sports focussed, lack of opportunity for young people beyond this. Need to drive to Horsham for singing lessons for e.g.
- Some coaches (of sport) may lack the necessary training / skills to coach (as volunteers)
- Anyone different can feel very isolated (gay etc)
- Lack of public transport, even so young people could do a day trip to Bendigo
- Need indoor heated pool to provide year round swimming lessons
- Lack of childcare, need for high quality early childhood staff
- Lack of Early Years opportunities for e.g. developmental programs
- 1 FDC provider (Cheree)
- NEED Childcare for 24 children approximately for 2-3 days per week (twice the level of need indicated by Jenny at Kindergarten)
- Important for allowing mothers to return to work
- Thos present OK with integrated childcare / kindergarten
- 7 of the 12 students in yr 12 have returned to Birchip to live after travelling away. He was motivated to do this because there was a good friends network and professional services, Birchip having a pop boom in that young age cohort ATM
- Shake Rattle and Read occurs in the Birchip P-12 Library weekly – typically 16 parents and 22 children

**What do you think is needed in your community (and across Buloke Shire) to support better outcomes for children and young people aged 9-18 years and their families?**

- Arts programs
- Football / netball / hockey is current sports
- School based after school care, keep stadium open for longer
- No youth development aspect of Council – this is a huge loss
- Buloke Shire Council don't value children and young people
- Vulnerability is creeping in
- Advocacy and connecting of services could be done better by Buloke Shire Council
- Need to focus on nurturing youth, building resilience
- We do aged care well, need to do youth 'care' well
- There needs to be more opportunity for young people to be involved in governance, there used to be the Birchip Shire Youth Councillors (pre – amalgamation)
- Loss of FREEZA
- Easter egg hunt was awesome
- RAMPAGE – good opportunity for young people to learn and test making good decisions
- Give youth the opportunity to see the world, trips to Melbourne etc (currently costs \$2000 to hire private bus and driver to do a trip to Melbourne from Birchip)

**FINAL COMMENTS**

- Youth are our strength, we need to support them so they want to stay / return
- Needs to be more professional development opportunities for family day carers so this childcare option is high quality
- Pop growth is critical, drought looms
- John R notes: population growth at Birchip P-12 between 1999 (193 students) and 2014 (240 students)
- Important to attract and maintain expertise (esp. nursing) and visiting services
- Tapping into hidden expertise already in the community
- Clear direct about where to go for what services (i.e. 'I didn't even know we had a visiting podiatry service, I had been driving to Warracknabeal')
- Childcare must be high quality and structured
- Mental health element of childcare "I'm a better working mother than a stay at home mother"
- Birchip B&S is great at donating to local services
- Multipurpose use of facilities is critical

## **Buloke Shire Council Community Focus Group - DONALD**

### **PRESENT:**

Pam (teacher/wellbeing coordinator, Donald High School)

Annette (teacher, St Mary's Primary School)

Mark (Community Development, Buloke Shire Council)

Leo Tellefson (Councillor, Buloke Shire Council)

John Hicks (CEO, Buloke Shire Council)

### **What do you think helps to make the Buloke Shire a positive place for children and young people?**

- Sport, open spaces
- P-12 Colleges are a strength
- High quality schools
- Local businesses are employing disengaged youth, giving them a second chance. One business started off doing this and others have followed
- The community does really care and want to support families with additional needs / experiencing risk / vulnerability but "sometimes we don't know how". Bridges training was again raised and discussed at this point. Lots of interest from CEO re this possibility for all of staff.
- Social inclusion is a strong ethic of the community
- Increase in different cultures is seen as a positive to the community

### **As a parent/community member what are the issues of concern that you notice for children and young people aged birth-18 years (in your community and across BulokeShire)?**

- Slack parenting
- Geographically isolated communities, there is no consistent service area or providers so mapping need becomes very dispersed
- Lack of drug and alcohol rehab services
- Mental health services
- Barry McKenzie document (PCP mental health document is a great resources)
- Mark (CD) is developing Principals meetings to increase engagement with schools and linkages
- Significant increase of lower socio-economic families into the community, particularly into Berriwillock, Watchem etc
- Leo T is on the East Wimmera Health Board
- Lack of extra-curricular activities
- Needs to be more of a relationship between all schools and especially in communities where there is more than 1 school (i.e. Donald has 3 schools)
- Need advocacy to the Education Department
- Need more training into our communities to assist with managing come change – Bridges out of Poverty
- Grant Doxey (social worker) is needing to intervene in family violence where as this should be a police role



**What do you think is needed in your community (and across Buloke Shire) to support better outcomes for children and young people aged 9-18 years and their families?**

- Parent engagement in the schools seems to really stop at secondary
- Need advice, information on where to go when you need help
- There is more support for men now than there used to be

***“In the most recent Council budget it was the very young, young and very old who suffered the most”.***

- Have to get services back into town for our youth and teens
- Buloke Shire Council needs to play a strong advocacy and planning role
- Childcare is critical
- Need to break down barriers so people feel they can ask for help
- Services need both integration and flexibility to provide a for a healthy society
- Structures are needed to ensure there are always people available to ‘step-in’ when needed
- Look at like communities and tailor to meet the needs of Buloke communities
- Hobsons Bay Council – a very welcoming community, sharing of knowledge between HBC and Buloke Shire Council now exists – “All the great things open to all of the people”.

## Buloke Shire Council Community Focus Group SEA LAKE

Participants: 1 (2 additional people have fed into this by phone and email)

### **What do you think helps to make the Buloke Shire a positive place for children and young people?**

- It's safe
- Basic services are present: i.e. GP, Maternal and Child Health, Preschool, schools etc
- More significant health needs must go to Mildura or Bendigo
- Dr Lowry is important

### **As a parent/community member what are the issues of concern that you notice for children and young people aged birth-18 years (in your community and across Buloke Shire)?**

- There is not enough for especially young people to do
- There is an in between age at around 10 yrs for which there is very little to do
- Age cohorts are very small, for example only 3 10yo girls in Sea Lake
- It is critical that the community maintains its existing level of servicing
- Nothing for youth to do

### **What do you think is needed in your community (and across Buloke Shire) to support better outcomes for children and young people aged 9-18 years and their families?**

- Need to create a youth space again, this used to be Thunder Alley. Where can young people go between school and football/netball training? They need a safe place that is accessible to the street and allows adults to be nearby for support if needed.

## Service Provider Results

Service providers working with or planning for children and young people aged 9-18 years of age were invited to contribute towards the Children and Youth Strategy through a focus group and via a survey.

There were 15 service providers who attended the focus group in Donald, 16 providers participated in the Sea Lake focus group and 47 service providers completed a survey.

### Service Provider Focus Group Results-Donald

(15 present): Barry McKenzie (NCLLEN), Jim Hirst (SFYS), Jessie Holmes (Buloke Shire Council), Bill Keane (Buloke Shire Council), Lisa Gillard (Playgroup Vic), Paula Clark (East Wimmera Library), Claire Lex & Jenny Birch (Donald Preschool), Rachel Weaver (MFC), Jo Dacey (DHS Child Protection), Paul (Buloke Shire Council), Jacinta Miller (School Nurse), Jesse Hinch (Wimmera Uniting Care), Bob Roberts (Friend & Neighbours Donald)

#### **Q1. What do you think helps to make the Buloke Shire a positive place for children and young people?**

- Good school newsletters and town based newsletters
- The parks are well maintained and inviting
- Dedicated schools
- The care in the community- people care for neighbours and look out for each other
- Schools and Kinders are well resourced
- Stable numbers across primary schools- good classroom sizes
- A healthy environment: fresh air, good weather and plenty of space
- It's a good place to raise a family
- Sporting facilities are good
- There are lots of sporting activities for children and young people
- Sports are well organised
- There are few young people so it is easy to participate in sport, in a more competitive environment this might not be the case
- A safe environment
- A good range of Playgroups, MOPS, Kinder gym
- Playgroups connect children and families to one another
- Shake, rattle and read in Birchip
- The children's centre in Donald is a wonderful achievement
- Positive press for YP- often profiles the achievements of young people in Buloke Shire- this puts a positive spin on young people

**Q2. What are the issues of concern that you notice for children and young people aged birth-18 years (in your community and across Buloke Shire)?**

- Not enough non-sport activities
- Arts activities are lacking
- There is not enough specialised support for children with additional needs- parents are traveling every week to get the therapy that they need.
- Reduced services for families e.g. in office only appointments- services are stretched so outreach is difficult
- There is no common community of interest in the Buloke Shire and it is in the middle of many boundaries- this makes things very confusing
- Very few services are located in Buloke Shire- many visiting services so it is hard to know what is available and it is hard for service providers to build relationships with these service providers
- Uncertainty of what services visit Buloke when
- A changing population in Buloke- there are more families moving here with complex needs and often these families lack their own family supports
- Given the changing population many of these families are harder to engage in the community- e.g. they don't often volunteer, rather they drop and run
- There are a greater number of transient families that will stay for a couple of years and then drop n run. These families are difficult to engage in the community. Social inclusion is difficult when there is a high turnover of families
- Young people aren't taking over farms
- Trauma can be a barrier to community participation- often these families don't know how to engage

**Q3. Are there any gaps in the service system that you feel needs addressing?**

- Need more support for Mental Health- for parents and young people
- Mental health support for young people can be infrequent- once a month, this isn't enough- these young people need more regular support
- Mental health emergencies are very difficult- can be hard to even get police involvement as they are stretched. YP can't be put in cells so this often means long drives to Melbourne.
- Police can sometimes sit in health care facilities for hours when someone is having a mental health crisis
- Student Support Service Officers (SSO's) e.g. Social Worker, Speech Pathology, Psychologists are stretched and it is hard to access these services
- There are many visiting services
- Not enough literacy support for children who are struggling
- Difficult to access paediatricians- involves travelling
- Health services in Buloke seem to be more focussed on service provision for the elderly
- Services are doing less outreach to families
- Sea Lake, Donald and Charlton don't have any dedicated youth spaces
- Communication between government departments and services can be difficult- it is hard to know who does what.

- There are around 22 middle teen young people who are disengaged, not attending school and not really supported
- No one is really working with disengaged young people since Youth Connections finished up
- All drug and alcohol services are based outside of the shire
- Getting young people to the FLO campus in Charlton can be difficult
- Schools and services are not working together as well as they could- some shared support plans are needed. This is endorsed by DEET but many principals don't seem to be aware or involved in shared support plans.

**Q4. What do you think is needed in your community (and across Buloke Shire) to support better outcomes for children and young people aged 9-18 years and their families?**

- Promote more sport- keep kids occupied
- More arts and culture activities are needed
- Explore schools as hubs concept
- Need low cost and no cost options for activities for young people as cost can be a big barrier to participation for some families

***"It can be hard for farming families to find money during dry times; it's not just families from lower socio-economic backgrounds who are struggling".***

**Q5. If you could prioritise one thing what would that be?**

- Explore the use of technology e.g. tele health
- More activities for young people
- Offer flexible services that respond to community needs
- Specialised mental health support for children and young people who have experienced trauma
- Social inclusion- "We need an attitudinal change from community- we need to be more socially inclusive- we should have champions in each town".
- Better engagement of parents of children with complex needs
- Improved library services- partnering could help this
- A Children, Youth & Family Services Network
- Child and adolescent trauma counselling
- Lift the aspirations of young people
- Build protective factors for children (outside of school)
- Encourage team sports

## Service Provider Focus Group Results-Sea Lake

Present: 14 Tyrrell College staff members including school nurse and wellbeing

Patrice Rickard (Maternal and Child Health) and Bron Alday (Kindergarten)

TOTAL 16

### Q1. What do you think helps to make the Buloke Shire a positive place for children and young people?

- Community safety
- Sport especially football and netball because it involves the whole family (can be a negative as well)
- Great opportunity for intergenerational mixing
- Takes a village to raise a child
- “Every child has 40 sets of parents” – they report on good and bad behaviour (anonymity / privacy is an issue as well)
- There is shared care of community assets including infrastructure and people
- Minimal drug issues
- Estimate that 70% of kids would volunteer at some level
- Knowing family backgrounds means you can support children and youth more holistically, wouldn’t get that knowledge in larger centres
- Lots of space, large backyards etc.
- “Kids can get dirty”
- Sense of community
- Parents tend to have closer involvement in their child’s education, they are real stakeholders
- Great communication between the 3 Sea Lake schools (St Mary’s, Tyrrell and Preschool)
- School nurse is a positive
- Transition happens both formally and informally (i.e. at the footy, in IGA)

### Q2. What are the issues of concern that you notice for children and young people aged birth-18 years (in your community and across Buloke Shire)?

- Lack of privacy
- Difficult for students who are outsider / different
- If you’re not into sport you can be very isolated
- Isolation is also an issue for professionals
- Sea Lake has lost a lot of professionals over the past 15 years
- Lack of facilities
- Lack of events
- Poor internet access / service
- Aged care focus takes precedence of the child / youth health focus
- Have to travel for services – cost and distance is a barrier
- Bus travel is hugely expensive, makes opportunities for children and young people difficult
- Public transport
- Resources are limited – professional educational etc.
- Volunteers are burning out but now we need to take on extra to auspice youth group / activities because Buloke Shire Council won’t
- Cost of maintaining community physical buildings
- Aesthetics of the community – “community has seen better days” – this rubs off and everyone ends of feeling like they have seen better days too

- Parents can have limited experience, which makes it difficult for them to have the skills or be able to encourage / support their children
- Green Lake is dry – Green Lake is so important for families, especially when times are tough. Look at Hopetoun, lots of grey nomads are spending money there because the lake is full and a good camping spot
- Cost of water for parks and ovals – why is Berri green and Sea Lake dry – Council prioritising
- Need to constantly be engaging with advocating to local gov't to be heard / remembered
- 20-30 Sea Lake kids walk to school the rest of the population comes by bus – travel and time spent travelling is huge for some children / youth
- Sea Lake feels separate to the rest of the Shire

**Q3. Are there any gaps in the service system that you feel needs addressing?**

- “Bring back the bloody diving boards – give our young people the chance to take some safe risks”
- Childcare x 5 days / week
- Family Day Care in Sea Lake is stand-alone (not overarching provider would take them on, a few were invited including Swan Hill Rural City Council), so only now are families using this service eligible to apply for the Child Care Rebate.
- No Centrelink agency
- No Shire office / representation / even just 1 day / fortnight... boat licences, everything requires you to go out of town.
- Would be great if our Neighbourhood House could be ‘beefed up’ offer more services like the Wycheproof resource Centre does
- Sea Lake Neighbourhood House offers employment services, family services. But it needs to move to the centre of town, have a shop front
- Could then be used as a youth space as well. Then there is an adult presence for the youth space
- Needs to be better service awareness and promotion as well (Network)
- Transport to Mildura/Swan Hill/Bendigo, even just once a month to give young people the chance to have a day out.

**Q4. What do you think is needed in your community (and across Buloke Shire) to support better outcomes for children and young people aged 9-18 years and their families?**

- Youth space (including a skate park) so they have somewhere to be skilled, shine, hang out
- Somewhere to belong
- Drop in centre, a safe meeting place
- A youthful youth worker
- Need the challenge of the diving board
- Need FREEZA / a disco
- There are now no events specific to youth, Battle of the Bands would be great
- Scouts / Guides for the middle age groups
- Importance of the internet connection for social networks
- Public Wi-Fi
- Buloke Shire Council “they should be driving and investing in young people because that’s the most important thing they have”

## Buloke MEYP & Children & Youth Strategy Service Provider Survey

Service providers working with or planning for children and young people aged birth-18 years of age were invited to contribute towards the Municipal Early Years Plan (MEYP) and the Children and Youth Strategy through a focus group and via a survey, there were 47 surveys completed.

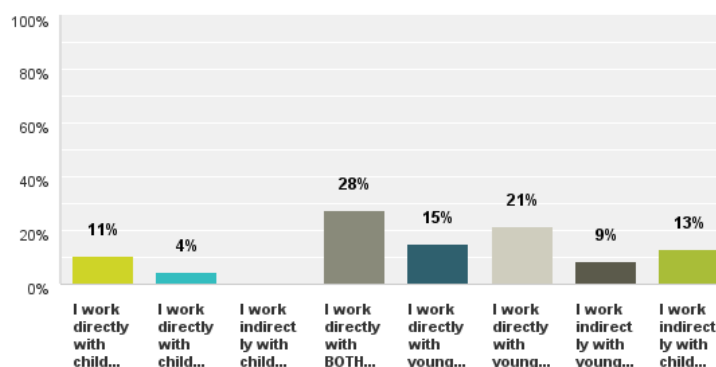
### Q1 Service Name /Organisation

Surveys were filled in from the following organisations:

Tyrell College P-12	Charlton College
Mallee Track Health and Community Service	Mallee Family Care
Mallee Sports Assembly	Donald Kindergarten
Donald High School	Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS)
Mallee Family Care	Birchip P-12 School
Buloke Shire Council	Donald Family Practice
Murray Mallee LLEN	Northern District Community Health Service
North Central LLEN	Wycheproof P-12 College
Wimmera Uniting Care	Wycheproof Community Resource Centre
Birchip Kindergarten	St. Mary's Primary School

### Q2 How would you describe your role?

Answered: 47 Skipped: 0



28% of respondents indicated that they worked with both children and young people aged birth-18 years of age and their families, 21% worked directly with children and youth aged 9-18 years only and 15% worked with 9-18 year olds and their families. 11% of survey respondents worked with children aged 0-8 years and their families and 4% worked with children aged 0-8 years only (not with their families). 15% of providers surveyed indicated that they worked in an indirect planning capacity with children and young people aged birth-18 years and the remaining 9% planned for children and youth aged 9-18 years only.

I work directly with children aged 0-8 and their families (11%)

I work directly with children aged 0-8 years only (4%)

I work indirectly with children aged 0-8 years (in a planning or service management capacity) (0%)

I work directly with BOTH children and young people aged 0-18 years (28%)

I work directly with young people aged 9-18 years and their families (15%)

I work directly with young people aged 9-18 years only (21%)

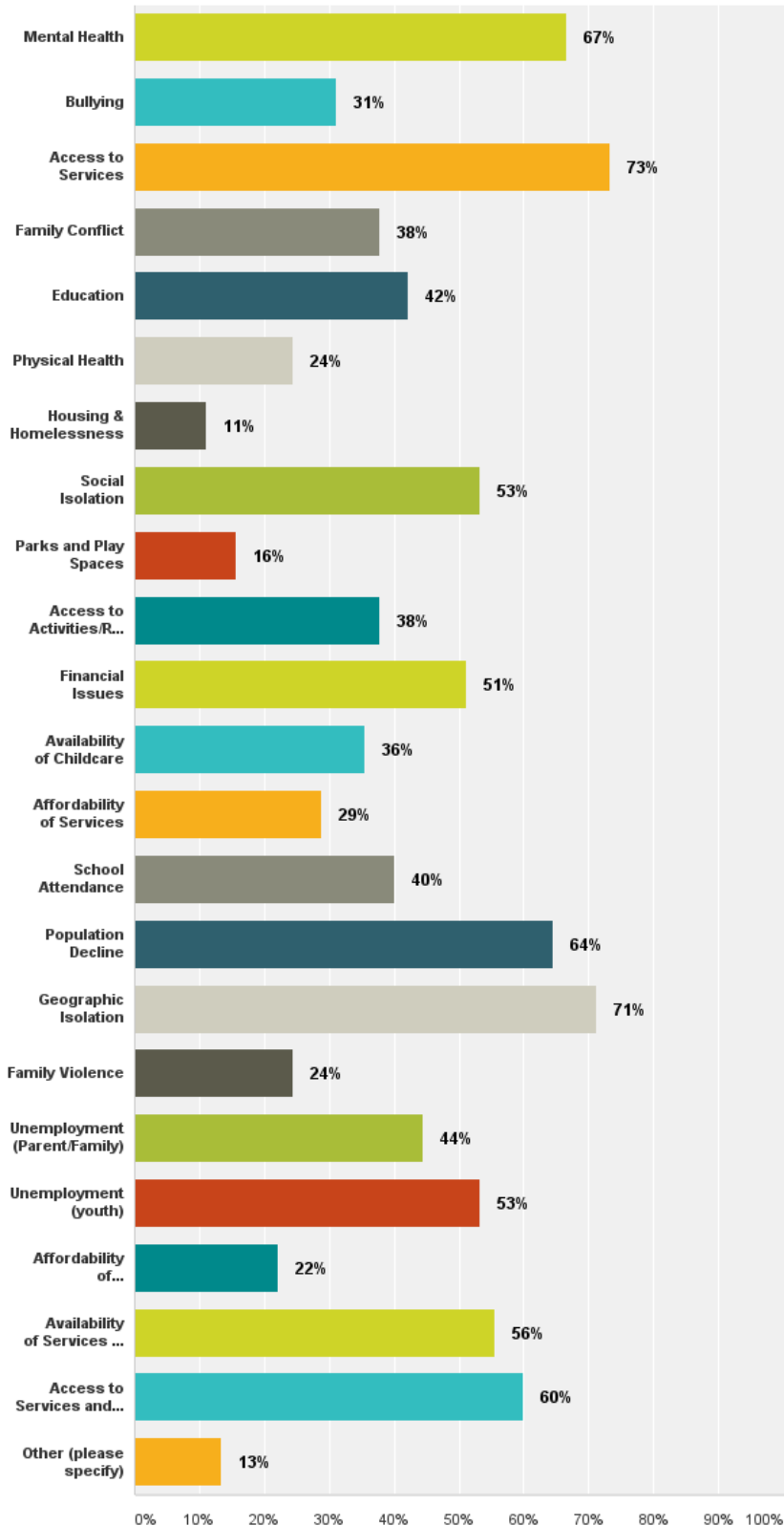
I work indirectly with young people aged 9-18 years (in a planning or service management capacity) (9%)

I work indirectly with children and youth aged 0-18 years (in a planning or service management capacity) (13%)



**Q3 What do you see as the key issues and challenges facing children and young people aged 0-18 years and their families living in Buloke Shire? (tick all that apply)**

Answered: 45 Skipped: 2

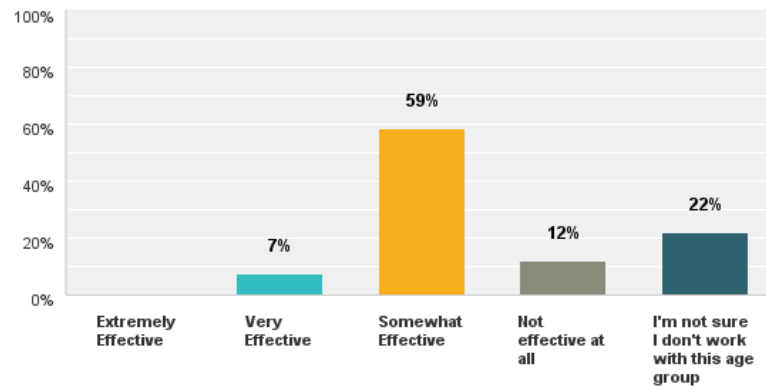


The top ten key issues and challenges facing children and young people aged 0-18 and their families living in Buloke Shire that service providers identified are:

1. Access to services (73%)
2. Geographic isolation (71%)
3. Mental Health (67%)
4. Population decline (64%)
5. Access to services and supports (60%)
6. Availability of services for children with additional needs (56%)
7. Youth Unemployment (53%)
8. Social Isolation (53%)
9. Financial Issues (51%)
10. Unemployment- parent/ family (44%)

**Q4 How would you rate the effectiveness of how the service sector (e.g. Federal, State and locally run services and programs) supports children aged 0-8 years and their families across the Buloke Shire?**

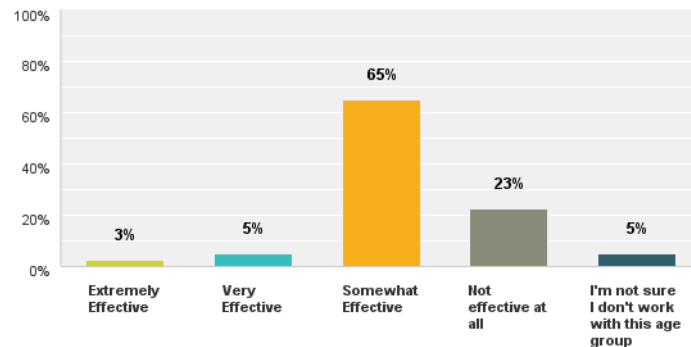
Answered: 41 Skipped: 6



7% of respondents rated the effectiveness of the service sector for 0-8 year olds and their families as very effective, 59% found it somewhat effective and 12% rated the sector as not effective at all.

**Q5 How would you rate the effectiveness of how the service sector (e.g. Federal, State and locally run services and programs) supports children aged 9-18 years and their families across the Buloke Shire?**

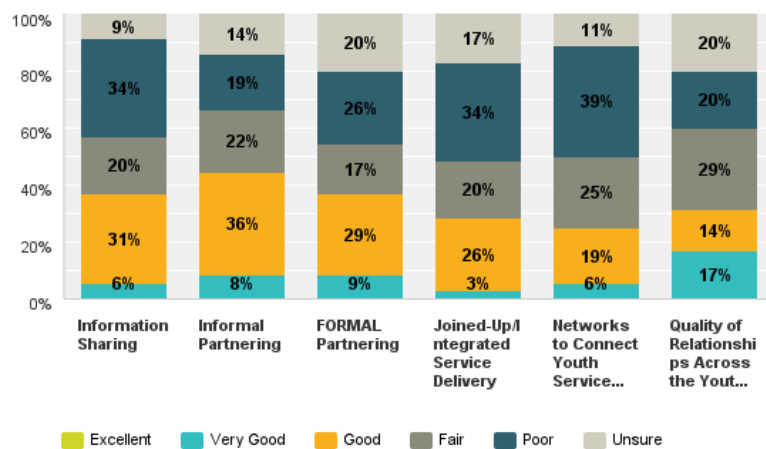
Answered: 40 Skipped: 7



3% of respondents rated the effectiveness of the service sector for 9-18 year olds and their families as extremely effective, 5% found the sector very effective, 65% rated it as somewhat effective and 23% rated the sector as not effective at all.

### Q6 How would you rate partnerships/relationships in the youth sector?

Answered: 36 Skipped: 11



Respondent ratings overall showed that there is a need for improvement or promotion of some things. Combined ratings of fair and poor: information sharing (54%), informal partnering (41%), formal partnering (43%), joined-up/integrated service delivery (54%), networks to connect youth services (64%) and quality of relationships across the youth sector (49%).

### Q7. What are the needs and issues for young people aged 9-18 years currently not being addressed by services (gaps)?

- ✓ No Freeza funding anymore
- ✓ Lack of places for young people to meet and socialise
- ✓ A wider range of employment opportunities are needed
- ✓ Outside of school hours activities for more academic or creative children who aren't keen on team sport.
- ✓ Non- competitive sports activities
- ✓ Funding for extracurricular activities and school camps
- ✓ Assistance with the costs of education, particularly related to isolation
- ✓ Mental health services
- ✓ Access to work experience options
- ✓ Improved transport options especially for disengaged young people
- ✓ Appropriate in-school supports for children and young people with disabilities
- ✓ Support for vulnerable young people and their families

*"There are no facilities for youth that are not involved in a sporting club. These are the cohort that often become disengaged and may feel 'anti' because of feeling excluded".*

*"A lot of young people do not have at least one positive role model in their lives. If they are able to form a rapport with at least one positive role model, they can seek advice from that person and talk to them through tough times".*

**Q8. What are some of the challenges for your organisation/service to meet the needs of children and youth aged 0-18 years and their families?**

- ✓ Getting other services to follow through and work together to support children/young people
- ✓ Geographic isolation/tyranny of distance
- ✓ Transportation
- ✓ Accessing ongoing government funding
- ✓ A larger number of lower socio economic families
- ✓ Engaging 'harder to reach' families
- ✓ Professional development
- ✓ Access to other services
- ✓ Can sometimes be difficult to engage parents
- ✓ Communication between services can be a challenge
- ✓ The loss of the Youth Connections Program has caused a huge gap
- ✓ Lack of resources
- ✓ Providing funded programs more locally for disengaged youth
- ✓ Diminishing population resulting in reduced staffing
- ✓ Many visiting services- a lack of on the ground presence by many services and supports

***"Getting organisations that are funded to deliver a service to follow through as Buloke is a 'difficult to service' shire".***

***"Diminishing population and consequently reduced staff mean it is harder and harder to provide quality comprehensive educational opportunities tailored to the individual interests and needs of the students".***

**Q9. If you could improve the way services support children aged 9-18 years and their families what would you do?**

- ✓ Provide youth spaces for young people to meet
- ✓ Offer more activities and events for young people to take part in
- ✓ Engage young people in community events
- ✓ Bring motivational speakers into schools
- ✓ Work with low income families to get meaningful jobs
- ✓ Provide regular public transport to Swan Hill from Sea Lake
- ✓ Employ a capable youth worker based in Buloke Shire
- ✓ Ensure services visit Buloke Shire
- ✓ Improved access to access to medical and dental providers
- ✓ Attract more employers
- ✓ Advocate for a service like Youth Connections to engage disengaged young people
- ✓ Better resource SSSO workers in schools so they can undertake more preventative work
- ✓ Improve coordination of services
- ✓ Improve information sharing between service providers
- ✓ Give young people a voice in how they are serviced
- ✓ Increase funding for aides
- ✓ Provide a range of non-sporting activities for young people

***"Funding bodies need to take into consideration the lack of professionals in the area, the costs of transport and disruption to lives of travel for services".***

***"Make sure that services are attending communities more frequently".***

***"Provide more youth based events outside of purely sporting pursuits".***

**Q10. What do you think helps to make Buloke Shire a positive place for young people aged 9-18 years and their families? E.g. places, events, activities, services, people, opportunities, facilities, location, education, sport etc.**

- ✓ A wide range of sporting opportunities
- ✓ Water in Green Lake
- ✓ Safe
- ✓ Everyone knows everyone
- ✓ School camps
- ✓ The Deb
- ✓ Music activities
- ✓ Dedicated Schools
- ✓ Caring community minded people
- ✓ Good sporting facilities
- ✓ A clean environment
- ✓ NCLLEN
- ✓ Strong community spirit

*“Community minded people who encourage engagement and connectedness through sporting clubs, schools, church groups, etc.”*

*“Young adults have numerous sporting opportunities within the Buloke Shire. This can be a fantastic social opportunity for young people”.*

**Q11 What do you think is needed in the Buloke Shire to support better outcomes for young people aged 9-18 years and their families?**

- ✓ Access to programs after school in a variety of sports, for example soccer
- ✓ Opportunities to build and develop skills in design and innovation in agriculture.
- ✓ Opportunities to socialise without emphasis/focus on alcohol.
- ✓ More apprenticeships
- ✓ SERVICES! Pro-active intervention which provides local counselling and housing/crisis support,
- ✓ Help with education costs, help with extra curricula costs, and increased access to services.
- ✓ Employment opportunities
- ✓ Recreational activities that aren't sport related
- ✓ Dedicated Youth services worker in Buloke Shire
- ✓ Greater access to services and more chances to access the opportunities that are available for young people in regional communities.
- ✓ Access to support and advice for parents who are not coping and whose children are vulnerable as a result
- ✓ Improved public transport to help young people get around the shire
- ✓ More youth events and activities
- ✓ More local access for families to support services.
- ✓ Funding for specialist programs in schools.
- ✓ Funding for aides
- ✓ Mental health services

**Q12 What do you think is needed to better meet the needs of vulnerable children and young people and their families? (*Children and young people are vulnerable if the capacity of parents and family to effectively care, protect and provide for their long term development and wellbeing is limited- Victoria's Vulnerable Children Strategy*).**

- ✓ Get kids into uniforms; provide them support to be able to go on camps etc so they don't keep missing out.
- ✓ Money directed to meet needs such as food and clothing and access to services like unlimited internet and after-school programs via neighbourhood house.
- ✓ Linking children to services
- ✓ Parenting programs
- ✓ Support for kinship care programs
- ✓ Drug and Alcohol support
- ✓ Support groups for parents
- ✓ Support services that they can access in their communities, not in Swan Hill or Bendigo.
- ✓ Access to be easier to specialist facilities and for specialists to visit more often .
- ✓ Family centered practice
- ✓ Improved identification of vulnerable children
- ✓ Resources and funding to support attendance and engagement in alternative learning settings like Flexible Learning Option programs
- ✓ Reinstatement of the Youth Connections program
- ✓ Social focus on young parents and mental health
- ✓ Support parents to find work
- ✓ Improved public transport
- ✓ Social support options for young people aged 16-25 years
- ✓ Identifiable assistance (most people do not know what services cover the area or how to access them).
- ✓ Support for schools to help make them a consistent, safe place in children's lives.
- ✓ Parenting classes

**“Make sure that the measure of education outcomes doesn't becomes as or more important than engagement itself!”**

**“More access to services, services working closely and managing specific cases and working with the school to share information. Better access to resources through schools where relationships already exist”.**

**“We need access to locally available services on a regular basis”.**

**“Services that actually go and visit houses to help families establish good parenting routines”.**

## Findings

### Children

All schools across the Buloke LGA were invited to participate in a drawing exercise as a means of engaging infants and primary school aged students in informing both the Municipal Early Years Plan and Children and Youth Strategy. The following nine schools took part in the exercise:

1. Birchip P-12 School, Birchip
2. St Joseph's School, Charlton
3. Charlton College, Charlton
4. Donald Primary School, Donald
5. St Mary's School, Donald
6. Nullawil Primary School, Nullawil
7. St Mary's School, Sea Lake
8. Tyrrell College, Sea Lake
9. Wycheproof P-12 College, Wycheproof

Lower primary aged children were asked to 'Draw the things you really love about where you live'.

#### **Lower Primary: 100**

##### ***The things that I really love about where I live....***

Caring People: 24

Playgrounds: 23

Pool: 22

My Home: 19

School: 18

Sport: 17

Shops: 17

Safe : 13

Animals/Pets: 10

Small Community: 9

Space: 8

Clean Air: 6

Easy to get around: 5

The Show: 4

## Parents and Community Members

It was critical that, in informing the Children and Youth Strategy, the voices of parents and community members were heard and understood. To ensure this parents and community members were able to share their knowledge of the strengths, challenges and opportunities of living in the Buloke Shire for children, young people and their families through several mechanisms, including:

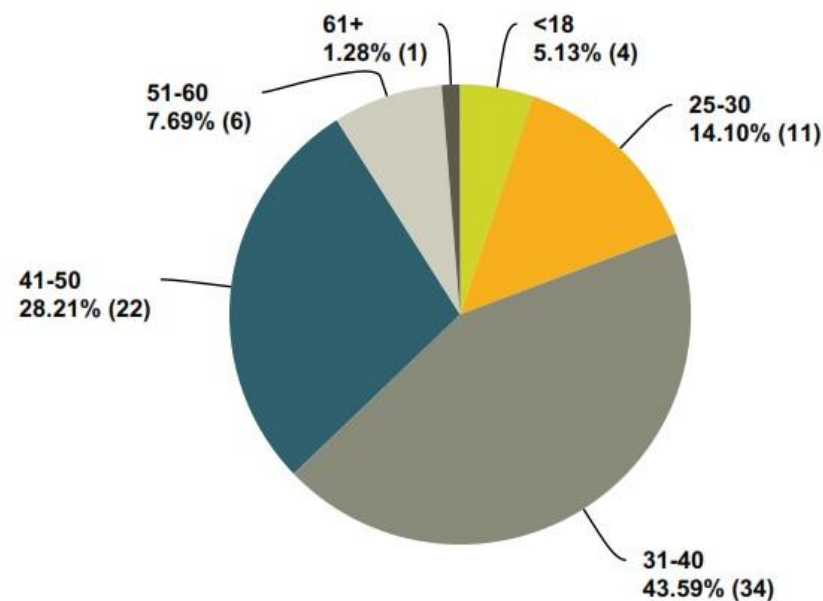
- An online survey (also available in hard copy at key locations throughout the Shire)
- Community discussion groups held at the five key Buloke communities of Birchip, Charlton, Donald, Sea Lake and Wycheproof
- Through direct phone and email contact with the researchers (whose phone number and email addresses were included in all research literature and advertising).

A total of 81 parents and community members from across the Shire took part in the online and paper based surveys. One formal written submission was received along with nine phone calls. Further to this a total of 27 parents and community members attend the five Community Discussion Groups which occurred across the LGA.

## Survey Findings

The analysis of data from the Parents and Community Members survey is presented below. A total of 81 parents, carers, grandparents and community members completed the survey. Of these respondents 86.4% were female (70) and 13.6% were male (11).

The majority of respondents (43.6%) were aged 31-40 years. The next largest age cohort was 41-50 years (28.2%). Four respondents were aged less than 18 years (5.1%) and one respondent was aged over 61 years (1.3%).

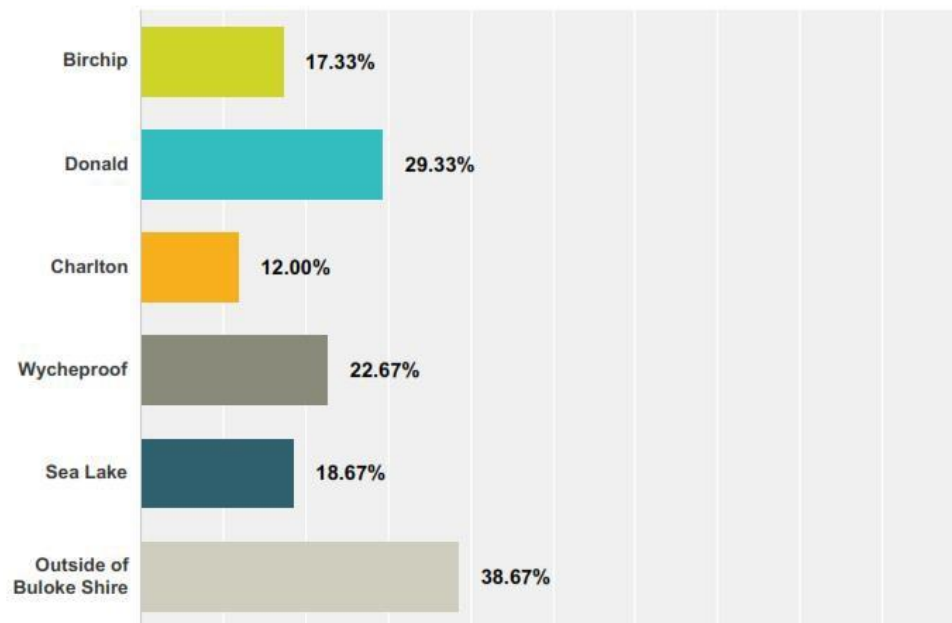




The majority of people responding to the survey lived in or nearest to Donald (28.6% or 22), then Wycheproof (26.0% or 20), Sea Lake (16.9% or 13), and Birchip and Charlton (both 11.7% or 9 respondents each). 'Other' respondents came from Berriwillock.

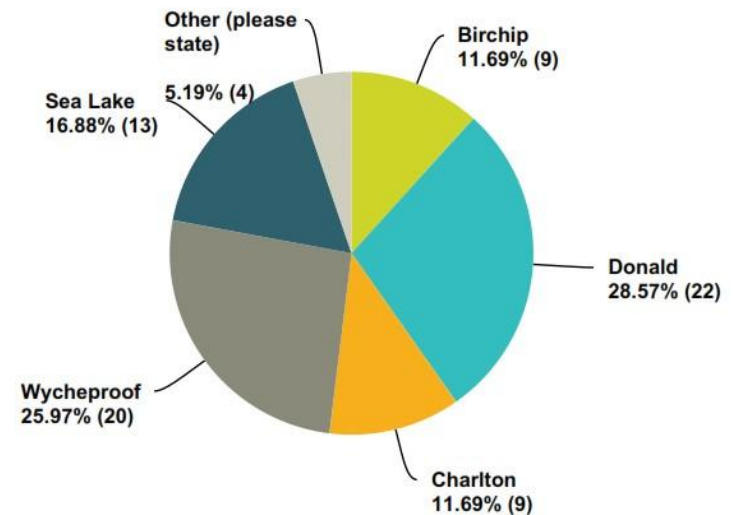
**Q4 In the past year where did you access services and supports (e.g. child care, family support, health services etc) for your family? TICK ALL THAT APPLY**

Answered: 75 Skipped: 6



**Q3 Where do you live (your closest major centre in Buloke)?**

Answered: 77 Skipped: 4



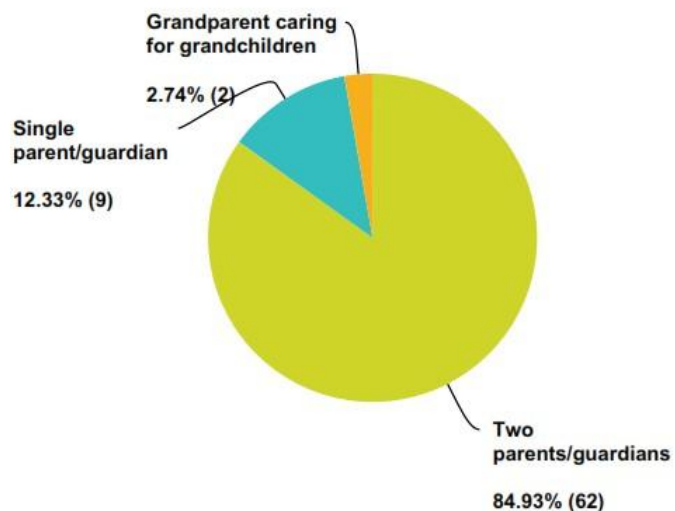
When asked 'where did you access services and supports for your family' the majority of respondents (38.7%) indicated they accessed at least some of their services and supports from outside of the Buloke Shire.

Respondents were asked to indicate the ages of their children. Between the 81 survey respondents there were 32 babies and toddlers aged 0-2 years, 27 children aged 3-5 years old, 23 children aged 6-8 years, 19 children aged 9-11 years, 11 young people aged 12-15 years and 10 young people aged 16-18 years. In sum the 81 respondents cared for a total of 122 children, 82 of whom were aged 0-8 years (Early Years) and the remaining 40 were aged 9-18 years (children and youth).

The survey data reveals the data collection tool was able to hear from the diversity of Buloke Shire family types with 12.3% of respondents indicating they were one parent families (slightly more than the rate of one parent families recorded in the 2011 Census of 10.3%). The majority of respondent families were two parent families (84.9%) and two respondents identified as grandparents who were caring for their grandchildren.

### Q7 Which of the following best describes your family type?

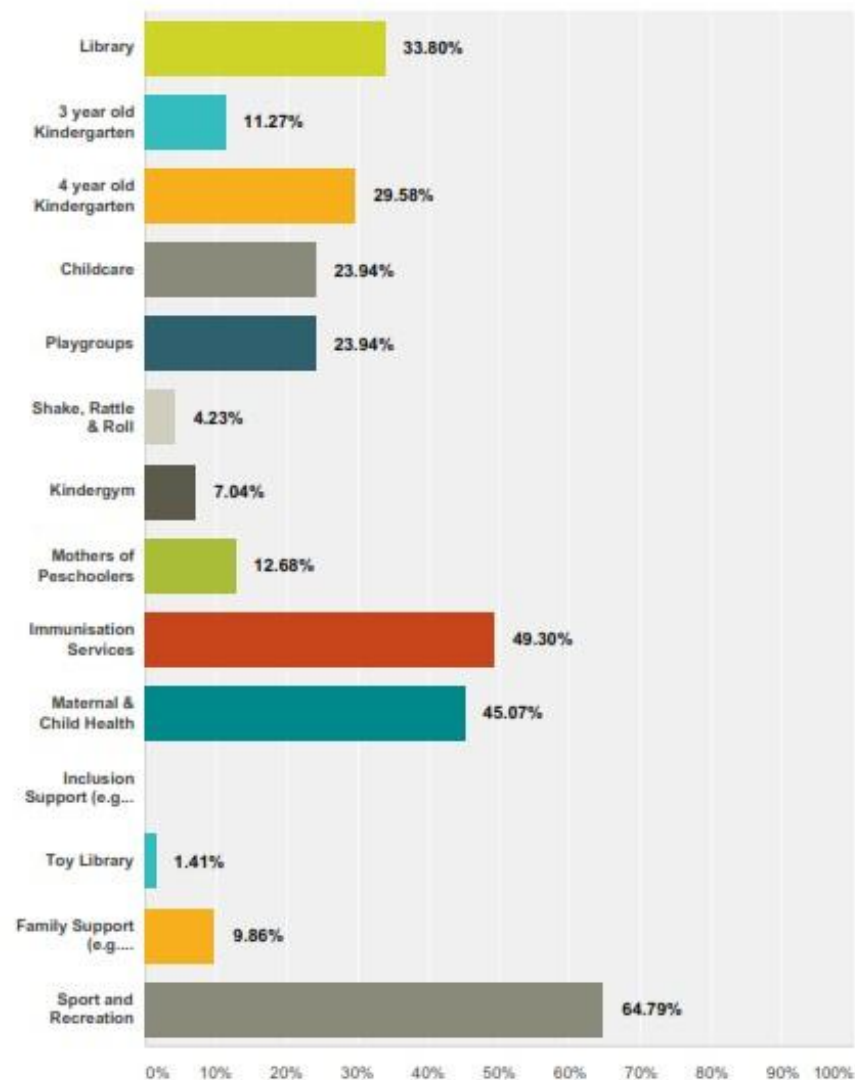
Answered: 73 Skipped: 8



Respondents indicated their most used services as Sport and Recreation (64.8%), Immunisation Services (49.3%), Maternal and Child Health (45.1%), Library (33.8%) and 4 year old Kindergarten (29.6%). Childcare and Playgroups were used by 23.9% of respondents each.

### Q8 Which of the following services (within Buloke Shire) has your family accessed in the past 12 months? (tick all that apply)

Answered: 71 Skipped: 10



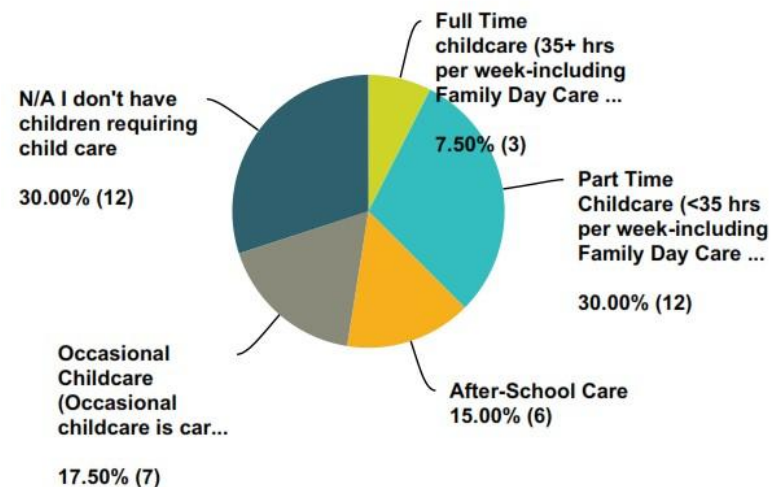
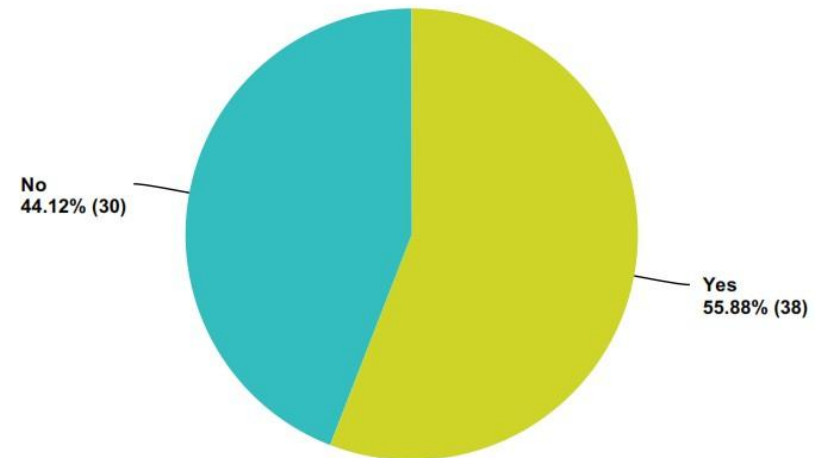
Respondents were asked 'In the past 12 months have there been any supports/services that you have needed for your children or your family but not been able to access?'. More than half of all respondents (55.9% or 38) indicated this was the case. Of these 38 respondents who had not been able to access needed services 35 indicated what these services were. These open ended responses are coded below (note some respondents indicated more than one service / support).

- Childcare 25 (including childcare 15, Before and After school care Holiday care 8 and Occasional Care 2)
- GPs (including weekend availability) 4
- Youth Programmes / Extracurricular activities 4
- Antenatal / Obstetric care 3
- Paediatric care 3
- Mental health / counselling support 3
- Early Years activities 1
- Speech pathology 1
- Autism / early intervention services 1
- Dentist services 1
- Radiology services 1

Anticipating significant demand for childcare the ensuing question in the survey asked 'If you answered childcare for Q9, please describe what your need was'. Forty of all 81 respondents (49.4%) answered this question with the results shown in the pie chart (right). The majority of respondents (30%) indicated needing Part Time Childcare, 17.5% required Occasional Care, 15.0% required After-School Care and 7.5% required Full Time Childcare.

**Q9 In the past 12 months have there been any services/ supports that you have needed for your children or your family but not been able to access?**

Answered: 68 Skipped: 13



Further recognising that many families have adapted to the shortfall in childcare availability and enacted different informal strategies to meet their childcare needs the survey asked respondents to indicate 'How often in the past 12 months have your children been cared for informally by unpaid carers, grandparents, relatives, neighbours or friends?'. A total of 67 of the 81 survey respondents answered this question.

For 20.9% of respondents (14) their children were cared for informally at least several times each week 'by unpaid carers, grandparents, relatives, neighbours or friends', for a further 31.3% of respondents (21) this informal care occurred at least several times a month and for a further 4.5% (3) this was once a month.

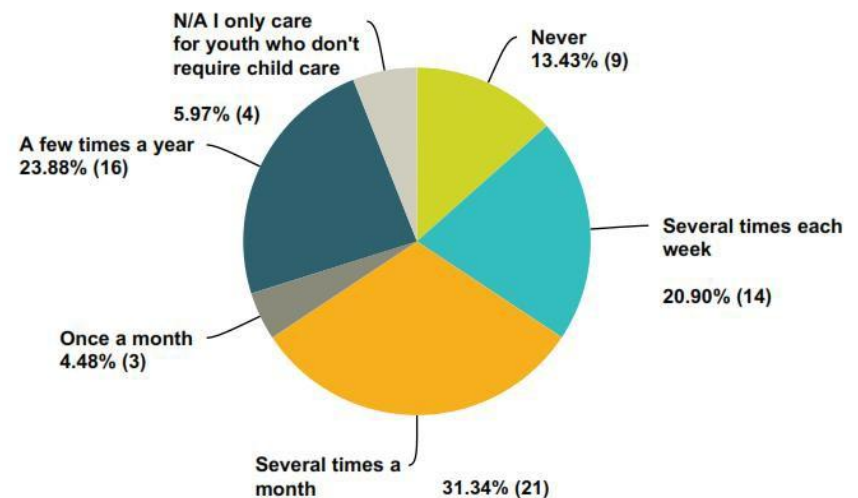
These results highlighted the need for increased childcare provision across the Buloke LGA and draws attention to the childcare crisis being experienced by newer families to the community who may be without the social and familial supports which enable 'informal childcare'.

Question 12 of the survey asked 'What do you think helps to make Buloke Shire a positive place for children and youth aged 0-18 and their families? E.g. places, events, activities, services, people, opportunities, facilities, location, education, sport etc.' Responses to this open ended question are coded below and some direct quotes are included on the ensuing page:

- Education (including small class sizes, excellent schools, dedicated teachers, good academic outcomes): 25
- Sport: 21
- Community (close, friendly, tight-knit communities, strong sense of belonging and community support): 20
- Community safety (safe streets, low crime rates): 16
- Public use facilities (notably, parks, free pools, skate parks): 14
- Early Years services (including Maternal and Child Health, kindergarten, LDC, Family Day Care, Shake Rattle Read): 11
- Opportunities for personal and community development through volunteering: 7
- Activities / Events (especially those for all of family and those promoting social inclusion): 6
- Playgroups and Parent Groups: 5
- Children can achieve independence / responsibility earlier (due to community safety, leadership opportunities): 2

### Q11 How often in the past 12 months have your children been cared for informally by unpaid carers, grandparents, relatives, neighbours or friends?

Answered: 67 Skipped: 14



- Employment (including opportunities and employer flexibility): 2
- One mention each of: networks for information sharing, relaxed, services relatively close, clean, local GPs.

*Tight knit communities, sense of safety, open and well equipped parks, pools, programs that are available, 'community to raise a child' approach where people are willing to offer support when needed, small class sizes and great schools, independence often possible earlier due to safe communities (i.e. walking to school, going to shops by themselves).*

*Community events help keep families connected. Berriwillock playgroup connects my children with other children in Berriwillock. Daycare service provided in Sea Lake is a wonderful service.*

*Buloke Shire is a great place to raise a child because of the close knit communities. We live in Wycheproof which has a great school with dedicated teachers and staff that go out of their way to help in every possible way. However, options to entertain kids i.e. activities are limited.*

*The community provides through volunteers many sporting and other activities at a reasonable cost. There is pathways for advancements in many of the sports for our youth to achieve at a higher level. Opportunities exist for parents to be involved in clubs and to take on roles and training to help them coach, administer etc. These are personal development opportunities. The clubs give everyone a sense of belonging and being part of a group with common interests.*

*Sporting clubs, swimming pools, maternal child health services-with open times availability, good schools, parks and gardens.*

*Safe. Friendly. Great supportive community - small enough that everyone knows everyone and everyone looks out for each other (particularly the kids). Local access to kinder and schools. Affordable (although limited) childcare.*

*We have excellent educational facilities in our town, would just like to see more community events getting families together, socialise like when the shire had the family fun days.*

Question 13 asked: 'What do you see as the key issues and challenges facing children and young aged 0-18 years and their families living in the Buloke Shire? (tick all that apply)'. Responses are coded below:

- Population Decline 64.7% (44)
- Access to Services 61.8% (42)
- Youth Friendly Spaces 55.9% (38)
- Availability of Childcare 55.9% (38)
- Geographic Isolation 51.5% (35)
- Social Isolation 45.6% (31)
- Mental Health 44.1% (30)
- Access to Activities/Recreation 41.2% (28)
- Bullying 33.8% (23)
- Financial Issues 32.4% (22)
- Education 30.9% (21)
- Availability of Services for Children and Young People with Additional Needs 29.4% (20)
- Access to Services and Supports 26.5% (18)
- Affordability of Services 26.5% (18)
- Parks and Play Spaces 26.5% (18)
- Unemployment (Youth) 23.5% (16)
- Unemployment (Parent/Family) 22.1% (16)
- Affordability of Activities/Recreation 14.7% (10)
- Physical Health 13.2% (9)
- Family Conflict 11.8% (8)
- School Attendance 7.4% (5)
- Family Violence 4.4% (3)
- Housing & Homelessness 2.9% (2)
- Other (please specify) 19.1% (13) –challenges specified included:
  - Increasing drug use (7)
  - Activities / services (youth worker) for our young people (4)
  - Homophobia (2)
  - Internet (including connection quality and cyber safety (2)

*"I think there needs to be a focus on teen and pre teen activities as there is nothing except sport for young people and if you're not the best you don't get a look in. A youth space things like skate park, youth centre, day trips since fusion stop there is nothing for kids. I think indigenous thing like NADOC should be celebrated"*

*"Being able to access a service that the Government's Childcare 50% Rebate applies to would make a difference. There is an inequality/discrimination of availability of childcare services that the government doesn't seem concerned about in rural areas"*

*"Binge drinking & homophobia (recent letters opposing Council's decision to support gay marriage were appalling - if we have a gay child I would consider leaving Buloke Shire to move to a more open-minded community)"*

Question 14 asked: 'What do you think is needed in your community (and across Buloke Shire) to support better outcomes for children and young people aged 0-18 and their families?' Responses to this open ended question are coded below and some direct quotes are included on the ensuing page

- Youth Events / Activities and Space: 25
- Youth Program, Service and Engagement: 6
- Family / whole of community events without access to alcohol: 16
- Childcare (including a viable model for rural services: 15
- Population growth, Economics, Employment, Training: 12
- Investment in public use facilities particularly pools, sports grounds and parks / playgrounds: 7
- Middle years focus / activities: 7
- Coordinated service delivery across the Shire including a clear Plan and Network: 5
- Early Intervention / additional needs / allied health: 4
- Drug education and services: 3
- Mental health supports and services: 3
- Supported playgroups: 3
- Supported parent Groups / Parent Education: 3
- Public transport: 2
- Reliable internet: 1
- Maintenance of local Lakes: 1

*A clear early childhood plan to address viable models of early childhood programs (childcare) across all towns.*

*A dedicated focus on youth, involving the youth themselves*

*Investment in current facilities to maintain or increase standard, drug education for parents, wider range of opportunities for youth,*

*Activities other than sport, support for youth issues, parenting support, especially for single working parents*

*I think given the geographical location of Berriwillock, coupled with the population decline and decline in town services it is absolutely vital a good service connection is established for educational purposes- when children reach school age I want them to be in line with the rest of the state and this means access to all the internet has to offer. Better, safer, more interesting play spaces (parks).*

*Maintaining pools to encourage regular physical activity.*

*Would be great to have access to more specialised services. Would LOVE more childcare options! More things for my children to do when they get older, i.e. skate parks & more recreational activities.*

*Maintenance of swimming pools and funding of recreational activities to give the youth something to do/keep them interested otherwise they will be lost to the region to go elsewhere*

*Events and activities that bring families together in social settings. Meeting places for the youth for social interaction and fun under the guidance of adults.*

*Improved economic environment creation of traineeships for business opportunities like we used to have in shire offices. Council needs to be over employing rather than under employing to create jobs in the shire.*

*Childcare to allow Mum's in particular to contribute more to the community and economy. I don't think some Mum's skills, qualifications & aptitudes are reflected in our community due to lack of childcare.*

*The shire needs to make sure that the families which run business in the community are very well supported at all times and costs to ensure that these local business stay in the shire-families kept in the shire, if they haven't got work then they can't live here*

*Definitely need some youth friendly spaces and regular activities, including some that take them out and show them a bigger world (even if done virtually through computer gaming - see "good games" <http://www.guf.com.au/> as an idea).*

*The older kids get, the less there is for them to do and certainly nothing to keep them in town post schooling.*

*Need job opportunities for the young. Building/manufacturing that can be done local but sold to bigger customer base online. Perhaps could be built up through schools. Definitely more support for schools. More financial assistance for incursions and excursions. Public transport OUT of Sea Lake on a weekend (out Friday night). More sporting/activity options than just football and it's not always savoury culture. Reduction in access to alcohol, continued drug and sex education.*

*More events that show our youth that you DO NOT need alcohol and drugs to be socially inclusive. Families need to be involved in these events as it is a positive for them especially in the financial times like we are having.*



The final question of the survey (question 15) asked 'Is there anything you would like to add?' 19 people added additional information, a sample of their comments are quoted below:

*It is important that in our community young people are supported as they are the future. Opportunities must be there to keep some young people in our community who can work and will have a family. Service provision is important.*

*The removal of shire support for Youth Freeza events and youth worker is such a step backwards. Youth need to be connected to their communities as disconnection can often lead to many negative behaviours such as drugs, alcohol abuse, teen pregnancy, unemployment and criminal behaviours. I believe Buloke Shire has a significant part to play in the community to ensure community and family connections remain strong and these outcomes are avoided. Teens do not have to be 'at risk' for these outcomes to occur, either.*

*Demand for specialised programs and services is relatively low across the shire but the need in those few cases is very high and that complicates things. There does however need to be a way to respond to these issues.*

*A lot of publicity has been given to the new centre in Donald for childcare, kinder and Maternal and Child Health, whereas Wycheproof has been running a very successful childcare program for nearly 5 years and it doesn't receive much attention. Why?*

## References

Buloke Shire Council Plan 2015-2019

Loddon Mallee Region Primary Care Partnerships. (2015). Building Socially Inclusive Rural Communities: A Complete Resource. Victoria.

National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020

North Central LLEN Environmental Scan 2014

North Central LLEN Mapping of Key Youth Services in Buloke Shire 2014

Victorian State Disability Plan 2013–2016

Victoria's Vulnerable Children Strategy - Our Shared Responsibility 2013-2022