



INDIGO
SHIRE
COUNCIL

HEALTHY CHILDREN AND
FAMILIES' PLAN 2010-2014

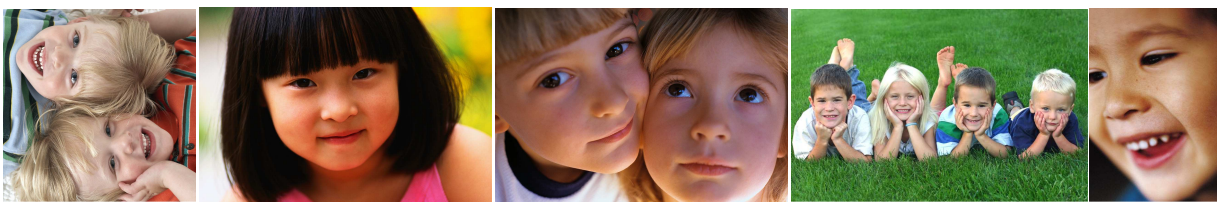
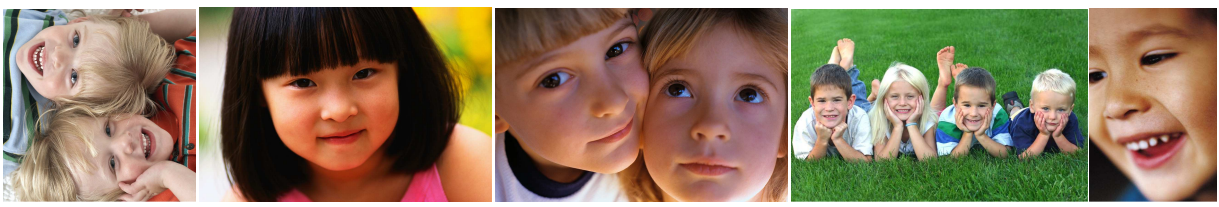
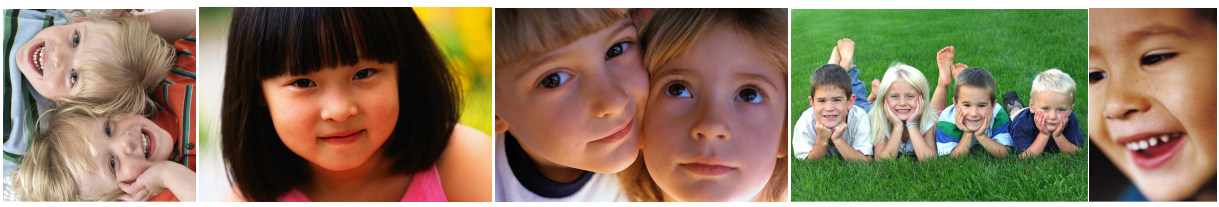


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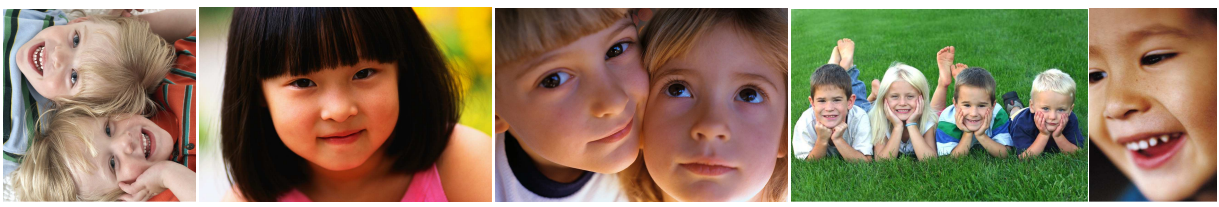


Acknowledgements

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In particular, we would like to express our gratitude to the following members of the Early Years Plan Steering Committee for their commitment and enthusiastic support in developing the plan.

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Why we need a *Healthy Children and Families' Plan*

This is Indigo Shire Council's first *Healthy Children and Families' Plan*. It celebrates our vision of children and families being connected to community, culture and place in ways that maximise their potential and develop a foundation for future health and wellbeing. The aim of this document is to plan ahead to improve and strengthen local support for children and families, so that all children from birth to eight have the best start in life.

Our *Healthy Children and Families' Plan* draws on conclusive international evidence that the early years are the most crucial in children's development and strongly influence their life chances. During the period from birth to eight years, children experience more rapid brain development and acquire more skills and knowledge than in any other period in their lives.

These years are a time of great optimism and promise. Yet, they are also a time when children need high quality care and services. For this reason, our plan is based on the following three key understandings.

1. *Children's development takes place in the context of their **families**.*
Families provide the caring relationships, the opportunities and the experiences that shape children's growth and development. All children and families are different and they require different levels of support, some requiring significantly more than others.
2. ***Access** to support and infrastructure is essential to ensure maximum benefits for children and families.*
Child and family friendly activities and venues are required.
3. *Successful **planning** for local communities requires a strong knowledge base about what really matters for children and families in our local area.*

Strong collaboration and shared goals are required between families, early childhood services, local agencies, schools and the broader community. A coordinated system that integrates services is required.

Indigo's *Healthy Children and Families' Plan* has been developed collaboratively by the Indigo Health Services Consortium, Indigo Shire Council and local service providers with substantial input from local families and community representatives. The plan has incorporated feedback from an extensive community engagement and consultation process, including two service provider forums, reference group meetings and a community questionnaire. This information has provided the basis of a comprehensive action plan designed to address a wide range of needs and priorities associated with the future of local children and families throughout the Indigo Shire.

The *Healthy Children and Families' Plan* outlines:

- A snapshot of Indigo's children and families.
- Our current services for children and families in the Shire.
- What we are going to do in the next four years to support children and families.
- Who we are going to work with to achieve better outcomes for children and families.

The Indigo Shire is a place where children are valued. Council will continue to work to ensure that their health, development, learning and wellbeing are optimised wherever they live, play and are cared for. Our commitment is to work with families, including grandparents and other extended family members, and the community to support the achievement of best possible outcomes for all children in Indigo.



What our community looks like

The Indigo Shire is located in the North East of Victoria and is made up of unique and vibrant communities. It is known for its natural beauty, small towns full of built heritage, rural living areas with rich and varied landscapes, and recreation and tourist areas. We are proud of the opportunities our residents have for physical, educational, artistic and environmental activities. Tourism is a major contributor to our economic, social and cultural wealth. In the past, there has been an increasing focus on local and regional travel. Figures from visitor information centres across the Shire show a trend upwards in the numbers of people visiting our major towns¹.

Where we live

Our Shire is diverse, covering a vast geographical area of 2,016km². While over 50 per cent of our people choose to live in the towns of Beechworth, Yackandandah, Rutherglen, Tangambalanga, Chiltern and their surrounding districts many residents choose to live in smaller rural townships and on land holdings².

Our population

According to 2009 Estimated Resident Population data the Shire's total population is 15,945. We have experienced steady growth of around 1.3 per cent pa since 2004³. It is projected that the Shire's population will continue to grow to 17,253 by 2021. Twelve to 20 per cent of future regional population growth is expected to go into Indigo Shire towns⁴. Over the last 15 years, Indigo Shire has attracted a certain demographic that lives in the Shire but commutes to the larger centres of

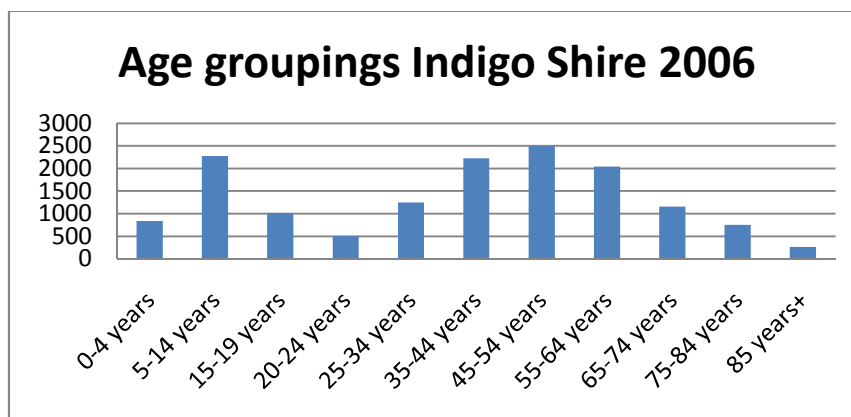
Albury-Wodonga and Wangaratta for work. As a result, we now have a larger proportion of young families in the area⁵. This pattern of growth presents a range of planning issues for the future of the Indigo Shire associated with service provision around children and families.

Our age

The Shire's age structure has a higher proportion of people in the five to 14 age group and the 35 to 54 age group than the rest of Victoria, suggesting a higher proportion of families⁴. In addition, there is a low proportion of people in the 15 to 24 age group, which is often associated with movement away from the rural areas by younger people in search of educational and employment opportunities. Indigo Shire also has an ageing population, matching the demographic trend for Victoria and Australia⁶. In 2008, the Department of Planning and Community Development predicted that our birth to eight year old population would remain steady to 2026, and our 65 and over group would rapidly increase⁴.

Our standard of living

Indigo Shire has a relatively low proportion of low income households and more households with high incomes than many other parts of regional Victoria². Our population is generally well educated with a higher proportion of people having tertiary qualifications (certificate through to post graduate degree) compared to regional Victoria². Indigo's employment rate as of March 2010 sits at 96.4% compared to the state figure of 94.6%⁶.





Our children and families

Family structure

Based on the 2006 Australia Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data, there were 3,973 families living in Indigo: 46.7% were couple families with children, 40.6% were couple families without children, 11.9% were one parent families and 0.9% were other families². In 2009, 1.4 per cent of the total population of children aged zero to five in Indigo were of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent⁸.

Ethnicity

As at the 2006 Census, 23.9% of Australia's total population and 23.8% of the population of Victoria were overseas-born. This compares to just 7.8% of people in the Indigo Shire being overseas-born. Of those 7.8% of overseas-born Indigo residents, 82% of them speak only English. This compares to 40.7% of overseas-born people Victoria-wide².

Birth rate

The number of births each year in the Indigo Shire has risen from a rate of 1.91 babies per woman in 2003 to 2.15 in 2008⁵. This is above the national average. Overall, Australia had a total fertility rate of 1.97 babies per woman in 2008, up from 1.92 in 2007 and the highest since 1977 (2.01). The fertility rate of a population is the average number of children that would be born to a woman over her lifetime.

Breastfeeding rates

Based on the 2005/06 figures, the percentage of infants fully breastfed at three months in Indigo (70.8%) was more than the percentage fully breastfed at three months in metropolitan Victoria (51.7%) and more than the percentage fully breastfed at three months in rural Victoria (52.2%). Indigo was ranked three out of 78 local government areas on the percentage of infants fully breastfed at three months and three for the percentage of infants fully breastfed at six months⁹. A rank of 1 was assigned to the area with the highest percentage of infants fully breastfed. Recently this figure has dropped slightly with 2007/08 records showing that the percentage

of three month old infants fully breastfed at 62.1%¹⁰.

Immunisation rates

Based on 2006 figures, the percentage of children aged 12 to 15 months who were fully immunised in Indigo was 91.3%. This was similar to the rates of metro Victoria and rural Victoria. Indigo was ranked 45 out of 78 local government areas on the percentage of children immunised in this age group. A rank of one was assigned to the area with the highest percentage of children fully immunised⁹.

Maternal and Child Health key age stage visits

In 2007-08, there were 553 children aged from two weeks to three years and six months attending Maternal and Child Health (MCH) key age stage visits¹⁰. Participation rates were below the regional average for four month, 12 month and 18 month visits, but significantly above the 3.5 year old rate.

Early education

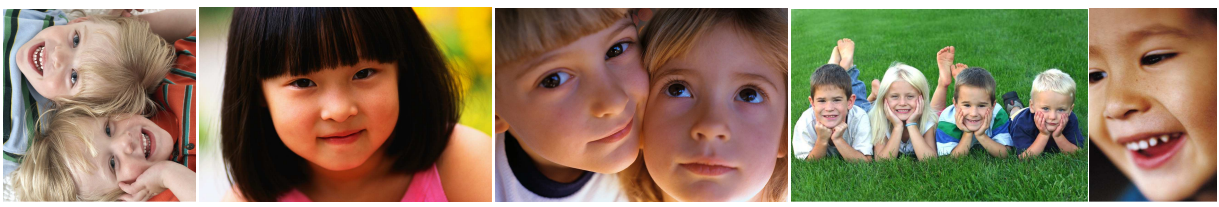
The kindergarten participation rate within Indigo Shire for 2009 was 93.2% which was slightly above the state average of 92.7%. Our rate is in line with regional data and in the years preceding 2009 has been well above 95%¹¹. In March 2010, the total number of enrolments in funded kindergarten programs for four year old children in our Shire was 231.

Disability

In our Shire in 2006, there were 32 children aged zero to four living with a disability, and a further 190 children in the five to 14 age group¹².

Child protection

The rate of child protection notifications was less than that of both metropolitan Victoria and other rural Victorian areas. In 2006, Indigo was ranked 70 out of 78 local government areas in terms of the rate of child protection notifications in the zero to eight age group. A rank of one was assigned to the area with the highest rate of notifications¹³.



Our challenges

Coordination of services

We believe an integrated system of services is the best way to respond to emerging needs in local communities. This is supported by research, social planning, policy and the early years sector as the most effective way to make a difference and provide better outcomes for children, families and the broader community. As a rural Council with a small rate base, Indigo experiences significant challenges in delivering a range of equitable services to children and families across the Shire. Population dispersion of small and medium-sized rural towns, all with unique and varied characteristics, along with funding constraints place distinctive and sometimes competing demands on the early years service system. Increased coordination of services is required to improve service delivery and offer more options in child care. This can be achieved through improved partnerships, exchanging ideas and information, program planning, service delivery and pooling of resources.

Communication

Convenient, accessible and coordinated sources of information on available services and programs for children and families are important in a Shire such as Indigo. Parents need access to information, advice and training that responds to their needs. Lack of information about relevant health and support services available across the Shire, especially for newcomers, was identified as a major concern for residents in consultations in 2008. A more coordinated and targeted approach to the provision of information is required. We

also recognise the increasing need for public and private health providers to exchange information and communicate effectively so that families and children can obtain quality services and programs.

Infrastructure

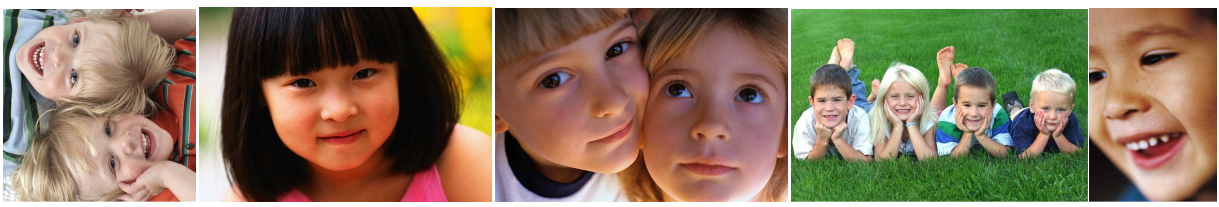
Public spaces and services are essential for children and families. These include footpaths, playgrounds, shops, children's centres, leisure facilities, libraries and other public amenities. One of the significant challenges facing any local government is managing its assets to meet the needs of its community. The funding challenge is to get the balance right between demand to provide new and improved assets with maintenance of existing assets.

Leadership and advocacy

Leadership, advocacy and policy direction were raised as important areas for inclusion in this plan. Council must develop strong partnerships with other service providers, communities and neighbouring councils along with federal and state governments, in order to meet the challenges faced by families in the Indigo Shire.

Community based services

It is appropriate that services for families and children be managed and delivered at a local level by community groups and volunteers. In this way, our diverse communities receive the specialised support they require. However, this support must be adequately resourced. Council acknowledges that to release the capacity of communities, strong and supportive processes and systems must be put into place.



How we cater for children and families

A snapshot of our Shire

Whilst families in the Indigo Shire have access to a range of services that support children's health and wellbeing for many families this access is limited. These services include playgroups, long day care, family day care, outside school hours care, toy libraries, kindergartens and schools, as well as health care, MCH services, community education, playgrounds and cultural experiences such as libraries, museums, gardens and galleries.

Targeted and intensive services provide further support for children and families. These include family support and counselling, specialist children's services and mental health services which may be required by families with higher needs, or in crisis and by those who have children with additional needs.

Early years services are characterised by their diversity. In Indigo Shire, service providers include local, state and federal governments, non-government organisations, private providers, community groups or a combination of these. Funding and regulation of early years services may also be the responsibility of one or more of these

levels of government, private providers or non-government organisations.

Council contributes to the wellbeing of children and families by providing:

- Leadership for local planning and development.
- A range of direct services and community events for families.
- Support for local community organisations through community grants and facilities.
- Advice to other levels of government on how to meet the needs of Indigo's children and families.

Council's contribution to the early years includes substantial financial contribution to the MCH service and immunisation program, provision and maintenance of some facilities for preschool and child care cooperatives, support to mobile library vans and the mobile immunisation program, and the Indigo Community Grants Program.



Maternal and Child Health

From the birth of their children, all families have access to the universal MCH service. MCH nurses work with families across the Shire to offer support and advice on a broad range of health and development issues. The service is provided from seven centres within the Shire.

A variety of services are provided by Council's MCH service including support and advice on breastfeeding, family health, new parent groups, children's growth and key age and stage developmental assessments of children aged birth to six years, through centre-based programs and home visits.

Child care

The federal government is responsible for ensuring families have access to quality child care services and provides child care benefit payments to eligible families to improve affordability. While a range of child care options, including both community-based and private long day care, family day care, out of school/ kindergarten hours care and vacation programs, are offered across the Indigo Shire, choice is limited for families depending on location and the size of the service. There is no occasional care offered in the Shire.

In the Shire, community-based child care is highly regarded by families, leading to high demand for places. There are suggestions the current operational hours and models of care need to be assessed with a view to increasing their flexibility and responsiveness, thus improving the range of options available to meet parental demand. The issue of more convenient child care was identified as important at focus group discussions in 2008 and is a key priority of this plan.

Toy libraries and playgroups

Toy libraries support children's development in the early years by offering families information and advice regarding the importance of play. They also provide an opportunity for families to meet together, build supportive social networks and reduce social isolation by engaging those who might not otherwise use early years services.

There are currently three community-managed toy libraries operating in the Indigo Shire.

Playgroups provide developmentally appropriate quality play opportunities at a critical time in a child's development. Playgroups also enhance parenting skills, capacity, confidence and enjoyment, promote social networks and community connectedness and create pathways to other services. The main feature that distinguishes playgroups from other early years services is that the parent or caregiver attends and participates in the playgroup's activities and is responsible for their child's safety when they are at the playgroup. There are currently seven playgroups operating throughout the Shire.

Preschools and primary schools

In the Indigo Shire there is a range of programs offered for both three year old kindergarten and four year old preschool. All kindergarten programs are community managed. Most programs, including those at Rutherglen, Yackandandah and the two in Beechworth, are operated by community based committees of management. Programs at Chiltern, Tangambalanga and Kergunyah are community managed and operated by Community Early Years Childcare (formerly FARMS) which is auspiced by the Community Education Centre in Wodonga. Three year old sessions are available at most preschools and enrolments are coordinated by the committees of management at each establishment. These programs are not subsidised by the state government and are dependent on four year old enrolment requirements.

There are 16 primary schools in the Shire, with five providing a range of out of school hours child care. Council recognises there are opportunities for more efficient use of current resources and infrastructure, in particular by using school buildings for a range of community activities. To achieve this we will develop strong partnerships with schools in line with *The Schools as Community Facilities: Policy Framework and Guidelines* and explore opportunities to co-locate services and share school facilities. Some families in the Shire choose to home school their children.



Playgrounds

Indigo has currently 27 playgrounds throughout the Shire, with the majority located in smaller sites and primarily targeted at children aged three to seven years. The play equipment used has been generally provided by commercial suppliers. Council undertakes an ongoing audit on all facilities to identify their current condition and the level of risk in the likelihood of an accident or injury occurring. While there are some notable exceptions, the play value and interest offered by many of the Shire’s playgrounds is considered by families as below what should be expected and what can be provided with contemporary materials and design approaches. This will be addressed in an upcoming review of Council’s existing Playground Strategy.

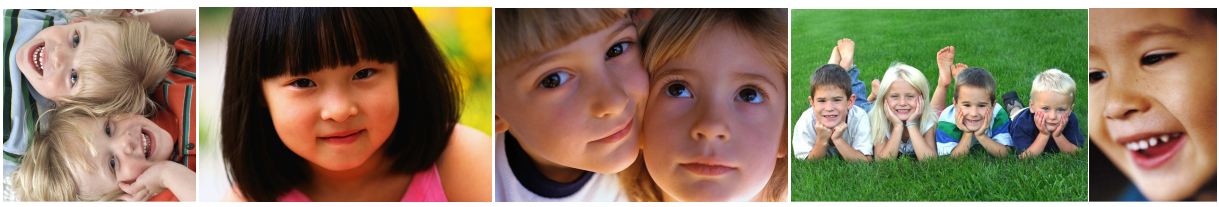
A coordinated approach

Throughout the first eight years of children’s lives, early childhood professionals collect important

information that provides a rich picture of each child’s health and wellbeing. It is important that families and early childhood professionals access and share this information so that they can build a whole picture of the child. To achieve this, Council will partner with families, schools, early childhood services, health agencies, neighbouring Shires and municipalities, privately owned child care centres, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Education, relevant state and federal government bodies and the broader community. Better linkages between MCH, child care and preschool, and services such as playgroups, toy libraries, nursing mother’s groups and health services will also increase the level of support and access for families to information and services required in the early years. Using an integrated approach to the provision of information on key parenting and early learning issues has been identified by community members as a key issue for our Shire.

Overview of early years services in the Indigo Shire

	Occasional child care	Long day care	Family day care	Playgroups	Toy library	Maternal & Child Health	Preschool/ kindergarten	Before school	After school	Before kinder care	After kinder care	Primary school	Community health services	General practice	Hospital	Library	Mobile library	Immunisation clinic
Stanley												●					●	
Beechworth		●	●	●	●	●	●		●			●	●	●	●	●		●
Yackandandah		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●			●		●	●		●	●
Tangambalanga		●				●	●	●	●		●	●		●			●	●
Chiltern				●		●	●			●	●	●	●	●		●		●
Barnawartha			●	●		●		●	●			●					●	●
Rutherglen			●	●	●	●	●	●	●			●	●			●		●
Wahgunyah		●	●	●		●						●					●	
Wooragee												●					●	
Osbornes Flat												●					●	
Upper Sandy Creek												●					●	
Middle Indigo												●					●	
Kergunyah		●					●										●	



How we can plan for healthy children and families

We act on research

There has been increasing evidence in both national and international research of the importance of the early years in setting the stage for later life. Much of this recognition has been drawn from research on early brain development. This points to the significance of secure and caring relationships in children's early years. Nurturing and responsive care giving in the first years of life, linked with quality early childhood development programs and good nutrition, can improve considerably children's learning, behaviour and health. We know we can make a difference by making sure the most appropriate supports are available to children in their local communities.

Other key research findings include:

- Children are considered active agents in life rather than passive recipients.
- Children's work is play.
- Brain development is at its peak from birth to eight years.
- Almost half of children aged birth to 12 are in some form of non-parental care outside the home (ABS 2006)
- The number of children abused and neglected in Australia has risen steadily over the past 12 years with a marked increase in child protection notifications in rural areas (Australia Institute of Health and Welfare 2006)
- Substance abuse is one of the main reasons for the increase in child abuse with up to up to 80% of child abuse cases being related to abuse of alcohol, heroin and amphetamines (Families Australia).
- Family breakdown affects over half of all marriages in Australia.
- Post natal depression affects one in seven women in Australia. Lack of treatment and support can lead to devastating impacts on the mother, the infant, family members and wider relationships.
- Children who are the target of, or witness to, family violence are affected in their cognitive, emotional, behavioural and social development.
- Early identification and intervention are crucial to maintaining children's health and wellbeing.
- Strong partnerships enhance children's success in learning.

The challenge for all stakeholders is to embrace early years research when planning, delivering and advocating for services that directly affect children and families.



We follow good models

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is an international human rights treaty that grants all children and young people (aged 17 and under) a comprehensive set of rights. Australia signed the Convention in August 1990, and it came into effect for Australia in January 1991. The convention gives children and young people over 40 substantive rights. These include the right to:

- Special protection measures and assistance.
- Access to services such as education and health care.
- Develop their personalities, abilities and talents to the fullest potential.
- Grow up in an environment of happiness, love and understanding.
- Be informed about and participate in achieving their rights in an accessible and active manner.

Indigo Shire Council acknowledges the convention and applies its principles to all children in the Shire without discrimination.

Social determinants of health

Social determinants of health are the primary determinants of whether people stay healthy or become ill. They are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. They acknowledge that poorer people have substantially shorter life expectancies and more illnesses than the rich. Early childhood experience is a critical determinant of whether a person grows to become healthy or not. Early childhood factors such as poverty, family stability and violence, social assistance dependency and living in public housing can have long term developmental implications on an individual's health.

Indigo Shire Council recognises that the context in which children live their lives, including their family, school and community environments—and the interactions among these—is crucial to their future health and wellbeing. Important to Council is the impact on children of:

- Family functioning.
- Social support and networks.
- Childhood activities.
- Attendance at child care, kindergarten, preschool and school.



We keep up to date with government policy

In recent years, there has been a greater focus from all levels of government on strengthening families and communities in order to provide children with a good start to life.

National policy

At the moment, quality standards across early childhood education and care services vary across Australia and there is often limited information available to help families choose the best service for their children. Currently, the commonwealth government, in partnership with all state and territory governments, is making important changes to early childhood education and care in Australia.

National Quality Framework for Early Education and Care

As of July 2010, the *National Quality Framework for Early Education and Care* will be rolled out across Australia. This framework will set a new National Quality Standard for early childhood education and care providers in Australia by improving quality through:

- Improved staff-to-child ratios to ensure each child gets more individual care and attention.
- New staff qualification requirements to ensure staff have the skills to help children learn and develop.
- A new quality rating system to ensure Australian families have access to transparent information relating to the quality of early childhood education and care service.
- The establishment of a new national body to ensure early childhood education and care is of a high quality.

The new framework will cover long day care, family day care, outside school hours care and preschools.

The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia

The *Early Years Learning Framework* is Australia's first early childhood curriculum framework which will guide early childhood educators in developing quality early childhood education programs. The framework describes the principles, practice and outcomes to support and enhance young children's learning from birth to five years of age, as well as their transition to school. This will help ensure consistency in the delivery of learning programs around Australia. The *Early Years Learning Framework* was endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments in July 2009.

Universal access to early childhood education

On 29 November 2008, the Council of Australian Governments endorsed a new National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education. Under the agreement, the commonwealth and state and territory governments have committed to ensuring that all children will have access to a quality early childhood education program by 2013, delivered by a four-year university-trained early childhood teacher, for 15 hours a week, 40 weeks a year, in the year before formal schooling. Since then, the commonwealth government has committed \$970 million over five years to achieve universal access to 15 hours of early childhood education, of which \$210.6 million is allocated to Victoria. Victoria is in the early phase of planning for implementation of this reform.



State policy

Victorian state regulations provide for the operation and programming of early childhood centres. The state government is responsible for regulating kindergartens, centre based long day care and occasional care services and provides funding which contributes to the provision of a kindergarten program for all eligible children in the year prior to school entry.

The Victorian State Government also plays an important role in supporting integrated service delivery for children and their families locally. It achieves this by directly providing early childhood services, including education and curriculum, preschool, Maternal and Child Health services, and parent and family support services. It also provides early intervention services for children at risk or in need of specialist assistance, as well as child protection services and child care licensing and regulation.

Children’s Services Act 1996

The main purpose of the *Children’s Services Act 1996* is to provide for the licensing and regulation of children’s services in the state of Victoria. It offers clear principles around the licensing and operation of children’s services as well as providing enforcement, funding and administration guidance. All children’s service providers in Victoria are subject to the Act.

Children’s Services Regulations 2009

The *Children’s Services Regulations 1998* was updated in 2009. It was originally made under the

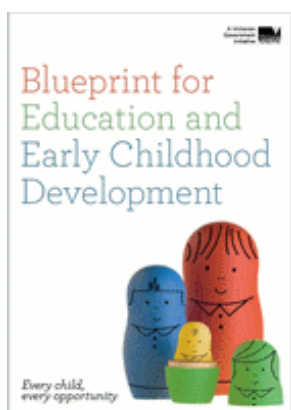
Children’s Services Act 1996 to regulate the licensing and operation of children’s services in Victoria. The regulations provide information on licensing of children’s services, records, provision and display of information, staffing, children’s programs, health and welfare of children and facilities.

Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood

The *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood* outlines the state government’s vision for Victorian education and early childhood development over the next five years. It was written in response to the creation of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) in 2007 which brought together early childhood services and schools. The document articulates shared goals for all Victorian children encompassing both early childhood services and education.

Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework

The Victorian Framework describes six key principles for professionals and five learning outcomes for children from birth to eight years, linking the learning outcomes to the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia. These provide a shared language for all early childhood professionals and families to use when planning for children’s learning and development. The Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development launched the new Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework in November 2009.





We take a local approach

Local governments are those that are closest to children – to their homes, families and communities. Municipal governments provide services that are vital to the quality of children’s lives: recreation, health care services, water supply, transportation, child care options, housing and support for families.

Local Government Act 1989

The *Local Government Act 1989* is the principal empowering legislation for councils in Victoria. One of the functions of council under the *Local Government Act 1989* is to provide and maintain community infrastructure in the municipal district. Council is required to ensure that facilities provided by the council are accessible and equitable.

Indigo Shire Council Plan 2009-2012

The plan sets out a framework the Council will use for the next four years, incorporating proactive strategies that address specific goals that are important to the local community. Under the pillar Developing Sustainable Communities, Council identifies the development of an Early Years Plan as an action in achieving a healthy community.

Healthy Communities’ Plan 2010-2014

This plan outlines what Indigo Shire Council is going to do to promote good health and prevent ill

health amongst its communities. It looks at the bigger picture of what is going on in our community that influences, or even contributes to, local health issues. One of the key priorities in the *Healthy Communities’ Plan* is to improve access to support services for children and families. Council will achieve this by:

- Supporting and promoting immunisation programs.
- Supporting and promoting accessible, affordable and flexible child care options across the Shire.
- Supporting breastfeeding friendly practices and programs.
- Promoting MCH key age stage visits;
- Providing the community with information about child friendly places.
- Supporting the Early Years Service Providers’ Network.

The *Healthy Children and Families’ Plan* directly informs this plan.

Healthy Children and Families’ Plan 2010-2014

This is Indigo Shire Council’s Early Years Plan. It focuses on planning ahead to enhance our support for children and families throughout the Shire. It influences, and is influenced by, a series of other Council plans and strategies as well as state and commonwealth policies.





Our professionals adopt sound principles

Our *Healthy Children and Families Plan* supports the same six principles as the *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework*. These principles underpin our work with children and families and reflect Council's commitment to developing a holistic approach to children's health, learning and development from birth to age eight.

1. **Family centred practice:** We recognise and respect the pivotal role of families in children's lives. We aim to deliver family centred practices by supporting environments that contribute positively to children's learning and development.
2. **Partnerships with other professionals:** We work alongside a range of early childhood service providers and professionals to assist families to maximise their children's development. We recognise the significance of transitions between early childhood services and settings, and work collaboratively to ensure these are smooth and well supported.
3. **Equity and diversity:** We know that children's development is shaped by their personal, family and cultural identity. As professionals, we support the needs of children from Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD).

4. **Responsive engagement for learning and teaching:** We provide safe and stimulating environments across the Shire that encourage children to actively engage in play and learning.
5. **An holistic approach:** We understand that all aspects of children's development are interrelated; their health, education, personal and social development, and emotional wellbeing. We promote connections between services to meet the needs of the whole child.
6. **Reflective practice:** We regularly gather information that assesses our practice to challenge and improve what we do. We continually develop our own professional knowledge to enable us to provide the best possible learning and development opportunities for all children in our Shire.

It is a responsibility of the Indigo Shire Council, as a facilitator of early years services, to ensure quality outcomes for children and families. Council acknowledges the learning outcomes identified in the *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework*, and supports early childhood settings and schools as they design the types of learning experiences that enable children to develop toward the achievement of these outcomes.

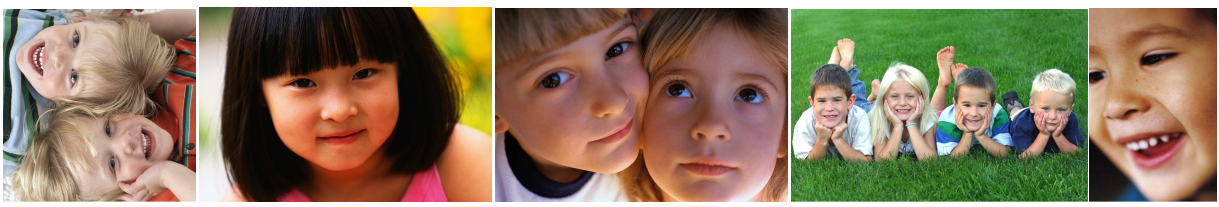


What we have done

It has taken considerable time and effort to develop our *Healthy Children and Families' Plan*. The planning process was facilitated by the Integrated Health Services (IHS) Consortium through its IHS project and was implemented using

a community engagement model. The project, while supported by a range of local service providers, was driven largely by community members. An overview of this process is tabled below.

Activity	Priorities suggested/identified	Comments
Informal discussion amongst health staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Literacy Physical activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness that service provision was so disjointed it was important to have some kind of plan to develop a strategic response to supporting the early years Early years ought be considered in the context of a key determinant of health
Service provider forum: Dec 2007 20 attendees from health, community and education sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to early intervention services Access to a variety of child care options Community based early learning and literacy programs available in all communities Formal networking opportunities for service providers Access to GP bulk billing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The plan would be a plan for the geographic area of the Indigo Shire and not just about what the Indigo Shire Council would be doing Significantly, this group also emphasized the importance of further discussion and planning across the Shire which included community members
Reference group: March to Sept 2008 Representation from the two health services and the Council	No further development of priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The priorities identified at the December 2007 meeting needed to be "checked" Identified that a collaborative community engagement methodology would be used to develop a MEY action plan Developed and then implemented a questionnaire across the whole Shire Developed the TOR for a steering committee of both service providers and community to analyse this data Collated epidemiological and demographic data Identified individuals interested in participating on the steering committee
Steering committee: Dec 2008 to Oct 2009 Service provider numbers needed to be limited to no more than the community representatives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The provision of accessible, affordable and flexible child care options The provision of social activities and venues which enable people to connect and which are inexpensive and child friendly The equitable provision of relevant and useful information in a range of appropriate and accessible ways across the Shire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An action plan to be developed for presentation to the Council in September 2009 based on the available epidemiological and demographic data as well as the community identified priorities provided through the questionnaire <p>Roles of members:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Community Reps: Are a conduit to or from their community and groups they are members of. Using all of the information they have at their disposal they will make decisions at the meetings. Service providers : Provide specialist information and a conduit to the areas of health and education Council staff: take responsibility for populating the planning template with information developed through the steering committee. The IHS coordinator will facilitate the development of the action plan - challenge ideas and assumptions, coordinate information and requests for information, and facilitate meetings to ensure timelines are met
Actions forum: July 2009 30 attendees from twelve different services	A final draft of the Indigo Shire Municipal Early Years Action Plan was developed for ratification by the Indigo Shire Council	Identification of and commitment to a range of strategies to achieve the objectives articulated under each of the priorities
Draft Action Plan: Sept 2009 Draft MEY action plan		A Council briefing provided by three community reps and the IHS coordinator
Healthy Children and Families' Plan: May 2010 Draft early years plan	A final draft of the Indigo Shire Healthy Children and Families Plan was developed for ratification by the Indigo Shire Council	A Council briefing by Indigo Shire staff



Our commitment to children and families

Our mission

Happy, healthy children and families

Our vision

Child and family friendly communities: To support communities and build environments that welcome children and families.

Inclusive services: To coordinate child and family centred programs and activities across the Indigo Shire that cater for the diverse and individual needs of children and families including those from Indigenous and CALD backgrounds.

Strong leadership: To provide leaders who are committed, at community and municipal levels, to ensuring that children's rights and interests are appropriately considered in local governance.

Sustainable practices: To make decisions and set directions that positively impact on children and families long term and can be sustained into the future.

A culture of learning: To seek up-to-date information that will generate new insights and guide decision making with the goal of improving services for children and families.

Collaborative partnerships: To form alliances, working alongside individuals, groups and other agencies, levels of government and businesses to increase our local capacity to create conditions that nurture children and families.

Empowered communities: To support and enable communities by providing efficient and adequate resources, systems and processes.

Our values

We value the early years: We uphold the rights of the child, recognise the importance of the early years as a pivotal stage in growth and development and act in the best interests of children.

We value families: We are convinced that the family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and wellbeing of children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community.

We value community: We understand the benefits for children and families in feeling a sense of belonging and connectedness with those around them.

We value equity: We acknowledge the need to promote a equitable distribution of services, resources and power for children and families.

We value flexibility: We know we must be able to adapt to ever changing conditions by thinking creatively and responding to emerging opportunities.

We value integrity: We realise that strong social connections and networks are built on trust, respect and reciprocal interaction.

Our key understandings

Families: We understand that children's development takes place in the context of their families.

Access: We understand that access to support and infrastructure is essential to ensure maximum benefits for children and families.

Planning: We understand that successful planning for local communities requires a strong knowledge base about what really matters for children and families in our local area.



What we are going to do

To support healthy children and families across the Indigo Shire means planning for action. Our action plan is framed by three main goals. These goals are clearly linked to the three key understandings of family, access and planning, and are informed by current state and federal priorities for early childhood education. Together, the three goals combine to uphold Indigo’s mission of building communities that support strong and healthy children and families.

Key understanding: *Children’s development takes place in the context of their families.*

We will support families by:

- Providing accessible, affordable and flexible child care options through:
 1. The central coordination of all child care types across the Shire.
 2. Providing a variety of child care options.

Key understanding: *Access to support and infrastructure is essential to ensure maximum benefits for children and families.*

We will enhance access by:

- Providing social activities and venues which enable people to connect and which are inexpensive and child friendly through:
 1. Providing public venues which include eating venues, medical clinics, and other relevant business premises which are child friendly.
 2. Ensuring support for volunteer managed activities/groups related to early life.
 3. Identifying and developing appropriate physical infrastructure.

Key understanding: *Successful planning for local communities requires a strong knowledge base about what really matters for children and families in our local area.*

We will plan intentionally to:

- Provide all families across the Shire with access to relevant and useful early childhood information in a variety of ways through:
 1. Increasing access to information for all members of the communities of Indigo Shire.
 2. Advocating for appropriate provision and access to health services in all our communities.
 3. Identifying processes which ensure coordination between services also occurs.

The objectives and strategies identified to achieve these understanding and goals will be monitored in an ongoing way through the HCFP Implementation Committee. This committee will be resourced and supported by Council and membership will consist of community volunteers and service provider representatives with the majority of members always being community representatives.

Acronyms used in the action plan include:

ISC	Indigo Shire Council
BHS	Beechworth Health Service
INH	Indigo North Health
CSP	Children’s Service Providers
KV	Kiewa Valley
PS	Primary School
CC	Child care
MCH	Maternal and Child Health
DEECD	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
CD	Community Development
HCFP	Healthy Children and Families’ Plan
UMFC	Upper Murray Family Care

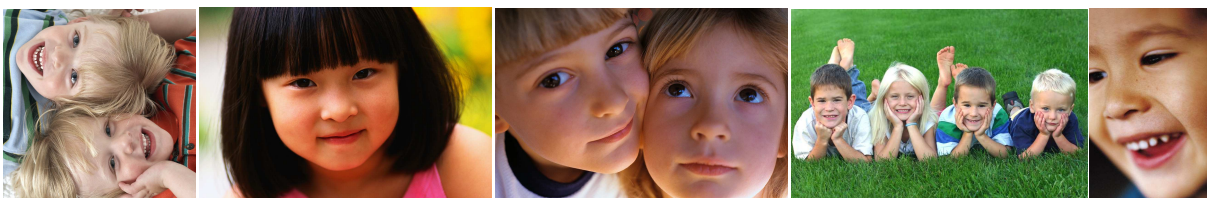


Key understanding 1: Children’s development takes place in the context of their families.

Goal: Supporting local families by providing accessible, affordable and flexible child care options.

Support Strategy: To appoint an early childhood community development worker.

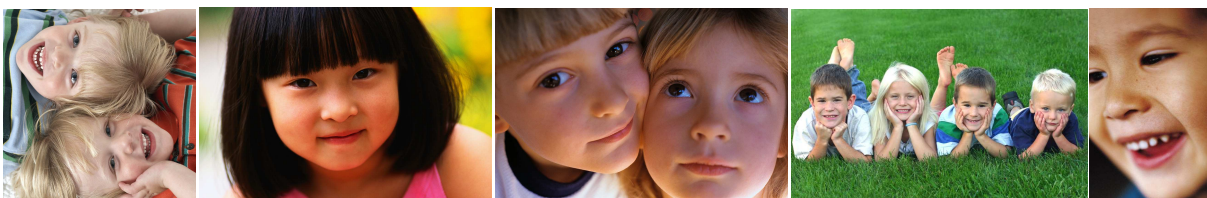
Objectives	Strategies/Actions	By Whom?	When	How will we know we’ve done it?
<p>1.1: Central coordination of all child care types across the Shire. (including long day care, occasional care, family day care, before and after school care, vacation care, after kinder care and mobile child care)</p>	<p>A working group will be established which identifies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • current child care services across Indigo Shire • demand for CC services • issues in meeting demand • potential solutions 	<p>Lead by ISC</p> <p>Membership:</p> <p>KV PS</p> <p>INH</p> <p>Beechworth PS</p> <p>UMFC</p> <p>Tangam CC</p> <p>Albury Wodonga CC</p> <p>Community Reps incl HCFP implementation group</p> <p>HCFP steering committee</p>	<p>Over the life of the plan and commencing</p>	<p>This will be determined by the relevant working groups.</p>
<p>1.2: Provision of a variety of child care options (including long day care, occasional care, family day care, before and after school care, vacation care, after kinder care and mobile child care)</p>	<p>Advocate for resources to support a dedicated Early Years CD worker provided by ISC</p>	<p>INH</p> <p>BHS</p>	<p>July 2010</p> <p>To inform the 2011/2012 budget process</p>	



Key understanding 2: Access to support and infrastructure is essential to ensure maximum benefits for children and families.

Goal: Enhancing access by providing social activities and venues which enable people to connect and which are inexpensive and child friendly.

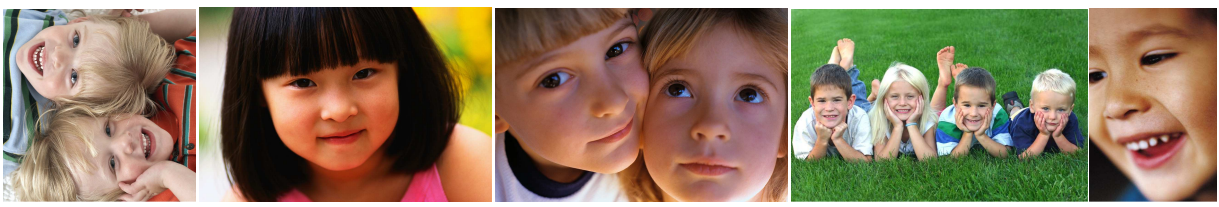
Objectives	Strategies/Actions	By Whom?	When	How will we know we've done it?
2.1: Provide public venues which include eating venues, medical clinics, and other relevant business premises which are child friendly	Establish a working group to identify a process to implement a "child friendly" status for health, retail and business venues across the Indigo Shire	BHS INH ISC Tangam CC Community reps	October 2010 and ongoing	This will be determined by the relevant working groups.
2.2: Ensure support for volunteer managed activities/groups related to early life	Using community engagement processes partner with small communities to provide accessible and relevant family activities	INH BHS ISC DEECD	July 2010 and ongoing	
2.3: Identify and develop appropriate physical infrastructure	Support the recruitment, skill development and training of volunteers to enable the establishment and sustainability of groups which improve connectedness of young families e.g. playgroups, toy libraries	ISC KV PS (locally) INH (locally) ISC councillor Implementation Steering Committee	December 2010 and ongoing	
	Develop walking tracks, bike paths and footpaths which connect communities as well as within communities	ISC Recreation Community Planning	Ongoing	
	Ensure that all outdoor play areas are climate appropriate with shade sails and taps			
	Investigate fencing of playgrounds			
	Provide an information board in each of the major towns and ensure all of the above are both accessible and provided equitably			



Key understanding 3: Successful **planning** for local communities requires a strong knowledge base about what really matters for children and families in our local area.

Goal: Planning intentionally to provide access to relevant and useful early childhood information in a variety of ways for all families across the Shire.

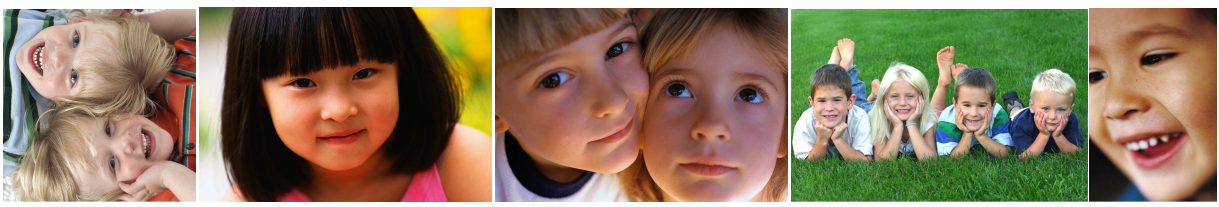
Objectives	Strategies/Actions	By Whom?	When	How will we know we've done it?
3.1: Provide accessible information for all members of the communities of Indigo Shire	Establish an Indigo Shire Early Years Service Providers Network which will initially have three roles <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To identify what information is required by families 	Facilitated by ISC INH BHS UMFC Gateway Community Health Service DEECD	May 2010	This will be determined by the relevant working groups.
	3.2: Advocate for appropriate provision and access to health services in all our communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To identify the most useful way(s) to share it To advocate for common locations of EY services wherever possible 	ISC (MCH) HCFP implementation committee rep	May 2010	
3.3: Identify processes which ensure coordination between services also occurs	Advocate for a "community health service" for the communities of Yackandandah, Kiewa and Tangambalanga	IHS Consortium BHS	Ongoing	
	Address the availability of early intervention services for families across Indigo Shire including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are they? Where are they? How do you find out about them? How are they accessed? 	Working group comprising community members plus UMFC INH BHS ISC - MCH DEECD Albury Wodonga Child Care	Nov 2010 and ongoing	
	Provide incidental access to information in relation to family violence, mental health, alcohol and other drugs and gambling in family oriented public venues across the Shire	INH BHS Gateway Community Health Service	Ongoing	
	All service planning processes will seek to identify and reflect community identified needs	ISC INH BHS	Ongoing	
Advocate for access to bulk billing medical provision in all communities	ISC INH BHS	Ongoing and opportunistically		



Where to from here

The rolling out of the *Healthy Children and Families' Plan* will be overseen by an implementation steering committee made up of community members and service providers in the same proportion as for the development steering committee. This model highlights the importance of involving our communities actively in identifying needs, defining priorities, taking action, evaluating

and monitoring progress so that we can move towards a healthy and sustainable future in the Indigo Shire. As part of our commitment to continuous improvement, an annual review of the action plan and its associated strategies will ensure that the realisation of new initiatives and partnership processes is dynamic, responsive and effective.



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