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Acknowledgement

Bass Coast Shire Council acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the first Australians and recognises that they have a unique relationship with the land and water.

Council also recognises that we are situated on the traditional lands of the Boon Wurrung/Bunurong, members of the Kulin Nation who have lived here for thousands of years. We offer our respect to their elders past and present and through them, all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people.
“Children are important. They bring their own value and influence to the world, as well as being shaped by the world around them. Children give joy and purpose to the lives of many and help bring people together. Children are particularly vulnerable in their early years and need others to seek out or advocate for services or supports on their behalf.” (Investing in the Early Years—A National Early Childhood Development Strategy, 2009)

**Introduction from the Mayor**

Families, schools, community, organisations, workplaces and all tiers of government have a responsibility to ensure our children are safe and supported. It does take a whole village to raise a child and we all have a part to play – they are our future, and their well-being needs to be nurtured with personal, social and financial investment.

It is with a sense of optimism for our children’s future that I introduce Council’s Municipal Early Years Plan representing the 4,916 children currently living in Bass Coast Shire. Research has shown that investment in the early years has returns in educational outcomes, productivity and positive community participation, so it is important to have strategic directions which are specific to our children aged 0-12 years.

It is vital to also work with the State and Federal Governments for an integrated strategic approach and response. One fact that raises the call to action is knowing that 40.8% of our children are living in a family of most disadvantage compared with the State average of 20.8%.

Not an idle Council in the early years arena, some of our accomplishments and achievements to date include successfully attracting funding for both the Phillip Island Early Learning Centre and Bass Valley Children’s Centre, with works starting in late-2016, and capital upgrades for San Remo, Inverloch and Wonthaggi North kindergartens to meet the 15 hours of kindergarten per week required for all children.

We have also supported both financially and in-kind kindergarten committees and playgroups, the annual Children’s Expo and Family Fun Day, a Preschool Field Officer program in collaboration with South Gippsland Shire, and an early years program in our libraries. We have partnered with three local schools to lead the linking learning program, and introduced early years as a key objective in Council’s the broader Education Plan 2014-2019.

This Municipal Early Years Plan will see further investment in many forms based on need and priorities as identified by the children, parents, schools, service groups and organisations that have influenced this plan and work within the frameworks set by the State and Federal Governments.

On behalf of Councillors and Council, I would like to personally thank all involved who have provided guidance, support, on the ground knowledge in the development of this plan, and importantly solutions to the issues and challenges we face here today. We look forward to your continued input and review over the next four years.  

**Cr Jordan Crugnale**
Acknowledgements

Many people have worked on this plan and have given their time and thoughts to achieve this document. These include parents, children, staff from Early Years agencies and internal staff of the Council. Kimberly Flanagan from KF Consulting has provided background analysis of data and undertook some consultations. Rowena Cann Principal Adviser, from the Inner Gippsland Children and Youth Partnership, Department of Education and Training has contributed to the process with support and data.

A Reference Group has overseen the development of this plan and provided critical comment. Members included representatives from Y Kindergarten Cluster, Bass Coast Health – Family Day Care, Best Start and Maternal and Child Health, Pre-school Field Officer, West Gippsland Regional Library Corporation, KFConsulting, and Leonie Anstey, Principal Wonthaggi Primary School.

About the Municipal Early Years Plan 2016-2020

Children in Bass Coast have a healthy and optimistic future. Bass Coast has a wonderful natural environment, broad range of educational opportunities, play spaces and health services. If a child is born in 2016 what expectations and aspirations should they have?

This Plan has been derived from learnings from the previous adopted Municipal Early Years Plan 2011-2015. Considerable work has been undertaken through the development of the adopted Education Plan 2013-2017 for the theme of Early Years. There are also links with the Municipal Health and Well Being Plan 2013-2017, the Draft Youth Action Plan 2016, the Draft Disability Action Plan 2016, the Draft Play Space Plan, and the Linking Learning project. Issues considered have included:

- Education
- Health
- Access to Services
- Active Recreation and play
- Emerging Issues
The data used to develop key issues will be derived from the Inner Gippsland Children and Youth Partnership which is a program of the Department of Education and Training aimed at bringing all services together who work with vulnerable children, young people and their families in the local government areas of Bass Coast, Baw Baw, Latrobe and South Gippsland. Data sources used for the development of this Plan are listed in Appendix 1 with a summary sheet.

This Plan aims to bring all of this information together along with current research to inform Council as to the key directions for the next four years. A Reference Group with representatives from early years’ services, including primary schools, and families has overseen this work.

**Policy Context - Government**

The Victorian Government has been focussing on targeting services to those most vulnerable families and has released The *Roadmap for Reform: strong families, safe children* (2016). The focus of child protection in Victoria will shift from crisis response to prevention and early intervention. There will be increased in-home support services for vulnerable families, extra child protection workers, more culturally-sensitive support for Aboriginal children, and a boost to the number of foster and kinship carers.

These $168 million dollars in the 2016/17 Victorian Budget for children and family services also forms part of the Labor Government’s initial response to the Royal Commission into Family Violence.

The *Roadmap for Reform: strong families, safe children* includes once-in-a-generation changes designed to ensure all Victorian families are as safe as possible and that vulnerable children are fully supported.

Early Childhood has been a key focus and priority of successive state governments for over a decade. This focus emerged following strong advocacy built on a solid foundation of evidence on the importance of early childhood experiences on the lifelong journey.

This advocacy resulted in extra funding for universal services such as the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Service, an extension of hours for kindergarten and the introduction of three-year-old kindergarten.

The universal MCH Service is jointly funded by the State Government and local governments using a population-based formula with weighting for socio-economic disadvantage. Funding for the MCH Service is based on 100 per cent participation of families at each of the 10 key age and stage consultations. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Department of Education and Training (DET) and the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) commits to a 50/50 split in funding for the service, based on a model of 10 key age and stage (KAS)
consultations and additional activities. The enhanced MCH Service is entirely funded by the State Government for an additional 15 hours of service delivery (17 hours in rural regions, including Bass Coast) to vulnerable families.

The State Government funds 15 hours of kindergarten for every child in the year before they attend school. There is also funded three-year-old kindergarten (Early Start) for eligible families, targeting Health Care Card holders and Indigenous children.

State Government funding has increasingly targeted vulnerable families and tightened eligibility criteria for many services. This can be seen in the changes to Supported Playgroup targeting Health Care Card (HCC) holders, kindergarten fee subsidies largely restricted to HCC holders and demand for family support services driving accessibility towards those with increasingly complex needs.

The Federal Government reforms for the Child Care Rebate are due to take effect in July 2017. Childcare subsidies will be means tested and high income families will receive a substantially reduced rebate. Low income families will have up to 85 per cent of their childcare costs met, although they will need to meet an activity test of working, studying or volunteering at least eight hours per fortnight. There will be a safety net for vulnerable and low income families who do not pass the activity test.

The roll out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is likely to mean significant increases for early intervention support available for children. This program will be available to families living in Bass Coast on 1 October 2017.

Policy Context – Bass Coast Shire Council

Council Plan 2013-17

Mission, Vision and Strategic Context

The development of the Plan supports the Council’s Vision and Mission, identified in the Council Plan 2013-17.

Vision

Bass Coast Shire will be recognised as a unique place of environmental significance where our quality of life and sense of community is balanced by sustainable and sensitive development, population and economic growth.

Mission

To take a leading role in partnership with other levels of government, businesses community groups and individuals to make our community’s vision a reality.
The development of the Municipal Early Years Plan fits the Council Plan 2013-2017 Objective: **Healthy Communities - our community feels connected, safe and strong.**

The Council Plan identifies the following strategies under this objective:

- ensure the community has access to a range of educational opportunities to maximise their potential
- build leadership, skills and capacity within the community

**Why a Municipal Early Years Plan?**

Council has many strategies and plans which touch on the lives of children and their families. Research has shown that investment in the early years has returns in educational outcomes, productivity and positive community participation so it is important to have strategic goals which are specific to children aged 0-12 years. Whilst the previous Plan covered children 0-8 years, there is no strategy which acknowledges the 8-12 year olds. Educational frameworks now cover this group of children.

The Council Plan 2013-17 Objective: **Healthy Communities : Our community feels strong and safe** is the overarching principle that guides further strategies.

Consultations for the Draft Youth Action Plan 2016, Draft Disability Action Plan 2016, the Draft Play Space Plan, the Sports and Recreation Active Needs Assessment 2016 all refer to programs, strategies and activities which affect the lives of children and their families in Bass Coast.

**Bass Coast Shire Population 2016**

The 2016 estimated resident population of children in 0-12 years in Bass Coast is 4916 – 2517 boys and 2399 girls. The projected population growth for the 0-12 year age group to 2020 is 8%. In raw numbers this equates to 5324 – 2713 boys and 2611 girls. This is small comparative to other age cohorts but given the limited range of services, this growth will put pressure on exiting services beyond their expected capacity.

Whilst Council does not deliver any early years services, it has a key role to play as a facilitator, co-ordinator, planner and advocate. It does provide many early years facilities and is able to attract major capital funding in collaboration with government and the community.

**Outcomes of the previous plan 2011-2015**

**What has happened since 2011?**

The vision of the MEYP 2011-2015 was:

*Bass Coast is a child-friendly municipality featuring a co-ordinated early years’ service system and community infrastructure that can respond to current and future needs of children 0-8 years and their families.*

The Plan had four key objectives:

1. To ensure the predicted increase in demand for services for 0-8 year olds and their families can be met.
2. To create family and child-friendly public spaces that are accessible and that cater for the developmental needs of 0-8 year olds.
3. To promote health, wellbeing, development and learning of 0-8 year olds living in Bass Coast.
4. To improve co-ordination and collaboration between services resulting in a more integrated service system for families and children.
How did we go?

Some key achievements:

• Capacity assessment of all Council owned Early Years buildings
• Successfully attracted government funding for capital works at the three kindergartens (San Remo, Inverloch and Wonthaggi North) to meet the introduction of the 15 hours program
• Successfully attracted funding to construct an early learning centre at Phillip Island
• Opening of the Phillip Island Early Learning Centre in 2014 to improve the facilities of the kindergarten, maternal and child health and child care services and to integrate with Cowes Primary School
• Began planning for the integrated new Community and Children’s Centre to replace the JLM kindergarten at Corinella
• Attract funding to provide and install appropriate shade for children in early years’ settings
• Encourage kindergartens to join Cluster Management – introduced YMCA of Ballarat to manage Wonthaggi, Wonthaggi North and Inverloch kindergartens, and UnitingCare Gippsland to manage JLM kindergarten at Corinella
• Support Kindergarten Parent Committees with maintenance
• Support Kindergarten Parent Committees with equipment through Community Grants
• Represent Bass Coast on the Municipal Association Early Years Strategy Group, the MAV/Department of Education and Training Round Table
• Actively participate in the Inner Gippsland Children and Youth Partnership
• Continue to financially contribute to the Maternal and Child Health Service with matched funding for the universal service
• Successfully sought funding for Children’s Week activities including two Expos
• Actively participate in the Best Start Partnership
• Financially support the PreSchool Field Officer program in collaboration with South Gippsland Shire Council
• Negotiate the changes to the Supported Playgroup program to be auspiced by Bass Coast Health
• Improvements in outcomes for children as measured in the Australian Early Development Census
• Become the lead agency, along with Cowes Primary School, in the three year Department of Education and Training funded Linking Learning program
• Support the West Gippsland Regional Library Corporation early year’s programs
• Introduce Early Years as a key objective in the BCSC Education Plan 2013-2017.
The development of the plan - who did we talk to and how?

Council has an adopted Consultation and Engagement Policy (2015). Staff have been very actively working with community members to seek their views on the actions and priorities for allocation of Council’s resources.

The recent consultations which are relevant to the development of this plan are the surveys and workshops for the Draft Disability Action Plan, Draft Youth Action Plan, the Sports and Recreation Active Needs Assessment 2016 and the Draft Play Space Plan.

In 2014, a series of workshops was held with the Early Years providers and parents in the formulation of the Council Education Plan 2013-2017. This resulted in Early Years becoming one of the three key themes of that plan.

The Linking Learning project which began in 2014 and is funded by the Department of Education and Training has administered a series of surveys to parents and service providers.

This Plan has been informed through a process called co-design which uses the expertise and experiences of the participants. Each person is considered an expert. In this case everyone has had an experience as a child, is a parent or is related to children. Each of the ten workshops asked four questions:

1. What is a plan
2. What is early childhood/children
3. List three issues for Bass Coast families and children
4. Name one key achievement you would like to see at the end of this Plan

Parents were asked what they would like for their child/children. The answers to these questions have been distilled into five key themes and the resulting actions reflect the discussions. A full consultation report is included as Appendix 2.

Three children’s workshops were conducted, the children were asked what they would like and to illustrate their number one priority. Some of their drawings have been used throughout the plan.
The development of the Draft Plan has been overseen by a Reference Group who are both early years’ professionals and parents residing in Bass Coast.

The Actions associated with the key objectives have been developed to cover the first two years of the Plan. It is intended that Council staff will be involved in the actions as a collaborative approach to early years. Many of the actions are directed at service providers as it has been recognised through the consultations that if service providers can deliver accessible, high quality and flexible services, this will benefit children and their families. Parent’s key issue is understanding what they can access, where and when. The involvement of children will be considered as the Plan progresses.

A mid-point review will be conducted to evaluate the impact of the Plan and establish the final two year Actions. This will ensure that the Plan is kept current with any changes in legislation, regulation and program changes.
0-12 years – what the data tells us...

**Mitigating Interventions**
- Enhanced Maternal and Child Health
- Child First
- Supported Playgroups
- Early Start Kindergarten
- School support services
- Early Childhood Intervention Service (ECIS)

**Resilient Youth Survey 2015 – Grade 3-6:**
- 88% feel safe at home
- 87% care for and serve others
- 92% value diversity
- 93% of students feel encouraged by teachers

**Children living in a family of most disadvantage**
- Bass Coast 40.9%  Victoria 20.8%

**Dental Health (at least one filling)**
- Bass Coast 36.9%  Victoria 30.8%

**Immunisation rates 24-27 months**
- 2012/13 – 96.1% → 2014/15 – 89.6%

**Family breakdown / violence**
- Bass Coast ranks 24 out of 79 Victorian LGAs

**Risk Factors**
- Kinder attendance
  - Bass Coast 93.9%  Victoria 98.2%

**Protective Factors**
- Loving family
- Reading at home:
  - Bass Coast 47%  Victoria

**Children reported to be in excellent health:**
- Bass Coast 92%  Victoria 88%

**Substance Abuse**
- Bass Coast 17.2%  Victoria 10.2%

**Loving family**
- Reading at home:
  - Bass Coast 47%  Victoria
Municipal Early Years 2016-2020 Action Plan

**Vision**

The vision for the MEYP 2016-2020 is:

To provide access to services for families through capacity building to maximise children’s outcomes.

Five key objectives emerged through the consultations:

1. Access to flexible services
2. Capacity building of professionals
3. Collaboration between services
4. Support for change makers
5. Access to information

**Year One Actions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Outcome Measure</th>
<th>Key Partners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access to flexible services</td>
<td>Scope what is currently operating in Bass Coast</td>
<td>List of services</td>
<td>For this to be successful, partners need to identify where they wish to place their resources. Further discussion required with agencies. Possible partners: Best Start South Coast Primary Care Partnership Kindergarten Cluster Managers Child First Alliance Maternal and Child Health Primary Schools Child Care centres Family Day Care Early Intervention Services School Support Services Supported Playgroups Bass Coast Health West Gippsland Regional Library Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identify gaps in service</td>
<td>Gaps identified</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Advocate to attract missing services</td>
<td>Evidence of advocacy including correspondence and meeting minutes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Capacity building of professionals</td>
<td>Determine benchmark</td>
<td>Documented discussions with professionals</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identify training opportunities</td>
<td>List of opportunities</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Make local times, venues and methods (eg video conferencing) available</td>
<td>Source practical solutions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaboration between services</td>
<td>Participate in Best Start</td>
<td>Recruit new partners</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promote the role of the Best Start program</td>
<td>Engage Best Start in wider networks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engage with the Child First Alliance</td>
<td>Quarterly liaison established</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support children in Out of Home Care to access services</td>
<td>Data from Inner Gippsland Children and Youth Partnership</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Establish an Early Years Professionals network</td>
<td>Network established</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Engage and support work of extra care meetings</td>
<td>Meetings attended</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCSC and BCH review and explore opportunities for early years services</td>
<td>Opportunities identified</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCSC and BCH review and explore opportunities to improve access and flexibility for families</td>
<td>Opportunities identified</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for change makers</td>
<td>Advocate to Inner Gippsland Youth and Child Partnership (IGCAYP)</td>
<td>Create think tank for action</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identify innovative practices</td>
<td>Research, seminars and discussions with professionals, academics</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Work with IGCAYP to identify mechanisms for children to be involved in service planning and delivery</td>
<td>Children’s involvement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Access to information</td>
<td>Work with parents to establish appropriate mechanisms</td>
<td>Consultations with parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Possible partners:
- West Gippsland Regional Library
- IGCAYP
- Murdoch Children’s Research Institute

Emerging partners in research eg Murdoch Children’s Institute

BCSC and BCH review and explore opportunities to improve access and flexibility for families. Opportunities identified Bass Coast Health and Bass Coast Shire.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Outcome measure</th>
<th>Key Partners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access to flexible services</td>
<td>Consult with service users about their experiences with Early Years services in Bass Coast</td>
<td>Consultations undertaken</td>
<td>Service providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Continue advocacy to attract services</td>
<td>Evidence of meetings and correspondence</td>
<td>Service providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Solutions focussed” forum to establish whether services can meet demand</td>
<td>Forum held</td>
<td>Parents and service providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consultation with parents re accessibility and flexibility</td>
<td>Consultation held</td>
<td>Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity building of professionals</td>
<td>Development of a shared training calendar</td>
<td>Calendar developed</td>
<td>Service providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Celebrate examples of good practice during Children’s Week</td>
<td>Celebration event</td>
<td>Service providers</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Consider possible scholarship opportunities</td>
<td>Discussions held</td>
<td>Possible partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Undertake scoping and criteria for scholarships</td>
<td>Scholarships established</td>
<td>To be determined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration between services</td>
<td>Joint projects and programs established</td>
<td>Services regularly collaborate</td>
<td>Service providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discuss models for networking</td>
<td>Model agreed</td>
<td>Service providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for change makers</td>
<td>Identify funding sources to provide for “think tank” opportunities for parents</td>
<td>Funding sourced</td>
<td>Philanthropic trust DET</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trial model for children’s involvement in service planning</td>
<td>Trial commenced</td>
<td>Children Service providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek opportunities for pilot programs</td>
<td>Discussions held</td>
<td>Department of Education and Training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to information</td>
<td>Parent trial of technology to access information</td>
<td>Model trialled</td>
<td>Parent focus group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of trial</td>
<td>Evaluation conducted</td>
<td>Chisholm Institute Murdoch Children’s Research Institute</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix One - Data Sources

Inner Gippsland Children and Youth Partnership – tailored data 2016

Bass Coast Shire Council Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013-2017


Resilient Youth Australia, Resilience Survey – Bass Coast Shire, Years 3-6 2015

School Entry Health Questionnaire – www.education.vic.gov.au


Australian Early Development Census – www.aedc.gov.au

Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring System (VCAMS) www.education.vic.gov.au

South Coast Primary Care Partnership (2012) Community Health & Wellbeing Profile

Flanagan, Kimberley, KF Consulting Data and consultation feedback report, 2016

Appendix Two – Consultation Report

Consultation Report KFConsulting

Summary MEYP Reference Group Workshops (3)

Summary Bass Coast Health Workshop

Summary Inverloch Kindergarten Committee Workshop

Summary Councillor and Executive Team Workshop

Summary Bass Valley Children's Centre Steering Committee Workshop

Summary Wonthaggi Primary School Workshop

Summary Lunchbox Session Council Officers

Summary Cowes Primary School Workshop

Summary Bass Valley Primary School Workshop

Summary Kindergarten Teacher Workshop
Appendix Three - Supporting Documents


PWC, A Practical Vision for Early childhood Education and Care, 2011

Victorian Department of Education and Training, State of Victoria’s Children 2013-2014

Victorian Department of Education and Training, Evaluation of Victorian Children’s Centres 2010

Sharon Bessell, Jan Mason, 13 March 2014, Putting the pieces in place: children, communities and social capital in Australia, National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect

Sharon Bessell, 7 March 2014, Communities matter: children’s views on community in Australia - report for children, National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect

VicHealth, 14 April 2015 Influencing children’s health: critical windows for intervention