



Loddon Youth Strategy



Loddon Shire Council
2020 - 2025

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This document is available in alternative formats (e.g. larger font) if requested.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Loddon Shire Council acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land comprising the Loddon Shire Council area. Council would like to pay respect to their Elders both past and present.

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	4
	1.1 Purpose	4
	1.2 Using this Youth Strategy	5
2	BUDGET IMPLICATIONS	6
3	RISK ANALYSIS	6
4	DEVELOPING THE YOUTH STRATEGY	7
	4.1 Literature Review	7
	4.2 Demographic Analysis	9
	4.3 Stakeholder and community engagement	10
	4.3.1 Engagement Participation	10
	4.3.2 Key Stakeholders	11
	4.4 Review of Services	14
	4.4.1 Local service providers	15
5	KEY ISSUES AFFECTING YOUNG PEOPLE	16
6	INCLUDING YOUNG PEOPLE, IS THE WAY WE WORK	18
7	THE FUTURE OF LODDON SHIRE	19
	7.1 Vision	19
	7.2 Our Strategic Objectives	19
	7.2.1 Strategic Objective 1 Strengthen Connections	19
	7.2.2 Strategic Objective 2 Consider young people in all we do	20
	7.2.3 Strategic Objective 3 Equip young people for change	20
	7.2.4 Strategic Objective 4 Provide engaging experiences	20
	7.3 Strategic Principles	20
	7.3.1 Be a connector	21
	7.3.2 Build relationships with young people /Consider young people in all we do	21
	7.3.3 Promote widely	21
	7.3.4 Think long term	21
8	ACTION PLAN	22
9	COSTING AND FUNDING OF ACTIONS	26
10	MAKING THIS HAPPEN	26
	10.1 Using Council's many roles to create change	27
	10.2 Partner with service providers and agencies	27
	10.3 Engaging with young people in the future	27

1 INTRODUCTION

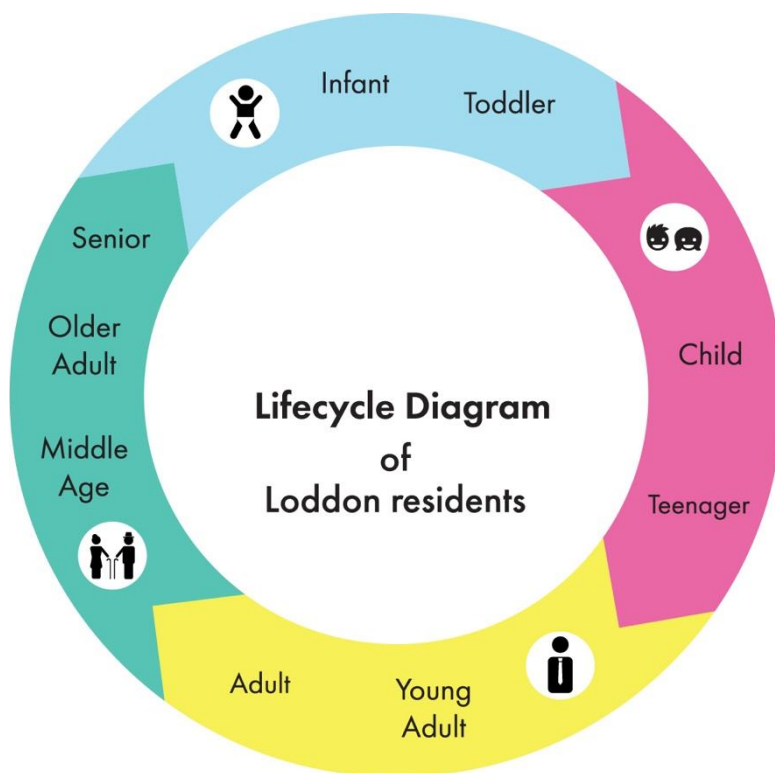
Like many rural areas, Loddon Shire is affected by young people leaving the area. Loddon Shire has a significantly lower population percentage of young people aged 12 to 24 years living within the municipality.

Retaining and providing support for our young people is a powerful exercise in strengthening the whole community. Diagram 1 shows how a well-supported and energised community of young people can make endless contributions to rural economies, community groups, local governance and provision of services; young people that choose to stay in Loddon Shire may also help to raise the next generation of Loddon residents.

While recognising the importance of young people to the future of the Shire, Council recognises that young people have the freedom to design a lifestyle suited to their needs and aspirations.

Loddon Shire Council wants young people to feel supported, and have the ability to lead a healthy and fulfilling life while living in Loddon, and return easily if they decide to leave.

Diagram 1: Lifecycle diagram



1.1 Purpose

The purpose of the Youth Strategy 2019 - 2023 is to create a framework to effectively plan for, and consider the future needs of young people living in and returning to Loddon. The intent of this strategy is to understand what opportunities young people pursue within and outside of the Shire and the type of services and support needed to live a fulfilling life.

This strategy was developed in consultation with young people and describes the actions Council will take to support young people to access the same opportunities as their peers, are healthy, engaged and confident in their future.

This Strategy has direct links to *Council Plan 2017 - 21, a prosperous, vibrant and engaged community*. Delivering this strategy will help Council to deliver on the following Strategic Themes and Strategic Objectives.

Strategic Theme	Strategic Objective
 Population	Grow and invigorate Loddon's population.
 Liveability	Develop attractive, vibrant well serviced communities.
 Economic Prosperity	Support development of a prosperous and diverse economy.

1.2 Using this Youth Strategy

Loddon Shire Council plays many roles in providing services to support its community, much of Council's role is in bringing together other service providers and agencies to deliver and advocate for improved services.

Delivery of the actions and initiatives within this strategy will require a coordinated response and for Loddon Shire Council to partner with agencies and service providers that are working closely with young people.

Loddon Shire Council will use its many powers to deliver this strategy:

- **Deliver** – Council is responsible for managing and delivering a range of services, programs, buildings and infrastructure to support community health and wellbeing.
- **Plan** - Council is a planning authority that implements planning controls to achieve positive social, economic and environmental outcomes. Council also carries out internal projects and program planning to guide and target actions that support community health and wellbeing.
- **Advocate** - Council has a responsibility on behalf of the community to promote their needs and aspirations, and recommend preferred courses of action to state and federal levels of government, statutory authorities and other sectors.
- **Partner** - Council works together with interested people, groups and stakeholders for the greatest benefit to the community.
- **Lead** - Council provides leadership by identifying opportunities and challenges to address the needs and hopes of the community, and make decisions which align with long-term strategic plans.
- **Inform and involve** - Council makes accessible information available to the whole community on matters of public and personal interest. It actively consults with the community and provides opportunities to be included in Council's decision making.

Diagram 2: Many roles of Council



Loddon Shire Council will use its many powers to deliver this strategy including:

- Deliver
- Plan
- Advocate
- Partner
- Lead
- Inform and involve.

2 BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

The delivery of youth services related initiatives is currently delivered by one worker employed with Council for 0.8EFT. This role is also responsible for delivering services and programs related to early years, children and youth.

It has been identified that these limited resources influence the impact Council can have in making a positive difference to the lives of young people. Further consideration on how this area is resourced, so that it can exercise all of the powers available to Council, will strengthen Council's ability to deliver more positive outcomes for young people.

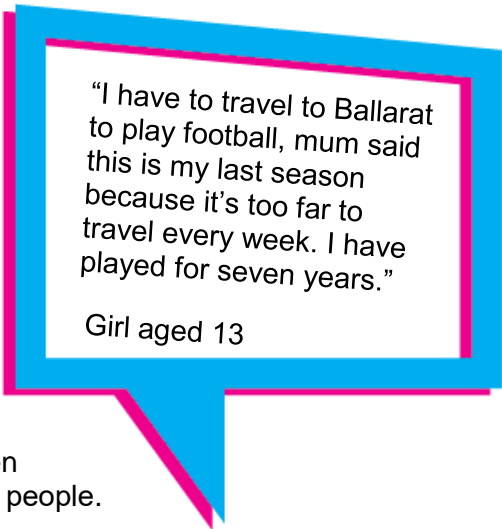
Consideration has been given to how young people can be better supported through the delivery of existing services and programs within Council's current operational budget, as well as considered as part of projects that have a community-wide benefit. This is considered in Section 5.

None of the actions in this strategy have been costed. It is the intention that each project be scoped and costed as part of the planning process. Council staff will identify potential funding sources to support the implementation / delivery of the scoped projects.

3 RISK ANALYSIS

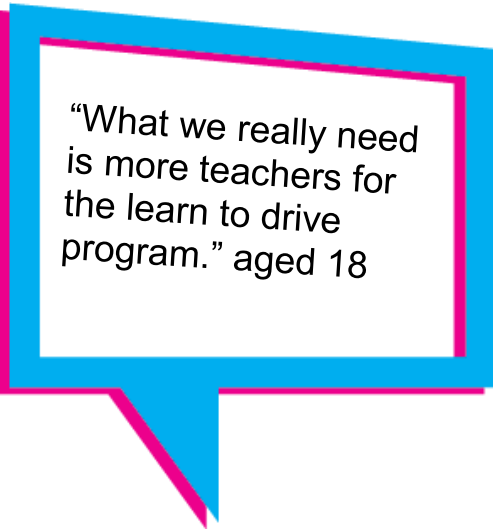
The risk of implementing this strategy is minimal, rather the risks in not resourcing this strategy, or planning for the future of Loddon's young people are possibly more detrimental. A further decline in Loddon's population is likely to have a moderate impact on Council's future ability to deliver services, or its ability to attract families and young professionals.

This decline in population will likely then reduce the number of rateable properties (residential/business) that contribute to Council's ability to deliver services and impact on businesses and service providers who may choose to locate closer to their customer base.



"I have to travel to Ballarat to play football, mum said this is my last season because it's too far to travel every week. I have played for seven years."

Girl aged 13



"What we really need is more teachers for the learn to drive program." aged 18

4 DEVELOPING THE YOUTH STRATEGY

To make informed recommendations to better support and engage Loddon Shire's young population it was necessary to understand the political, social and environmental context and what is happening at a local and national level.

Illustrated is the process taken to develop this youth strategy.

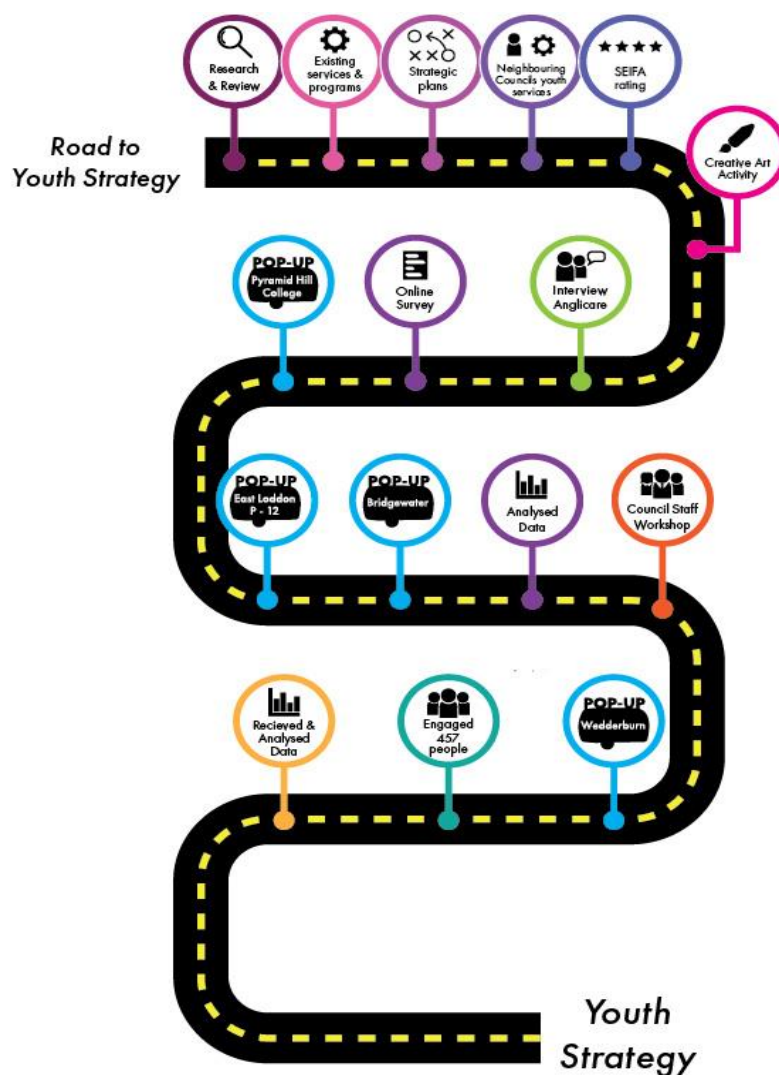
The following activities were undertaken to inform this understanding:

- literature review
- demographic analysis
- stakeholder and community engagement
- analysis of current services.

4.1 Literature review

Retaining and providing support for young people is a powerful exercise in strengthening the whole community. Many of the policies and strategies developed by Council either directly or indirectly impact young people. The following documents were reviewed to understand the connection to and recommendations for inclusion within the Youth Strategy:

- *Council Plan 2017 - 2021*
- *Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2017 - 2021*
- *Disability Access and Inclusion Plan 2018 - 2021*
- *Volunteer Strategy 2018 - 2022*
- *Tourism Strategy 2016 - 2019*
- *Recreation Strategy 2015 - 2020*
- *Loddon Economic Development Strategy 2015 - 2019*
- *Loddon Healthy Minds Network, Strategy Plan 2017 - 2022*
- *Central Highlands Children and Youth Area Partnership Plan 2018.*



The desktop review highlighted different organisations and service providers to speak with in relation to services that support young people access. The desktop review highlighted many opportunities to continue to advocate and engage young people in the community.

Detailed below are the key strategies and the actions that have a strong connection to support the delivery of the Youth Strategy 2019 - 2025.

Council Plan 2017 - 2021

A key issue for the area, that was highlighted through the *Council Plan 2017 – 2021*, is the continual decline in population and lack of a sustainable demographic profile due to an ageing population.

Two youth-related actions are listed that appear to address this growing concern:

- advocate for the provision of quality facilities and services which attract and retain families
- explore opportunities to rejuvenate a Youth Council in partnership with 'Youth Building Places and Spaces' project

Health and Wellbeing Plan 2017-2021

The Health and Wellbeing Plan 2017-2021 does not specifically address youth-related health and wellbeing strengths and challenges, but implies a response to residents of all ages.

The Plan addresses four priority focus areas with relevant outcomes that are essential for young people:

- good physical health, increase healthy start in life (including increase in dental health and hygiene).
- good mental health, increased mental wellbeing, prevention/decrease in youth suicide.
- protect and promotion of health, reduce tobacco use and harmful alcohol and drug use.
- feel safe and secure, young people are safe, resilient and free from abuse and family violence.

Disability Access and Inclusion Plan 2018 - 2021

Though this Plan does not have age-related or life-cycle-related recommendations, it is inferred that all ages and abilities are considered as part of this project.

Some of the main concerns and aspirations raised during the consultation included:

- accessibility of services, programs and events: being about to participate in the community and seek support services regardless of location and a person's disability
- accessing buildings and infrastructure: moving within the community and the difficulty of using uneven footpaths, lack of accessible toilets as well as businesses and buildings that were not accessible for a person with a physical mobility
- seeking employment: a person with a disability being considered for work, training placements along with other candidates; and providing support for candidates and employers
- communication and signage: wayfinding across Loddon Shire was not considered easy to read; and the need to consider other ways of providing this information apart from online
- social isolation: many reported social isolation experienced as a result of geographical distance, lack of public transport and difficulty in accessing the community.

Volunteer Strategy 2018 - 2022

The Volunteer Strategy outlines a number of methods to encourage more youth participation in volunteering which are included within the action plan of this Youth Strategy. Other opportunities considered through this Youth Strategy to increase volunteering include:

- work with local community organisations and sporting clubs on referral pathways and barriers to involving young people in volunteering (eg. inability for community organisations to support needs of young people, higher skill requirements, safeguarding issues) and ways in which Council can support greater youth engagement within those organisations.

- engage with young people that have volunteered locally to understand common routes to volunteering, opportunities or barriers in order to maximise attraction and retention opportunities.

Recreation Strategy 2015 - 2020¹

Key challenge is in the sustainability of local sporting clubs (due to an ageing population), as well as maintenance of sporting grounds due to environmental impact (namely floods and droughts).

Youth participation was highlighted throughout the document as integral to the success of the strategy, the strategy outlined activities to support young people:

- attracting and retaining junior players, providing modified sports and partnerships with other clubs
- develop a range of Shire-wide physical activity programs and events such as Come and Try Days, summer in the parks (which may include live music and movies), family BBQs at swimming pools, guided walks in forests / parks, etc
- research and develop programs to attract and retain younger volunteers in clubs
- assist communities to develop community gyms as required.

Loddon Economic Development Strategy 2015 - 2019

Some of its stated goals are to attract new residents and workers, develop tourism and agri-business industries, build on local infrastructure and attract investment, enhance streetscapes, and leverage the region's NBN and Wi-Fi hotspot facilities.

Key challenges faced include a declining population (amplified with high levels of 18-24 year olds leaving rural areas), inadequate infrastructure and decline in labour demand from the agricultural sector.

Ideas to further youth engagement:

- engage with local businesses to identify the 'skills gap' referred to in the *Loddon Economic Development Strategy (pg 11)*, caused by a shrinking and ageing population and assess Council's role in supporting young people to upskill
- audit existing programs that support young people engaging in local employment
- engage with local education and training programs to explore opportunities to collaborate with local businesses for youth employment opportunities.

Loddon Healthy Minds Network, Strategy Plan 2017 - 2022

Supporting the mental health of residents of all ages was a key driver of this strategy, two activities specifically identified to support youth are:

- advocate for funding of Mental Health First Aid Training (MHFA) – especially Adolescent and Youth MHFA
- increase access to local services, for example expansion of the Doctors in Schools program.

4.2 Demographic analysis

Loddon Shire has a lower proportion of younger people aged 0 to 17 years and a higher proportion of people in the older age groups 60+ years compared to Victoria average (Id Profile 2016).

In 2016, 12.4% of the population was aged between 12 and 24 the basis for this Youth Strategy. The major differences between the age structure of Loddon Shire and Victoria were:

- a larger percentage of 'Empty nesters and retirees' (17.4% compared to 10.3%)

¹ The Recreation Strategy was current at the time this strategy was developed. It has subsequently been renewed although the outcomes identified remain.

- a larger percentage of 'Seniors' (14.5% compared to 8.5%)
- a larger percentage of 'Older workers & pre-retirees' (17.1% compared to 12.4%)
- a smaller percentage of 'Young workforce' (6.9% compared to 15.0%).

Loddon Shire has a SEIFA Index of Disadvantage of 942, the index measures the relative level of socio-economic disadvantage and is derived from attributes that reflect disadvantage such as low income, low educational attainment, high unemployment, and jobs in relatively unskilled occupations.

Adjoining municipalities Buloke Shire (967), Campaspe (967), Gannawarra (957) and Greater City of Bendigo (981) have a higher SEIFA Score compared to Loddon Shire. A lower SEIFA Score is likely to impact the disposable income available for extra-curricular activities young people are involved in, and can also impact the level of education pursued by young people.

4.3 Stakeholder and community engagement

Engaging with all stakeholders provides a complete understanding of the needs of young people; the young people themselves who are experts on their lives, the services and organisations that service young people, parents and guardians who play a role in raising young people and the Council staff who work to provide for the needs of the community.

To engage Loddon Shire's young population, their parents and guardians, service providers, and Loddon Shire Council staff, the following engagement activities were undertaken.

Creative arts activity

Young people were engaged to help design a brand and implement a logo to be utilised for this project and online. This activity was designed to provide an initial insight into their views of Loddon and areas to further explore in the engagement process.

Interview with Anglicare

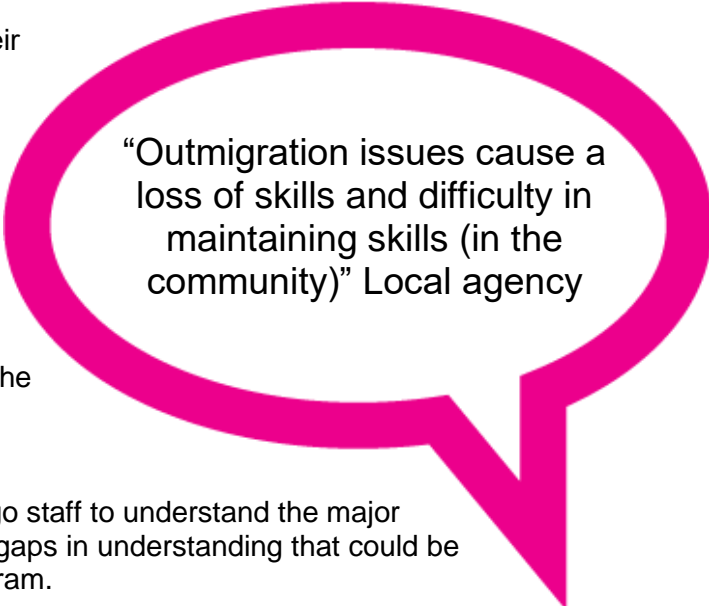
An activity was carried out with Anglicare Bendigo staff to understand the major issues confronting young people in Loddon and gaps in understanding that could be considered during the broader consultation program.

Guided online survey

The survey was designed for services to have a conversation within their organisation or community group about the needs of young people living in the Loddon. Service providers, sporting clubs, community groups and schools located within the Loddon Shire and Bendigo region were invited to participate.

Community pop ups

Two pop ups were held at schools located in the Loddon Shire and two community pop ups were held at local sporting matches to engage with young people and their parents. These place making pop ups provided young people the opportunity to provide feedback to inform the data for this strategy.



“Outmigration issues cause a loss of skills and difficulty in maintaining skills (in the community)” Local agency

4.3.1 Engagement participation

A total of 457 people were engaged throughout the engagement activities, with a total of 250 young people aged 12-25 years of age. Diagram 3 provides a breakdown of all ages engaged.

Diagram 3: Engagement participation



4.3.2 Key stakeholders

There were four stakeholder groups identified in the engagement process; agencies and organisations, young people, parents and Council staff. Each stakeholder played a role in understanding the needs of young people. Refer to the Engagement Summary August 2019 to see the full engagement findings.

Agencies and organisations

The provision of services and programs to young people are a vital support in young people living a healthy and fulfilling life. Understanding current issues for young people as seen by service providers is key in identifying service gaps and areas of opportunity.

Service organisations and agencies identified major issues confronting young people in the Loddon Shire. There were several areas of concern facing young people. The two key themes identified:

Access

- to transport, there is only an am and pm service and as a result, young people hitchhike.
- to affordable and attainable housing, there is discrimination towards young people in the rental market and lack of social housing.
- of learning to drive programs, the waiting lists are too long.
- to healthcare, accessibility and confidentiality, especially mental health services.
- to phone and internet services, the cost and reliability of service in remote areas.
- to services; with the dearth of services and the lack of outreach in the Loddon area.

Their future

- education transition, leaving home, assimilation into a larger community.
- intergenerational expectations from parents to take over farms, continue parent's legacy.
- underemployment and unemployment.

Young people

Young people are the experts on their lives and as such they are an important part of the process of uncovering what their needs are. Identifying areas young people would change and what their worries are now and for their future self provides information on how to make positive changes for the young residents of Loddon.

Young people prioritised the internet, recreation and youth spaces and local shops and upgraded supermarkets as the areas of change they would make to Loddon as seen in Diagram 4. Young people reported the frustrations and impacts to their life the current internet service limitations create, and the need for free WiFi.

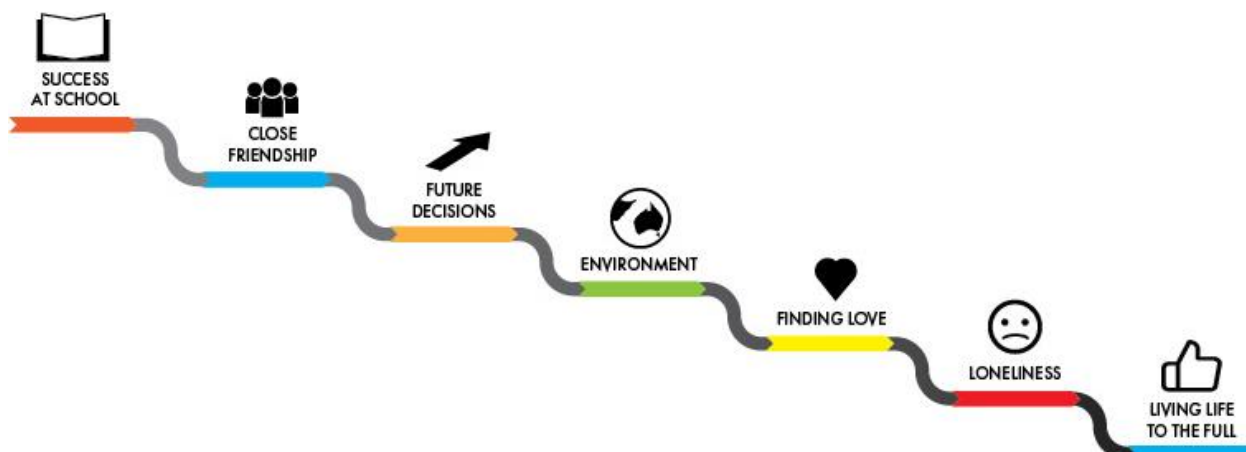
Having a place to 'hang out' and spend their time was important, whether at a skatepark or an indoor youth space providing areas to study, spend time with friends playing ping pong or table tennis or learning new skills together. Opportunities for shopping and upgrades to local supermarkets were also a priority for young people.

Diagram 4: Top three changes young people would make to Loddon.



The young people of Loddon have worries for themselves now and for their future as seen in Diagram 5. Concerns around schooling, maintaining friendships, making big life decisions and obtaining the life they want for themselves; with meaningful relationships and opportunities for family. Living on the land there are concerns regarding the environment and the effects of climate change.

Diagram 5: Biggest concerns for young people now and in the future.

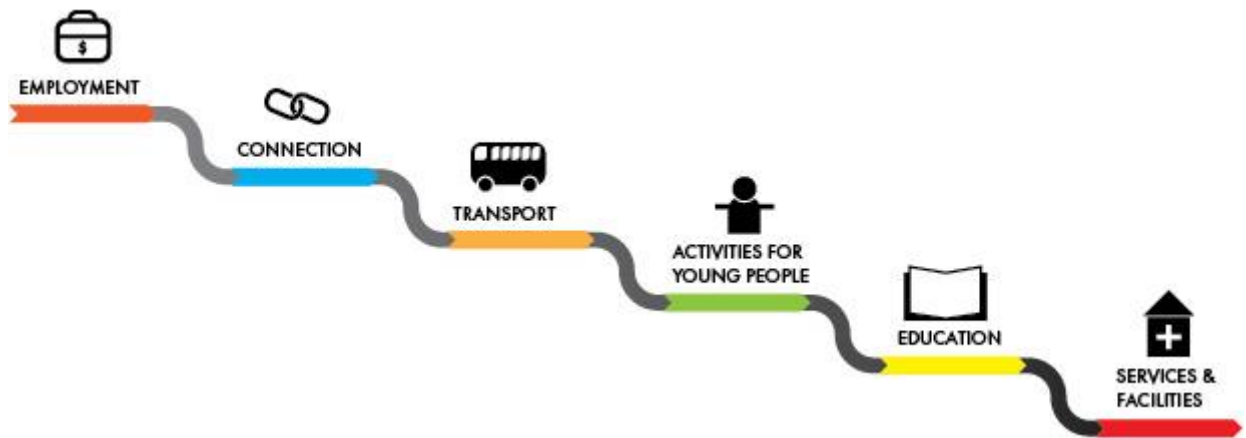


Parents

It was important to understand what support the parents and guardians of Loddon's young people felt they needed to raise healthy and fulfilled young people. Parents and guardians want their children to have the opportunities needed to set them up for success for their future

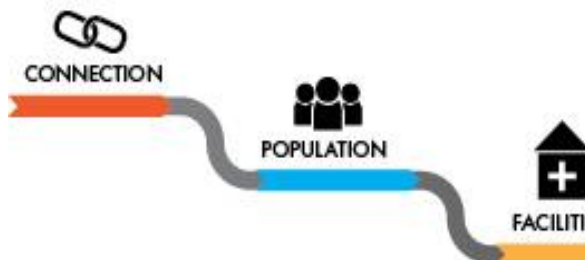
Diagram 6 shows what parents/carers believe makes it difficult to raise a young person in Loddon.

Diagram 6: What makes it hard to raise a young person in Loddon



Parents and guardians want their children to have the same opportunities as their peers; strong connections with their friends, a large enough population to provide educational opportunities, facilities and youth activities for young people to have something to do and ways to move safely around the Shire. Diagram 7 shows what this group believe would make it easier to raise a young person in Loddon.

Diagram 7 What would make it easier to raise a young person in Loddon



“More employment opportunities, workplaces partnering with young people to provide training opportunities” (Parent of a young person)

“(I love) that you can do anything out in the paddocks” (aged 16)

4.4 Review of services

Preparation of this Youth Strategy also considered the services that are currently being provided or offered to young people in the area, to both determine gaps in service and level of need. This review considered services provided by the Loddon Shire Council, adjoining municipalities as well as local service organisations and agencies. Table 1 provides a comparison of these services.

Table 1: Comparison of services provided for young people

Services/Programs	Loddon Shire Council	Adjoining Councils	Community Organisations	Agencies
Community Houses	Yes	Yes		
Youth Council	In progress	Yes		
Parenting programs	Yes	Yes		Yes
Driver education	Yes	Yes		
Social media platforms for young people or youth website		Yes	Yes	
Youth space		Yes		
Youth week		Yes		
LLEN (Local Learning and Employment Network)	Yes	Yes		
Young makers market		Yes		
Youth awards		Yes		
Youth grants		Yes		
Teenage school holiday program		Yes		
Skills training (Barista)		Yes		Yes
Road Trip Project (driving behaviours and hazard awareness)		Yes		
Pool parties	Yes			
Freeza	Yes	Yes		
Mentoring programs		Yes	Yes	Yes
Creative arts program	Yes			
Drug and alcohol support			Yes	Yes
Mental health support				Yes

4.4.1 Local service providers

To understand the service gaps and possible barriers for young people it is important to engage with services and community groups that have a relationship with and currently service the young people of Loddon. Fourteen different providers of service to young people undertook the guided questionnaire consisting of sporting clubs, mental health service providers, employment services and other community groups. The highest representation of services was for mental health, sports, physical health and employment services.

Diagram 8 shows the age group each service provider felt they were supporting.

Diagram 8: Age groups supported by providers

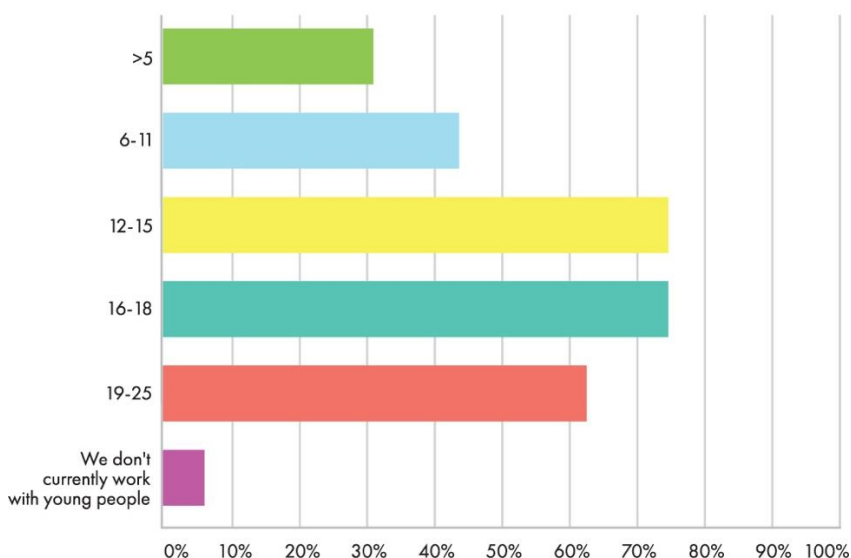


Diagram 8 shows the largest age bracket supported was for young people aged 12-15 and 16-18 years of age. Young people of Loddon are being serviced by an array of different service providers, sporting groups and organisations. There were many benefits for young people from various providers:

- sporting clubs: physical activity, skill development, sportsmanship, teamwork, building connections, activity to participate in (training, game day).
- organisations: counselling, mentoring of students, independent living skills, training in areas such as first aid, responsible service of alcohol, food handling course, forklift licence, and skill-based preparation for the workforce.

Organisations identified things their service was doing currently to indirectly or directly improve areas they felt were concerns or challenges. Organisations were already providing several services to directly help with concerns facing young people. Organisations were targeting the following areas:

- sports clubs are providing training and education around drugs and alcohol.
- parenting programs, for parents to develop skills to support their children.
- utilisation of positive role models and mentors to work alongside young people and offer support such as transportation to appointments.
- providing fundamental skills for young people to live independently in the future, encouraging and financing training and supporting and advocating for further education.
- providing employment skills and opportunities for work experience, self-employment opportunities and encouraging long term thinking around education and employment.

5 KEY ISSUES AFFECTING YOUNG PEOPLE

In our discussions with young people, their families and the service providers consistent themes emerged related to the challenges and difficulties young people experience while living in Loddon. Please refer to the Community Engagement Summary Report to view the full analysis of the consultation program. Challenges young people experience while living in Loddon are themed below by subject matter.

Access to education

Young people in local schools find it difficult to pursue emerging and mainstream careers while living in Loddon. Throughout the consultation we heard that young people need to travel to study a specialist subject not offered within their secondary school, and travel to Bendigo, Geelong or Melbourne to pursue Higher Education opportunities. More common was that young people were unable to study their desired subjects.

Access to employment

Underemployment and unemployment was an issue that many young people faced, many young people were working within the same cafés and supermarkets however were working short shifts.

Young people also faced intergenerational expectations from parents that they would eventually take over farms, continue their parent's legacy.

Travelling in and around Loddon

Most young people were reliant on their families, older siblings or friends with drivers licence to access the Shire. Not only is this access to pursue recreational activities, it is also needed to pursue employment, education and to access healthcare and other support services.

Young people living in areas serviced by public transport, were reliant on the infrequent bus service that often required them to leave the Shire early and return after dark, even if it was for a short medical appointment.

Young people without access to public transport, or a friend or family member with a car, took to hitchhiking; targeting tradies leaving the area early in the morning as their safest option to travel to Bendigo.

Young people with a driver's licence noted the pressure they experienced. The expectation that they will drive their friends and take more than the permitted number of passengers, despite being aware of the safety and licensing risks.

Access to reliable and confidential healthcare

The majority of young people needed a qualified person to speak to, to talk through immediate concerns related to their sexual or mental health; their concerns with school, their body or relationships with a close friend or family member; other young people needed a trusted advisor to help them to piece together their future, to make choices related to their career or education, or to understand their finances better or the practicalities of leaving home.

Many wanted the ease of finding out this information for themselves, and either did not have access to the internet or did not know where to start.

Connection to friends and family

Loss of connection was something that many young people faced or were experiencing, this included those still living in Loddon, as well as those returning home periodically to play in a local football match or come home to visit family.

Many young people were concerned with their ability to make friends, to start a relationship and eventually start their own family. Concerned that continuing to live in Loddon would prevent them from having these opportunities. With a continual outmigration of young people, this concern is quite plausible especially for young people that feel leaving Loddon is not a possibility.

Those that have left the Shire were finding the connection to family and friends difficult to maintain; as the pressure in their new lives/communities increased some were finding it more difficult to return home as regularly. Siting a lack of phone and internet services (cost and reliability of service) as well as the lack of physical activities and areas to socialise; weekend sports were really the only opportunity.

Access to the world

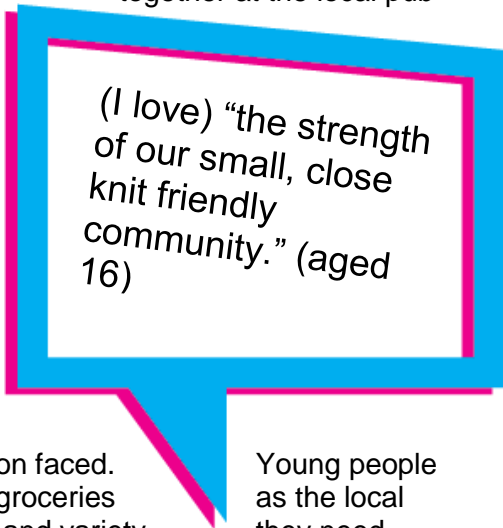
Majority of the young people living in the Shire have issues with internet in terms of connection and speed. The lack of WiFi throughout the Shire creates barriers across many levels of young people's lives; connection to family and friends through apps such as Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat; ability to complete homework; access to health information and support; knowledge about opportunities and upcoming events. Many young people feel frustrated by the limited internet provisions in Loddon.

Access to entertainment

Young people felt the need for a space in their community to 'hang out'. A place they could come together to study, spend time together away from school, play ping pong or table tennis and learn new skills. Many young people reported coming together at the local pub to spend time with each other, many especially in Pyramid Hill look forward to turning 13 so they can gain entry.

Young people in the Shire want to have things to do with their spare time, many suggestions related to recreational spaces; skate parks, outdoor gyms, motorcycle tracks. The love young people in Loddon have for the outdoors compliments these suggestions, many spoke of travelling to Cohuna skatepark and nearby dirt bike tracks.

The lack of local shopping options was a concern many young people shared. Missed opportunities for friends to shop together due to the distances needed to travel and the high price of shipping were issues the young people of Loddon faced. felt they needed to travel to Bendigo or Echuca to purchase groceries supermarkets could not provide them with the fresh produce and variety Many would welcome an upgrade to the local supermarkets they currently have, fresh produce and variety to take away the fortnightly commute for groceries.



Young people as the local they need.

Being equipped for change

The future was an apparent concern for many young people. Facing concerns of career choice, obtaining employment and 'good' jobs, the need to move away to receive further education or employment opportunities. Young people of Loddon need support in their transition from Loddon life to living in a city; skills to set them up for success in perusing further education, being gainfully employed and living away from the family unit. By implementing transitional programs and support young people of Loddon can take their next step into adulthood with confidence and self-reliance.

Connection to the land

Young people of Loddon have a connection to their environment; their farms, rivers, lakes, mountains, bush, countryside, and their backyard paddocks. This is where they feel at peace, in their quiet, safe community.

Many young people spoke of their responsibility to their family farms; consisting of the many chores they carry out both before and after school and the family vision of their role for the future; managing the land. Young people of Loddon have concerns around climate change and the impacts of pollution, floods, fire and drought and the resulting effects on the land.

The love and desire to live in the local area was very evident, however young people faced the large questions around their future; employment, opportunities to purchase homes, meet partners and build family lives in the Shire.

6 INCLUDING YOUNG PEOPLE, IS THE WAY WE WORK

Involving young people in the current actions of Council is beneficial for young people both now and in the future, as they continue to be residents of the Shire or return to enjoy their contributions made as a young person.

In addition to shaping their communities, there are many benefits for young people to be engaged and involved in Council processes, these include:

- feeling valued by their community
- providing a platform for young people to express their needs and ideas
- increasing a young person's confidence to be involved in their community
- increasing knowledge and understanding of government and decision making processes
- exposure to new career or educational opportunities.

Likewise, for Council, there are also many advantages of engaging with young people, these include:

- informed decision making with the consideration of all of their residents
- increased quality of services based on needs and feedback from young people
- building of trust and transparency
- creating higher participation from young people in their community.

Through the collaboration with young people policies, actions, programs and services will be more relevant, providing the best service possible to the young residents of the Loddon Shire. Consideration of young people across Council's activities will also ensure that programs delivered are cost effective and maximise Council's limited financial resources.

Considering the impact on young people across all of Council's services, requires all staff to adopt a philosophy to planning and better engaging young people in the design and implementation of projects.

These opportunities include:

- youth advocacy: opportunity to participate in the decision making, this includes involvement within the planning and design phase as well activation and implementation.
- building connections: opportunity to build a connection to Loddon as a place but also with the people of Loddon.
- growth and development of young people: opportunities for young people to gain further education and training.
- promotion of health and wellbeing: opportunities for young people to gain confidence and self-esteem through contribution to their community.

Some examples of this philosophy are presented for consideration.

Example Project 1: Implementation of a streetscape master plan

- Consider the design: design places for young people to connect with each other through public seating, play spaces (that are age appropriate) and provide access to free WiFi.
- Engage young designers: allow young people to build connection and sense of achievement through direct involvement in the project.
- Provide opportunities for learning: public engagement, project management or practical skills of implementing the streetscape provide exposure to new pathways.

Example Project 2: Provision for childcare services

- Consider needs of young families: when completing a business case for childcare services, consider the needs of young parents requiring day care to enable them to run a business from home, engage in further education online or partake in employment.
- Engage young parents in the design of services: ask young families what they will and wouldn't use; understanding what types of services are beneficial will ensure Council is maximising its investment and resources.

Many projects within Council's direct control can have a stronger connection to young people and deliver on the needs of young people.

7 THE FUTURE OF LODDON SHIRE

We know retaining and providing support for our young people is a powerful exercise in strengthening the whole community. An energised community of young people can make endless contributions to rural economies, community groups, local governance and provision of services; young people that choose to stay in Loddon Shire may also help to raise the next generation of Loddon residents.

7.1 Vision

While recognising that young people have the freedom to design a lifestyle suited to their needs and aspirations, Loddon Shire Council wants young people to feel supported, and have the ability to lead a healthy and fulfilling life while living in Loddon, and return easily if they decide to leave. We know they are the future of the Shire.

A further decline in Loddon's population is likely to have a moderate impact on Council's future ability to deliver services, or its ability to attract families and young professionals.

Our vision is therefore for:

Young people living in Loddon Shire have access to opportunities to lead a healthy life, where they are ready to learn and confident and supported in their future. If they do move away they are encouraged and supported to move back to Loddon to raise their own families.

7.2 Our strategic objectives

To achieve our vision for Loddon Shire and realise the opportunities and mitigate the challenges with young people we need to:

7.2.1 Strategic objective 1: Strengthen connections

A young person with strong family connections, strong personal connections and strong connections within the community is going to be set up for success. Loddon Shire Council will work to provide opportunities to establish, strengthen and support these connections to ensure young people have strong ties to the Loddon Shire.

7.2.2 Strategic objective 2: Consider young people in all we do

Loddon Shire Council will not only consider the direct impact on young people across all of Council's services, it will adopt a philosophy to ensure young people are involved and considered in the planning, design and implementation of projects. Consideration of young people across Council's activities will also ensure that programs delivered are cost effective and maximise Council's limited financial resources.

7.2.3 Strategic objective 3: Equip young people for change

Young people have the freedom to design a lifestyle suited to their needs and aspirations, we want young people to feel equipped to handle future changes and challenges that will come in choosing and designing their future lifestyle. This means ensuring that young people feel supported while living in the Shire and encouraged to pursue possibilities.

7.2.4 Strategic objective 4: Provide engaging experiences

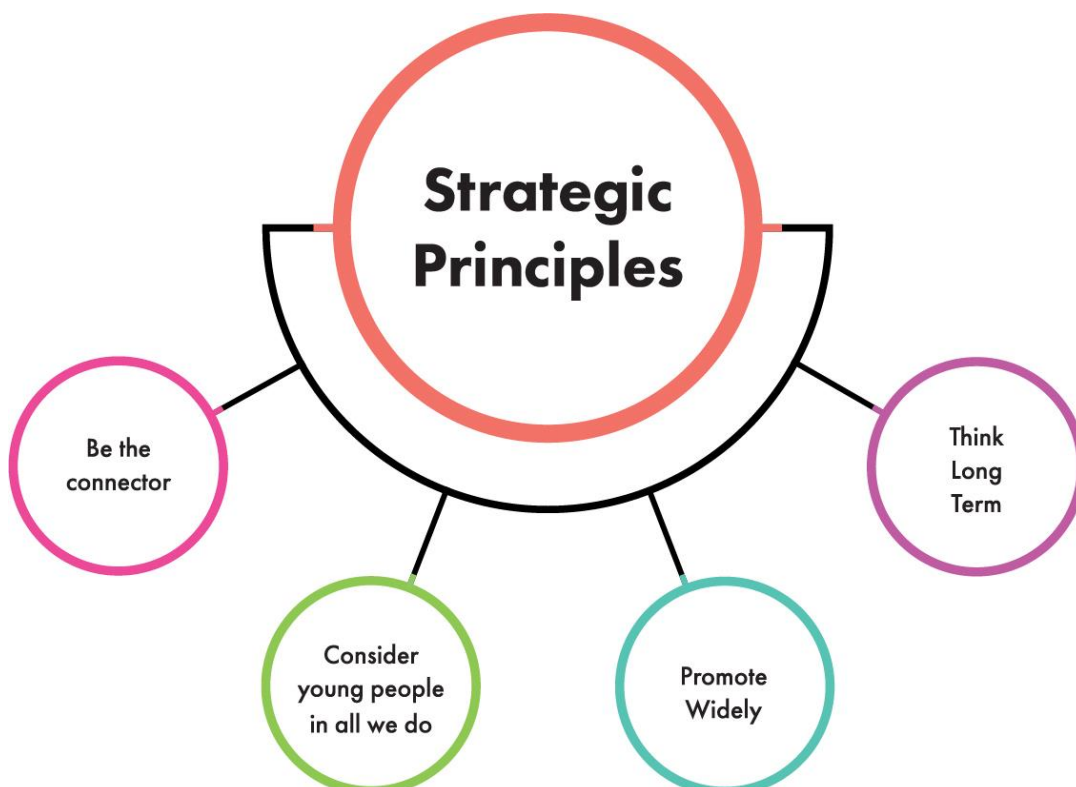
Young people living in Loddon enjoy the many benefits offered by a rural setting; they enjoy the wide open spaces, safe communities and the freedom to explore natural areas. While their basic needs also provided, there are some needs that are not provided for in Loddon. Council will work to provide access to these experiences and opportunities to enjoy a full and engaging lifestyle.

7.3 Strategic principles

Use these strategic principles to make decisions about services and programs to support young people, particularly larger decisions that will likely have an impact on the resourcing or funding of the department.

These principles define the way Loddon Shire Council will work in the future and are considered in more detail below:

Diagram 9: Strategic principles



7.3.1 Be a connector

Council may not be able to directly deliver all of the actions and initiatives within this strategy; it can however bring together many services and organisations that are directly working with young people. Ways to put this principle into action everyday:

- Sharing the data and key findings collected as part of this strategy.
- Bringing together service providers, agencies and organisation to present 'launch' this strategy.
- Continue to speak with and partner with relevant agencies when planning and implementing projects and actions.

7.3.2 Build relationships with young people /Consider young people in all we do

The young people of Loddon are a valuable resource to the Shire, as they are the experts in their own lives. They are best placed to provide feedback and solutions about the issues that affect them and their communities. There are benefits for both young people and Council staff when young people have a voice in the planning and decision processes.

Ensure young people are considered in every Council project, consider how young people are affected by the project.

7.3.3 Promote widely

Council needs to promote the services and programs offered not only by Council but also by other service providers. Young people will not hunt for information and as a result Council needs to ensure information is readily available.

Ways to put this principle into action everyday:

- advertise programs and services available for young people of Loddon on the Shire website.
- create stronger social media linkages for young people in the Shire to advertise and promote services, programs and opportunities for young people in the Shire.
- utilise schools and sporting clubs to advertise events and programs for young people.

7.3.4 Think long term

Loddon Shire Council needs to think long term when implementing programs or resources for the young people of Loddon; ensuring the programs and resources are viable and sustainable long term. Trust needs to be built between Council and young people so that when Council offers a program it is maintained and built upon rather than discontinued, leaving young people believing that positive change is fleeting. Ways to put this principle into action everyday:

- evaluate programs at planning levels to consider the viability and sustainability; implement checklist such as, where will this program be in 6 months, 12 months, 2 years; how long will the funding last, is this the best use of current funding, what are the running costs to maintain this program?
- set programs up for success by ensuring they meet the needs of young people; young people have provided evidence based data to support the need for the program or service.

8 ACTION PLAN

With so many ideas and opportunities to better support young people, all with seemingly competing urgency, this section recommends an approach for bringing about the changes desired for young people living in, or returning to Loddon.

The approach is based on implementing actions that will have the greatest benefit overall for young people, their families and the community at large. Therefore actions that help to achieve each of the objectives are considered higher than the other actions.

Table 2: Loddon Youth Strategy Action Plan

Strategic objective 1: Strengthen connections

Action	Strategic Objective 1 Strengthen Connections	Strategic Objective 2 Consider young people in all we do	Strategic Objective 3 Equip young people for change	Strategic Objective 4 Provide engaging experiences	Funding of actions	Priority
1.1 Create a business case for the provision of free WiFi in Council owned facilities. Explore the possibility of extending this into privately owned facilities for a lower cost (businesses, sporting facilities) to expand the reach for young people.	•	•	•	•	Within existing resources Secure funding to support this action	High
1.2 Continue to strengthen the current L2P Program to reduce waiting times and bring together Loddon's older and younger residents with a community run, learn to drive program.	•		•	•	Partner to secure funding to support this action	High
1.3 Investigate a mentoring program that facilitates opportunities for young people to be involved in the community and to explore different employment and volunteering opportunities.	•		•	•	Partner within existing resources	Low

Strategic objective 2: Consider young people in all we do

Action	Strategic Objective 1 Strengthen Connections	Strategic Objective 2 Consider young people in all we do	Strategic Objective 3 Equip young people for change	Strategic Objective 4 Provide engaging experiences	Funding of actions	Priority
2.1 Co-design with young people youth-friendly public spaces within the proposed new community centre in Pyramid Hill, with activities and spaces for young people to use after school and on the weekends.	•	•	•	•	Partner within existing resources	High
2.2 Co-design with young people the design of youth-friendly public spaces as part of the streetscape masterplans and facility upgrades (with consideration of youth spaces such as pump parks, outdoor gyms and areas where young people can ride their bikes or picnic).	•	•	•	•	Delivered within project planning processes	High
2.3 Work with young people to establish (or review existing) policy and procedure for Council staff that supports the involvement of younger people when planning projects.	•	•	•		Secure funding to support this action	Medium
2.4 Develop a youth engagement protocol to support Councillors and staff to use when engaging or consulting with young people	•	•	•		Within existing resources	Medium
2.5 Facilitate and participate in a sub-regional youth network (agencies) to undertake collaborative planning and identify shared or value add program delivery options.	•	•	•		Within existing resources	Medium

Strategic objective 3: Equip young people for change

Action	Strategic Objective 1 Strengthen Connections	Strategic Objective 2 Consider young people in all we do	Strategic Objective 3 Equip young people for change	Strategic Objective 4 Provide engaging experiences	Funding of actions	Priority
<p>3.1 Seek funding to resource an internal role within Council with a particular focus on mental health, health promotion and education transition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establish communication channels that are relevant to young people • coordinate data sharing between services, schools and Council • support collaborative environment for local services and schools to deliver on emerging priorities for young people (particularly bullying, career selection and transition, mental and physical health, things to do for young people, and youth-friendly public places and spaces) • support engagement with young people across Council's projects • provide input into any education or training needs analysis and • apply for external grants and funding to support Council and partners to deliver on emerging priorities. 	•	•	•	•	Secure funding to support this action	High
<p>3.2 Advocate for an expansion of the Doctors in Schools program to be delivered in all Loddon secondary schools.</p>		•	•		Within existing resources	Medium

Strategic objective 4: Provide engaging experiences

Action	Strategic Objective 1 Strengthen Connections	Strategic Objective 2 Consider young people in all we do	Strategic Objective 3 Equip young people for change	Strategic Objective 4 Provide engaging experiences	Funding of actions	Priority
4.1 Investigate options to reduce public liability insurance costs for community groups and clubs wanting to provide services for young people however find the insurance requirements restrictive (e.g. men's shed).	•			•	Within existing resources	Medium
4.2 Continue to bid for and advocate for events and activities to come to Loddon Shire, particularly events that provide entertainment or employment opportunities for young people (sporting events, concerts, music events).	•			•	Within existing resources	Medium
4.3 Investigate the level of interest from young people in participating in local area Youth Development Networks (such as previous Young Farmers model) which could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learning, fellowship and entertainment opportunities • promotion of local employment/career opportunities • combined network opportunities 					Partner within existing resources	

Action	Strategic Objective 1 Strengthen Connections	Strategic Objective 2 Consider young people in all we do	Strategic Objective 3 Equip young people for change	Strategic Objective 4 Provide engaging experiences	Funding of actions	Priority
4.4 Continue to advocate for improved broadband and telecommunications services to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support young people who live in households without broadband connections in rural areas • enable services to deliver digital outreach services (eg skype consultations) • enable people to access study and work opportunities such as online courses. 			•	•	Within existing resources	Medium

9 COSTING AND FUNDING OF ACTIONS

This Youth Strategy will inform the development of annual operational plans that will identify activities, responsible and participating teams, measurable outcomes, costs and timing for each project undertaken within the year.

The funding of actions section in the previous tables indicate what will be required to support delivery of the identified action . It is the intention that each project be scoped and costed as part of the planning process. Council staff will identify potential funding sources to support the implementation / delivery of the scoped projects.

10 MAKING THIS HAPPEN

Delivery of the actions and initiatives within this strategy will require a coordinated response and for Loddon Shire Council to partner with agencies and service providers that are working closely with young people.

Engagement on this project has generated interest and awareness of the Loddon Shire Youth Strategy. Goodwill has been created between the Council and the young people of Loddon their parents and guardians, and the service organisations and agencies that support young people.

10.1 Using Council's many roles to create change

Loddon Shire Council will need to use its many roles if it is to bring about the required change to ensure its young people feel supported, and have the ability to lead a healthy and fulfilling life while living in Loddon, or return easily if they decide to leave.

- **Deliver** – Council is responsible for managing and delivering a range of services, programs, buildings and infrastructure to support community health and wellbeing.
- **Plan** - Council is a planning authority that implements planning controls to achieve positive social, economic and environmental outcomes. Council also carries out internal projects and program planning to guide and target actions that support community health and wellbeing.
- **Advocate** - Council has a responsibility on behalf of the community to promote their needs and aspirations, and recommend preferred courses of action to state and federal levels of government, statutory authorities and other sectors.
- **Partner** - Council works together with interested people, groups and stakeholders for the greatest benefit to the community.
- **Lead** - Council provides leadership by identifying opportunities and challenges to address the needs and hopes of the community, and make decisions which align with long-term strategic plans.
- **Inform and involve** - Council makes accessible information available to the whole community on matters of public and personal interest. It actively consults with the community and provides opportunities to be included in Council's decision making.

10.2 Partner with service providers and agencies

Loddon Shire Council is unable to bring about the positive change for young people alone, the successful implementation of this strategy requires the support of service providers and agencies work in this space. Here are some ways Loddon Shire Council will leverage its relationships and connection to these agencies:

- Continue the conversation: thank the participants and organisations that participated in the project. We will consider ways to recognise their involvement and ensure their continued involvement in the implementation of this strategy.
- Share data collected: As a Council we have invested financial and human resources into the collection and analysis of this data. We will openly share the Engagement Summary Report and the raw engagement findings with the wider community.

10.3 Engaging with young people in the future

When planning future engagement programs that affect young people, we will continue to take a place-based approach to engaging young people; that means continuing to go directly to them.