



**CHILD AND FAMILY
STRATEGY 2021-2024**

WHY A CHILD AND FAMILY STRATEGY?

This strategy is targeted towards our youngest residents of Lake Macquarie and their families. A strategy such as this, recognises that the first years of a child's life are the most important in setting the foundations for lifelong learning, success and future life outcomes. Research continues to show us that the experiences children engage in during the first five years help to shape their outcomes over their entire life.

We also know that family is a child's first teacher, their first community, and their first introduction to the culture and traditions which will shape their understandings of the world. It is for these reasons, that we believe a Child and Family Strategy is necessary to support and guide Council's thinking and planning on how we can support children's foundations for learning and development, from the very beginning of their life.





MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR

Our childhood is such a precious time for us all. It's a time when we create memories that last with us and shape us into the adults we become. The role of parents in these first years is so important as a role model, teacher and supporter. It can be a difficult job, but parents are not alone and can often lean on the support from their families, schools and community to help when it's needed.

Council recognises our role in helping support parents and children and this is the basis of our Children and Family Strategy. This strategy provides a framework for us to assist our more than 55,000 local families through a range of services, events and advocacy so that being a kid and growing up in Lake Mac can be even better.

Over the next four years, our three key priority areas will see us focus on child safety, child development, and connecting and supporting families. We know that our families love the You're Kidding Me Expo, so I'm pleased to see its return. I am also keen to see what we can do to increase consultation with families and younger children on many of our projects, especially for our outdoor facilities and parks.

We know that children love being outdoors and living in Lake Mac means that our kids have our beautiful lake, beach and bush right at their fingertips. I encourage parents to make the most of our incredible lifestyle, our facilities and the many support options available to you. Enjoy raising your family in our amazing City and together we can all have a whole lot of fun with our kids and show the love and support they deserve.

Cr Kay Fraser
Lake Macquarie Mayor



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SNAPSHOT



55,000

FAMILIES CALL LAKE MAC HOME

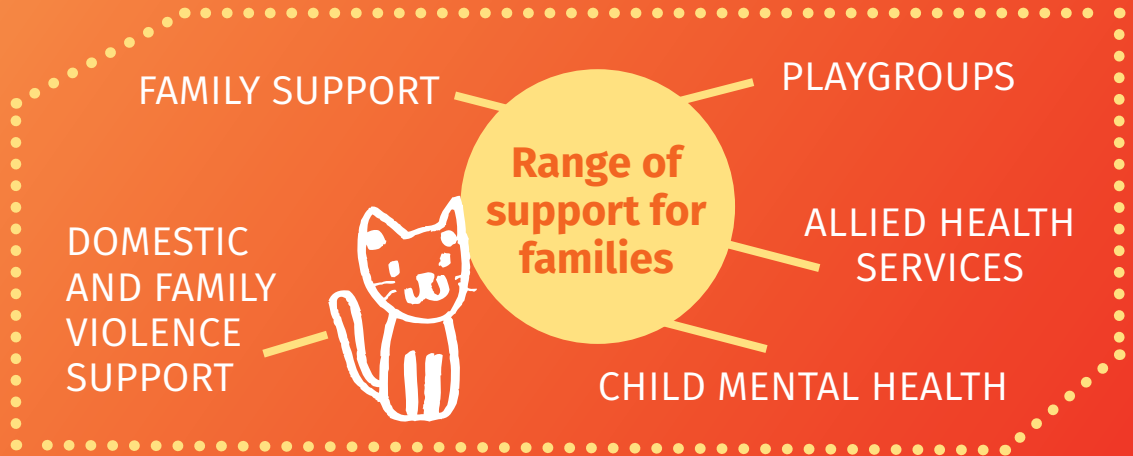
MORE THAN
330

kids workshops in our libraries
and Art Gallery each year



130 PLAYGROUNDS

FOR CHILDREN TO EXPLORE



1 in 5

children developmentally
vulnerable prior to school

31,000
CHILDREN AGED
0-11 YRS

OVER
500

FAMILIES ENGAGING IN THE
YOU'RE KIDDING ME PROGRAM EACH YEAR



90

early education
and care services

85%

meeting or exceeding the
National Quality Standards



PREVIOUS ACHIEVEMENTS

CHILD AND FAMILY STRATEGY 2015-2020

Upon expiration of our previous strategy, Council had achieved all actions it set out to undertake. The previous strategy had a primary focus on connecting families and services together, extending families understanding and skills in supporting their child's developmental outcomes.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS WERE:

- ♥ Development of a child and family interagency to provide a space for increased collaboration between services. Council was also able to offer a range of training and workshops to upskill educators and family support workers
- ♥ Development and implementation of the You're Kidding Me Program, which provides families with relevant information and strategies on supporting their child's development. This program is sponsored by local services who all donate their time and expertise to connect with families
- ♥ Implementation and expansion of the You're Kidding Me Expo, the largest and longest running child and family expo in the Hunter, which provides a space for families to connect with and learn about local services, programs and resources available. We want families to know where support is available for them, when and if they ever need it
- ♥ Uploading all of our playground information to our website. Our interactive map shows families where all the local playgrounds are and also what facilities are available at each playground
- ♥ Chairing the Lake Macquarie Domestic Violence Committee and supporting key initiatives, programs and resources to educate and create awareness in the community on domestic and family violence
- ♥ Advocacy for services and families. Over the past five years, Council has provided letters of support and advocacy on a range of topics, from seeking ongoing funding for domestic and family violence services, creating the Hunter Regional Domestic Violence Forum, to support for funding for early childhood services and increasing the design standards for child care centres.



WHAT IS SHAPING OUR NEXT STRATEGY?

Over the past five years, there have been a range of key focus areas emerge around children and families.

These areas include:

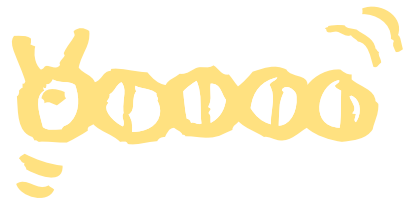
- ♥ child safety and protection
- ♥ the First 2,000 Days
- ♥ rights of all children in our communities
- ♥ the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC).

All of these areas have guided the development of this strategy and initiate a focus point for which to build our own local strategy and action plan upon.



ENGAGEMENT

WITH THE COMMUNITY



From Monday 20 July 2020 to Friday 21 August 2020, Council sought feedback from:

- ★ families via online and social media platforms
- ★ family and child services via a survey and online consultation session
- ★ school-aged children through a 'Mayor for the Day' competition
- ★ early years children through targeted workshops with their educators.



WHAT DID FAMILIES TELL US?

- ♥ We had 65 people engage in our online discussion panel, complete a survey or comment on our social media posts
- ♥ We heard that many parents are concerned with footpath accessibility, shade in our playgrounds and a variety of play features at our playgrounds including water and other natural elements (56 per cent). This information will be helpful as we develop our upcoming Playgrounds and Parks Strategy and our Cycling and Better Streets Strategy
- ♥ Parents would like more information on what services and resources are available to them
- ♥ We also heard that families love the natural landscapes Lake Macquarie has to offer, and would like to ensure these are preserved, enhanced and encouraged to be utilised by all.

WHAT DID SERVICES TELL US?

- ♥ We had 16 services engage with the online survey and consultation session
- ♥ We heard that services are keen to support and connect with families, and feel that the best way to do this is to make services more visible and accessible in local places where families live and frequent
- ♥ We also heard that online platforms should be a key focus area for engaging with and supporting families. Online platforms should be easy to locate with all information accessible from the one place and promoted regularly to families.

WHAT DID CHILDREN TELL US?

- ♥ We heard from more than 120 children aged 3-12 years, from primary schools and early childhood services
- ♥ We heard that children are invested in their community and ensuring that no-one is left behind. Ideas from our youngest citizens included:
 - community gardens to support those who need it the most
 - more outdoor facilities and experiences such as motorbike tracks, mountain bike tracks, skate parks, a hedge maze, and interactive game stations along our foreshore
 - environmental sustainable practices such as ensuring we have “more plants than buildings”, recycled craft groups for children to attend and parents to make friends, and keeping our lake and beaches clean so they remain the best in Australia
 - connecting with culture and community by engaging with volunteers to support the programs, creating multicultural spaces so everyone feels welcome and enhancing our bush tracks and Aboriginal heritage sites so we can all learn about our rich culture and history
- ♥ Children love being outdoors, in our parks, playgrounds, open space, lake and beaches. Younger children especially love to visit these places and feel safest when they do so with their parents and grandparents



PRIORITY AREA 1:

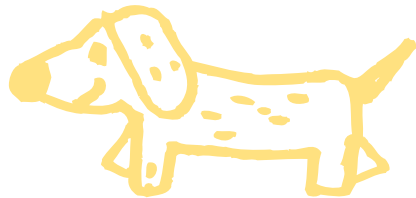
KEEPING OUR CHILDREN SAFE

THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

In 2017, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses into Child Sexual Abuse was released along with 409 recommendations. While not all recommendations can be implemented by Council, we do fully support the recommendations in being a Child Safe Organisation and supporting other organisations in our City to become child safe as well. We believe that children cannot thrive to their fullest potential, unless they feel safe and secure in their environment and with the people around them. We want children to know that they are valued members of our community, that their voice matters and that there are systems in place to ensure they are heard, supported and kept safe.

DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

Domestic and family violence (DFV) remains one of the highest call out reasons for police in our community. DFV can affect anyone at anytime and it is important our community is equipped to respond to any incidents they witness. Children are severely impacted by DFV and the trauma of violence in the home is something that can impact their development and life outcomes for many years. We want to ensure that children and families feel safe in the community and at home, that children and families know where they can turn to if they need support, and that we have a community who are knowledgeable in how they can help if they see or hear something. We want to break down societal stereotypes that foster gendered violence and promote equality amongst all people in our community.





PRIORITY AREA 2:

HELPING OUR CHILDREN DEVELOP WELL

THE AUSTRALIAN EARLY DEVELOPMENT CENSUS

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) is a national progress measure to monitor Australian children's development. Conducted every three years since 2009, it assesses and compares the development of kindergarten children in five developmental domains: physical health and wellbeing; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive skills; and communication and general knowledge skills. Due to children being assessed in their first year of schooling, it provides an indication of what opportunities have been afforded to children in the years prior to school. Data can be viewed as an entire Local Government Area or at a suburb level. Across Lake Macquarie, approximately one in five children are developmentally vulnerable in at least one domain. This figure varies across domains and suburbs and, at the last census in 2018, several communities show as high as 50 per cent of children being developmentally vulnerable.

Using the AEDC data and the First 2,000 Days Framework, our community will be able to work together to identify the needs in our local areas, develop shared language and common goals to work towards to best support our children's development.

SUPPORTING, CARING AND LISTENING TO ALL CHILDREN IN OUR COMMUNITY

In 1990, Australia signed up to the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Rights are reviewed every few years and the most recent report was released in November 2019. It found that while many children in Australia were doing well, there is much more that can be done. Some of the key proposals focus on improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children with disability and children who are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. While Council has specific plans for people with disability and our Aboriginal and multicultural communities, the Child and Family Strategy will further complement these plans by relating specifically to children and the services who support them. We believe that all children should be heard, that it takes a whole community to raise a child, and services should be supported to ensure they are inclusive and open for everyone. This will only be achieved, when culture and experiences are shared, understood and celebrated throughout our community.

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES HAVING SAFE ACCESS TO PARKS, PLAYGROUNDS AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

In the importance of listening to all children and families within our community, our actions will support much of feedback regarding safe access to natural spaces and recreation particularly within our parks and playgrounds. In the age of technology and rise of childhood obesity and other illnesses, the need for families to have safe and accessible outdoor spaces for children to regularly interact with the natural environment, is very clear. This has also been identified by many of the responses from children, whose feedback reflects their desire to learn, explore and play within the natural environment. Reflecting upon our community engagement summary, notably there has been a considerable amount of feedback from children seeking opportunities for their playgrounds and spaces to promote a variety of actions to positively support their growth, development and wellbeing. Some these include 'connecting with culture', through programs and volunteer opportunities, inclusion and support for others such as community gardens 'for those who need it most', as well as the provision of risky play facilities which include 'motor/ mountain bike tracks and a hedge maze'.

Parents have also identified the need for safe access to roads, footpaths and shaded areas. Whilst some themes are identified more comprehensively within other council strategies, our actions will support and complement the key priorities identified by children and their families in this current strategy.



PRIORITY AREA 3:

HELPING TO CONNECT AND SUPPORT FAMILIES

THE FIRST 2,000 DAYS

In 2019, NSW Health released a Framework titled 'The First 2,000 Days'. This Framework supports development of children from conception up until the age of five. It encompasses services working together to improve the outcomes for children and support parents through pre-natal, pregnancy, post-natal and parenting. This Framework expands on the original 'First 1,000 days' research, as it provides notice to the importance of quality early education experiences and the impact this can have on a child's future educational and life outcomes. This Framework also complements and expands on the work Council has already undertaken in recent years to connect families to services, as well as connecting family, health and early education services together. The Framework will guide and support Council's ability to further enhance the connectedness of services and outcomes in our community, with a shared language and approach to working with families.

YOU'RE KIDDING ME PROGRAM

Council's You're Kidding Program, developed in 2015, has seen more than 2,000 families register for workshops, talks and attend the annual You're Kidding Me Expo, with local services and presenters who support child development. This program has proven successful with families connecting to services, learning about what support are available in the community and being able to implement tools and strategies to give their child the best start in life.





WHAT WE WILL DO

WITH ALL THE INFORMATION GATHERED

We have developed the following Action Plan to implement over the next four years to continue to support children and families in our community. While some actions are prescriptive, others are more open-ended, to allow for creative thinking in delivering our key priorities.



KEY PRIORITY	ACTIONS	TIMEFRAME	KEY PARTNERS
Keeping our children safe	Embed a child safe framework throughout Council	1-2 years	Internal teams – People Culture and Risk, Senior Leadership Network, child-focused roles, Communications
	Provide learning and development opportunities for external organisations to be child safe	One year	External child-focused services
	Support the Lake Macquarie Domestic Violence Committee to deliver key initiatives and develop resources and campaigns	Ongoing	Lake Macquarie Domestic Violence Committee
	Support and deliver Reclaim the Night	Annually	Lake Macquarie Domestic Violence Committee
	Raise awareness in the community of child protection during Child Protection Week	Annually	
Helping our children develop well	Increase collaboration opportunities for services, for example Link Up Day	1-4 years	External child and family support services
	Increase consultation opportunities with younger children on Council plans and projects	1-4 years	Internal teams – Integrated Planning, Asset Management, Recreation and Land Planning, City Projects, Communications Local Primary Schools
	Showcase children’s voices and ideas around the City during Children’s Week	Annually	Internal teams – Arts, Culture and Tourism, Communications
	Ensure the diversity of our children and families are represented in our facilities and marketing	1-4 years	Internal teams – Arts Culture and Tourism, Leisure Services, Communications, Community Facilities Management
	Advocate internally and externally for quality learning environments for children, including playgrounds and play spaces	Ongoing	External government organisations and developers Internal teams – City Projects, Development and Assessment, and Asset Management
Connecting and supporting families	Update Council’s child and family webpage to include more useful information	1-4 years	Internal teams – Business Information and Technology Solutions, Communications
	Include a monthly update on child and family events, activities and resources in Council communications	1-4 years	Communications
	Increase the You’re Kidding Me Program to offer online workshops and webinars	1-4 years	External services Internal teams – Business Information and Technology Solutions, Communications
	Develop a child and family services guide	1-4 years	
	Develop a pop-up play session program to connect families and provide new play opportunities for children	1-4 years	External services
	Host the You’re Kidding Me Expo	Annually	External services Communications

For more information



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