



Middle Years in Whittlesea: **A COLLECTIVE RESPONSE**

A municipal middle years strategy for the City of Whittlesea

SUMMARY

The middle years – transition, risk and opportunity

The middle years, the period of development between 9 and 14 years, can be characterised as a time of significant transition, risk and opportunity.

Children and young people in the middle years experience tremendous growth and change. The middle years is a time of personal, cognitive and social development. It is a time when children transition into young adolescents and experience new challenges and opportunities in the personal, educational and social realms of their lives. Research describes the significance of brain development during this time.¹

It is also a time when significant risk factors can emerge. These include the shift and challenge of relationships with self, parents and peers. A myriad of internal and external issues confront adolescents including self-esteem, body image, anxiety, depression and bullying.

The middle years provide an invaluable opportunity to empower and support children and young people in their development. It is a time when lifestyle habits begin to be established² and when foundations can be laid to support success on a range of fronts, in later adolescence and adult life. It is therefore a critical time for prevention and early intervention approaches to address risk, promote wellbeing and support educational engagement.³

Within the City of Whittlesea, we have a rich and diverse network of stakeholders, each with a role to play in supporting the development of children and young people in the middle years; these include parents, carers, educators, service providers, businesses, government and community leaders.

OUR CONCEPTUAL AND PRACTICE APPROACH

1. Ensure policies and programs are responsive and relevant throughout the life course and include a specific focus on the needs of children and young people in the middle years.
2. Be mindful of the context in which children and young people in the middle years live their daily lives and ensure that all stakeholders are alert to the role they play in influencing the opportunities and experiences of children and young people in the middle years.
3. Build upon good practice approaches to supporting children, young people and their families. This includes tailored practice approaches and respecting their rights, their developmental stage and their need for connectedness and supportive relationships.

Significant population growth

The estimated residential population of children and young people in the middle years aged 9 to 14 years old in 2017 was 15 282. This is forecast to grow to 29 493 by 2041.⁴ Significant growth is anticipated in the population of children and young people in the middle years by 2041, particularly in the suburbs of Wollert, Epping North and Donnybrook.

Vision

*That **all** children and young people in the middle years have supportive relationships, a positive sense of self, healthy development, meaningful engagement in learning and connectedness to community.*



STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1: CONTINUOUS DIALOGUE WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE MIDDLE YEARS AND THEIR FAMILIES.

Objective: Ensure that the experiences and needs of children and young people in the middle years and their families are central in influencing the shape of policy, program and service development.

Broad areas for action:

- Collect data that gives voice to the experiences of children and young people in the middle years and their families so as to build a comprehensive understanding of those experiences.
- Collaborate across the children's, youth, family and education sectors to share information to inform program and service development.
- Develop the capacity within the children's, youth, family and education sectors to engage children and young people in the middle years and their families in participatory opportunities that help shape program and service development.

The Middle Years Development Index

A key initiative undertaken within the Whittlesea municipality has been the implementation of the Middle Years Development Instrument (MDI). The MDI has given middle years children and young people a voice in reporting on their own experiences and wellbeing and has provided unique and important data and insights into a range of development and wellbeing indicators. In broad terms, the information collected from students points to the need to explore how to:

- Strengthen relationships with adults – at school, home and in the neighbourhood.
- Strengthen students' sense of a positive school climate.
- Improve nutrition (eating breakfast) and sleep.
- Increase engagement in after-school activities.⁵

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2:
STRENGTHENING
RELATIONSHIPS WITH
FAMILY, FRIENDS AND
IMPORTANT ADULTS.

Objective: Support children and young people in the middle years to establish strong and safe relationships that support and guide them through opportunities and challenges.

Broad areas for action:

- Identify opportunities for family strengthening, informed by the experiences of children and young people in the middle years and their families.

- Ensure families of children and young people in the middle years can access early intervention family strengthening services.

- Use the universal platform of schools to implement partnership approaches to family strengthening and support.

- Strengthen the sense of connectedness that children and young people in the middle years have with adults in their schools and communities.

- Support children and young people in the middle years to develop knowledge and skills for healthy relationships and friendships.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3:
HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT
AND A POSITIVE SENSE
OF IDENTITY

Objective: Support the personal and physical development of children and young people in the middle years, and nurture a positive sense of self and pride in identity.

Broad areas for action:

- Enhance the capacity of stakeholders to offer participation and engagement opportunities for all children and young people in the middle years, in line with the principles and approaches outlined in the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria's YERP online resource, found at <http://yerp.yacvic.org.au>.

- Provide information, tailored support and access to positive role models representing the breadth of diversity of ethnicity, culture, gender identity and sexuality to children and young people in the middle years and their families.

- Provide quality opportunities for children and young people in the middle years to develop their social and emotional skills, and engage in 'healthy' risk taking.

- Provide, facilitate or advocate, to address identified need to support the healthy development of children and young people in the middle years.

- Provide generalist youth support services enabling continued good practice for youth development with a central focus on youth participation and engagement practices.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 4:
SUPPORTING
ENGAGEMENT IN
LEARNING

Objective: Support children and young people in the middle years to be engaged in meaningful learning opportunities with a strong sense of competence and positive connection to school.

Broad areas for action:

- Collaborative, community-based partnership for the provision of a broad, holistic 'transitions support' model for children and young people in the middle years.

- Use evidence based approaches to strengthen early identification of children and young people at risk of educational disengagement.

- Address the learning styles and needs of young people who are disengaging or have disengaged.

- Promote a culture of respect within all learning environments.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 5:
OPPORTUNITIES
TO CONNECT
WITH COMMUNITY

Objective: Support children and young people in the middle years to have a strong sense of belonging and connectedness to community and place.

Broad areas for action:

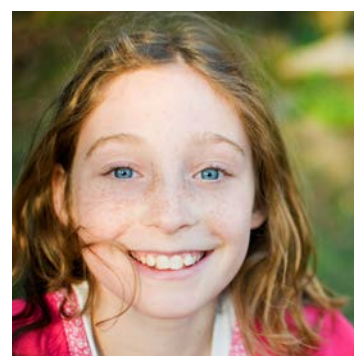
- Deliver opportunities for children and young people in the middle years to participate in decision-making about them and their communities.

- Ensure social and physical infrastructure is designed to be inclusive of, and responsive to, children and young people in the middle years and their families.

- Promote access to affordable out of school hours activities, tailored in response to the views of children and young people in the middle years and their families.

- Advocate for early provision of place based community development and social and physical infrastructure in all new growth areas, for children and young people in the middle years and their families.

The middle years provide an invaluable opportunity to empower and support children and young people in their development.





Next steps

This strategy provides a framework for a collective approach whereby stakeholders can work in complementary ways, reflecting their valuable and diverse expertise, to support the development of children and young people in the middle years and their families.

The Whittlesea Youth Commitment, with support from the City of Whittlesea, will bring together a range of stakeholders (including schools, service providers, network and Council representatives) to support the development of specific actions for implementation. These will be building upon the important work already being undertaken by many stakeholders within the community.

This summary report and a copy of the full report are available for download from:
www.hwllen.com.au/youthcommitments/wycmiddleyears

1. Mak, V.K. & Ford-Jones, E.L., (2012) Spotlight on middle childhood: rejuvenating the 'forgotten years' *Pediatrics and Child Health*, Feb 2012; 17(2): pp 81–83. Available for download <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3299351/> (Accessed February 2017)
2. NSW Commission for Children and Young People, (2008) *Submission to the NSW Joint Parliamentary Committee on Children and Young People: Inquiry into children and young people 9-14 years in NSW*, pp. 1-23.
3. See Grogan, P., Colvin, K., Rose, J., Morstyn, L. Atkins, C. (2013) *Building the Scaffolding: Strengthening Support for Young People in Victoria*. Victorian Council of Social Service and Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, Melbourne. & Parliament of NSW, Committee on Children and Young People (2009) *Children and young people aged 9-14 years in NSW: the missing middle*, Sydney.
4. forecast.id (2017). City of Whittlesea Population Forecasts. Available: www.forecast.id.com.au/whittlesea (accessed March 2017)
5. See *Student Wellbeing: Results from the Middle Years Development Instrument - Whittlesea cohort, Year 8 (2014 cohort) & Student Wellbeing 2015, Results from a survey of young people: Whittlesea Year 5/6 & Student Wellbeing 2015, Results from a survey of young people: Whittlesea Year 7/8*. Available: www.hwllen.com.au (accessed March 2017).

The City of Whittlesea and the Whittlesea Youth Commitment recognises the rich Aboriginal heritage of this country and acknowledges the Wurundjeri Willum Clan as the Traditional Owners of this place.

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