

Mount Alexander Middle Years Plan 2020-2023

“All children (aged 8-12 years) and families in Mount Alexander Shire are happy, safe, active and connected.”

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Acknowledgement and thanks

“We acknowledge the Dja Dja Wurrung and the Taungurung as the traditional owners of the lands and waters of the Mount Alexander Shire and recognise all other Indigenous people of the Shire and the vital role that the traditional owners play as custodians of the region.

We would also like to acknowledge and thank the children, families and service providers who have participated in the development of this plan.”

Executive Summary

The *Mount Alexander Middle Years Plan 2020-2023* provides a collective approach to developing and coordinating services, programs and partnership activities for our children 8-12 years and their families in the Shire. We refer to this phase of development, between 8 and 12 years of age, as the 'middle years'.

Following on from the development of the *Mount Alexander Early Years Plan 2018-2021*, this Plan further demonstrates Council's commitment to improving the health and wellbeing of children and families in our Shire.

The Plan is a Council initiated plan, developed in partnership with our community and service providers. It is an inspirational document that provides a solid foundation for collaboration by recognising that everyone can play a role in ensuring Mount Alexander Shire is a great place for our children and their families to live, work and play.

It acknowledges that Mount Alexander Shire Council plays an important role in facilitating the success of the Plan by providing leadership and support. However, this success is reliant upon the collaborative efforts of everyone.

As such, a holistic approach was applied to inform the development of the Plan. Central to this approach was an extensive consultation process that involved conversations, surveys and forums with our community.

Following an analysis of the information gathered through this process, three key priority areas emerged:

Priority Area 1: Happy and Safe Kids

By this we mean that all kids and families:

- have positive mental health
- are safe online and off-line
- are ready to transition to high school

Priority Area 2: Active and Adventurous Kids

By this we mean that all kids and families?

- have more opportunities to be physically active
- have opportunities to connect with the environment and engage in nature play
- have access to age appropriate child friendly spaces for all seasons

Priority Area 3: Connected Kids & Families

By this we mean that all kids and families:

- know what is going on and can access useful and coordinated services
- have access to flexible employment and out-of-school-hours care
- have opportunities to participate in accessible and affordable activities

The objectives, actions and outcomes under each priority area provide a strategic framework to guide the implementation of the Plan. They encourage a collective approach to combine resources and expertise to achieve our vision that *"All children and families in Mount Alexander Shire are happy, safe, active and connected."*

Why the Middle Years are important

The middle years of childhood (8-12 years of age) are an important period of individual growth and learning, characterised by rapid physical, cognitive, emotional and social development.

During this time puberty begins, children are finding a sense of self, growing and establishing peer relationships and making the transition from primary to high school.

This period of significant change and growth also sees children develop resilience and adaptability, and strategies to manage themselves in different situations.

It is an important time for establishing the foundations of future wellbeing, but it is also a time of vulnerability. During the middle years, children are at the greatest risk of disengagement from learning and we start to see high rates of mental illness and health issues such as obesity. There is increasing evidence that early intervention is crucial not only in the early years, but also at key points in a child's development, with a focus on transition periods, such as the transition from childhood to adolescence.

Despite the critical changes that occur in children's lives during this period, children in their middle years have received little attention in research, policy and program funding. This critical gap in research data and program funding makes it hard to understand and support the unique needs of children in the middle years and their families.

In December 2018, Council adopted the Mount Alexander Early Years Plan 2018-2021. The Early Years Plan consultation with families and service providers identified the need for further planning to better support children in the middle years (8-12 years) and their families.

Local data shows that most middle years' children and families in our Shire are doing well. Most children feel connected to school, report less bullying than the state average, and when asked what they would change to make life better, 50% of children surveyed responded, "Nothing, I like everything."

However, the data also tells us that we have a higher proportion of children whose parents report high levels of family stress compared to the state average.

A survey of 298 children aged 8-12 years in our Shire showed that their biggest concerns are about climate change, being ready for high school, doing well at school, bullying, and being safe online and off-line.

Local families and service providers have identified the need for more health and wellbeing services, mental health education for children and families, more affordable and accessible services, better access to out-of-school-hours care and more support to transition to high school.

By identifying and addressing issues during the middle years and by providing targeted intervention, we may be able to improve the social, emotional and health outcomes for children and their families in our community.

Council's role in the Middle Years

Local governments are legally bound under Victoria's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 to actively enact, promote and support the human rights of adults and children in service provision, policy, and practice.

Direct delivery of middle years services, activities and programs:

Council provides a range of activities and programs for middle years children including the Walk to School program, the Young Makers Market (10-25 years) and Quick Response Youth Grants (10-25 years).

A number of other initiatives for young people aged 12-25 years also provide activities for children in the upper range of middle years. These include the FReeZa Committee, Youth Advisory Group and Mondo Lounge Youth Space.

Provision of public spaces and community facilities:

This includes parks, pools, recreation reserves, walking and cycling trails and community facilities (i.e. library).

Indirect delivery of middle years services, activities and programs:

Council provides funding support to community organisations to deliver middle years programs. This includes support given to Nalderun Aboriginal Services to deliver The Meeting Place and Koori Bus Service.

Community strengthening, advocacy and partnerships:

Council supports other organisations and agencies across the Shire to improve outcomes for middle years children and families through a range of actions including:

- Advocacy (such as submissions to the Victorian Government or representation on regional networks)
- Professional development (such as delivering Youth Mental Health First Aid)
- Networking opportunities (such as the support for the Family Violence Prevention Network)
- Resourcing and support (such as community grants to organisations and community groups and Quick Response Youth Grants to young people from 10-25 years)
- Events and forums (such as Children's Week events and Early Years Forums)
- Project partnerships (such as the Youth Wellbeing Project group)

Council Strategies

Other Mount Alexander Shire Council plans and strategies, developed in partnership with the community, also align with the *Mount Alexander Middle Years Plan 2020-2023*. Table 1 provides an overview of some of these plans and strategies and their relevant commitments.

Table 1: Summary of other Mount Alexander Shire Council plans and strategies that align with the Mount Alexander Middle Years Plan 2020-2023.

Plan/Theme	Priority Area 1: Happy & Safe Kids	Priority Area 2: Active & Adventurous Kids	Priority Area 3: Connected Kids & Families
<p>Council Plan 2017-2021</p>	<p>Strategy: Improve access to mental health services for our community.</p> <p>Strategy: Support the building of social connections in each of our towns.</p> <p>Strategy: Implement initiatives to change the behaviours and attitudes that contribute to family violence in our community.</p> <p>Action: Deliver a Youth Mental Health First Aid program to the community in partnership with local service providers.</p> <p>Action: Partner with the community and local health providers to address the causes of mental health by developing programs that build social inclusion, diversity and tolerance.</p>	<p>Strategy: Improve health through use of our public spaces and trails.</p> <p>Strategy: Protect and enhance the natural environment.</p> <p>Action: Promote use of footpaths, trails and open spaces as a form of recreation.</p>	<p>Strategy: Facilitate an accessible range of services for all including children, young people and families.</p> <p>Action: Develop programs to support children in the middle year age bracket.</p>
<p>Public Open Space Strategy 2016</p>	<p>Recommendation 12: Where possible, support opportunities for arts and cultural expression in existing reserves including interpretive information and relevant signage in public spaces to promote heritage connections and to support tourism initiatives</p>	<p>Recommendation 9: Consider opportunities to improve the appeal of existing public open spaces for all ages where appropriate.</p>	
<p>Investing in Play Strategy 2014-2024</p>		<p>Principal 1: Provide play spaces that support children’s physical, social, cognitive and emotional development.</p> <p>Provide play spaces that cater for different play activities such as: climbing, swinging, tumbling, crawling, running, bike riding, ambling, building, creating, and make believe and role play.</p> <p>Offer different play environments such as: equipment to climb through, swing on, hang from natural areas with plants for smelling, leaves for crunching, trees for climbing and bushes for tunneling through sandpits and veggie gardens, and places for running around or playing ball games.</p> <p>Principal 2: Provide play spaces that stimulate different responses in children such as creativity,</p>	

		physical activity, learning, spontaneity and imagining.	
Walking and Cycling Strategy 2012-2020		<p>3.1: We will work towards building a connected footpath network that creates an unbroken link between all the locations [in the above list] within the 'walking zone' of each township.</p> <p>3.2.9: We will work with interested community partners (Older people, parents with young children, people with disabilities) to identify gaps and areas for improvement in the existing provision of the [above facilities] as well as options for utilising existing public or private facilities for this purpose.</p> <p>7: We will work towards developing a clear, consistent, connected and complete Wayfinding system across the Shire that assists walkers and cyclists to comfortably navigate their way around.</p>	
Municipal Emergency Management Plan		<p>3.5: Community Preparedness: [There] are seven resilience characteristics that emergency managers should aim to strengthen and encourage in communities. These characteristics are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe and well • Connected, inclusive and empowered • Dynamic and diverse local economy • Sustainable built and natural environment • Culturally rich and vibrant • Democratic and engaged • Reflective and aware. 	
Climate Change Action Plan		Action 57: Support young people to develop and implement climate change projects and recognise young sustainability leaders through the Mount Alexander Youth Awards.	

Policy Context

The development of the *Mount Alexander Middle Years Plan 2020-2023* has been guided by current data, research and feedback received from our community. It has also been developed within the context of local, State, Federal and international legislation, policies and strategies which have included, but are not limited to the following:

Local

- Mount Alexander Shire Council Plan 2017-2021
- Mount Alexander Shire Council Early Years Plan 2018-2021
- Mount Alexander Shire Council – Let’s Play 2014-2024: Investing in Play
- Mount Alexander Shire Council Walking & Cycling Strategy 2010-2020
- Central Victorian Primary Care Partnership Strategic Plan 2017-19
- Loddon Mallee Action Plan for the primary prevention of violence against women 2016-2019
- Mount Alexander Shire Council Public Open Space Strategy (2016)

State

- Child Safe Standards, Victorian Government 2015
- The State of Victoria’s Children Report 2016, Victorian Government
- Victoria’s Vulnerable Children: Our Shared Responsibility - Strategy 2013-2022, Victorian Government
- Child Friendly Cities and Communities Charter, Victorian Local Government Association 2013
- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, Victorian Government
- Children, Youth and Families Act 2005, Victorian Government
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005, Victorian Government

Federal

- Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration 2019, Council of Australian Governments Education Council
- National Principles for Child Safe Organisations, Australian Government 2019
- National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2009-2020, Australian Human Rights Commission
- My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Aged Care, Australian Government 2011
- A stronger, fairer Australia: national statement on social inclusion, Australian Government 2009

International

- Child Friendly Cities Initiative, UNICEF 2009
- Convention of the Rights of the Child, United Nations 1989

Community Consultation

The Mount Alexander Middle Years Plan 2020-2023 was developed with the feedback received through an extensive consultation process that involved conversations, surveys and forums with children, families and service providers.

Consultation Process



Three surveys were developed: one for children (hardcopy), one for parents/carers (online and hardcopy) and one for service providers (online).

Survey participants included 298 children, 118 parents and carers and 15 service providers.

Survey responses identified that:

- Children and families value the lifestyle, community, environment and sports and recreation opportunities in our Shire.
- Children are most concerned about the environment, being ready for high school, doing well at school, bullying, and being safe online and off-line.
- Families and service providers identified the need for more health and wellbeing services, mental health education for children and families, more affordable and accessible services, better access to out-of-school-hours care and more support to transition to high school.
- Children would like to see more climate change action, more affordable activities and more age appropriate child-friendly play spaces for all seasons.
- Children and families would like to see an indoor aquatic facility in our Shire.

About the Plan

The Mount Alexander Middle Years Plan 2020-2023 presents a shared vision that 'all children and families in Mount Alexander Shire are happy, safe, active and connected'.

Three priority areas and nine objectives have been identified to address the needs of children and families in the Mount Alexander community.

For each objective, there is a series of actions outlining what we, and our key partners will commit to delivering over the next three years.

The three year Plan is underpinned by significant research about:

- The benefits of investing in children and families
- The local, state, federal and international policy context
- The demographic and health profile of the Mount Alexander Shire community
- The supports available to children and families in Mount Alexander Shire, and
- The results from extensive consultation with local children, families, service providers and Council officers.

Each objective and action was developed by using feedback received through an extensive consultation process with key stakeholders including children, families and service providers.

Each action states which stakeholder group has the Lead Responsibility for its implementation as well as the role of Council in its delivery. Council's role has been defined as one of the following:

Lead: Council adopts full responsibility for delivery of the action, due to the action being either internal or at a policy level.

Facilitate: Undertaking a process involving other stakeholders, which will be driven by Council.

Support: Add value to activities that are initiated by, and the responsibility of, other agencies. This may include promotion, in-kind support or providing advice.

Advocate: Using Council's role in the community to exert influence on external agencies to undertake an action.

Each action has been defined as either a High, Medium or Low priority in which to be implemented. This prioritisation is reflective of importance rather the proposed order in which actions should be delivered.

The Plan is an adaptive document that recognises that as a community we are already greatly contributing to a shared vision. It also acknowledges that there are many stakeholders who will develop their own strategies that will complement and support different areas of this plan.

The Plan is based on a Collective Impact model that provides a structured approach to collaboration. It focuses on the concept that no single policy, government department, organisation or program can address the increasingly complex range of social issues impacting its community.

The approach requires stakeholders to defer their own agenda in favour of a common agenda, shared measurements and alignment of effort.

In undertaking this process, a commitment is required by all key stakeholders to work together to provide a more efficient and integrated service delivery so that services and programs remain responsive to the actions of the Plan.

Stakeholders:

Key stakeholders who will work together to collectively achieve the outcomes of the Plan.

- Castlemaine Secondary College
- Central Victorian Primary Care Partnership
- CHIRP Community Health
- CycleSafe Mount Alexander
- Goldfields Library Corporation (Castlemaine Library)
- Mount Alexander Shire Council
- Mount Alexander Family Violence Network
- Nalderun Upper Loddon Aboriginal Services
- Primary schools
- School Focused Youth Service
- State Government
- Victoria Police
- YMCA Victoria

Priority Area 1: Happy and Safe Kids

Kids and families have positive mental health, are safe online and offline and ready to transition to high school.

What we want to achieve (Objectives)	How we will do it (Actions)	Lead Responsibility	Council role	Priority Level
1.1 Kids and families have positive mental health and good self-care	1.1.1 Coordinate and promote parental education sessions and programs for our families to improve child wellbeing, safety and family resilience.	Middle Years Steering Group	Facilitate	Medium
	1.1.2 Coordinate the delivery of mental health training in schools for students and staff.	Middle Years Steering Group	Facilitate	High
	1.1.3 Advocate for an increase in the number of health and wellbeing services available locally for middle years children and their families (i.e. counsellors, psychologists, General Practitioners).	Middle Years Steering Group	Advocate	High
1.2 Kids are safe online and offline	1.2.1 Extend the Preparation for Puberty program to include sections on respectful relationships, consent and cybersafety.	CHIRP Community Health	Support	Medium
	1.2.2 Support the implementation of the eSmart Schools and the eSmart Libraries program in schools and Castlemaine Library to teach children to be smart, safe and responsible online.	Local Primary Schools and Castlemaine Library	Support	Medium
	1.2.3 Improve the relationship between the local Police and community and promote a better understanding of how we can collaboratively increase community safety.	Victoria Police	Support	Medium
	1.2.4 Continue to work with our key partners to ensure emergency preparedness and planning specifically considers the needs of our children and their families.	Council	Lead	Low
	1.2.5 Identify and promote training opportunities for our local organisations and service providers to better understand and implement 'child safe standards'.	Middle Years Steering Group	Facilitate	Medium
	1.2.6 Raise community awareness of the impact of family violence on children.	Mount Alexander Family Violence Network	Support	Medium
1.3 Kids are ready to transition to high school	1.3.1 Seek opportunities to implement additional measures to support vulnerable children and children with additional needs to transition to secondary school.	Middle Years Steering Group	Support	High
	1.3.2 Expand the existing transition program to better support children and families to transition to secondary college.	Castlemaine Secondary College	Support	High
	1.3.3 Engage families to increase their participation in events and activities at Castlemaine Secondary College.	Castlemaine Secondary College	Support	Low

We will measure our success by seeing:

- Mental health training delivered to middle years children, families and school staff.
- An increase in the number of local schools participating in the eSmart Schools¹ initiative.
- Child Safe Standards training promoted to local organisations and service providers.
- Greater support provided to vulnerable children and families to transition to high school.
- The Preparation for Puberty program expanded to include content on respectful relationships, consent and cybersafety.
- An increase in the number of schools participating in the Safety Awareness Field Education (SAFE)² program.

¹ The eSmart Schools initiative is designed to help schools improve cyber safety and reduce cyber bullying and bullying.

² The Safety Awareness Field Education (SAFE) is a multi-agency educational programme, for primary school students in grades 3 and 4, delivering a series of safety education sessions.

Priority Area 2: Active and Adventurous Kids

Kids have opportunities to be physically active and to connect with the environment and have access to age appropriate child friendly spaces.

What we want to achieve Objectives	How we will do it Actions	Lead Responsibility	Council role	Priority Level
2.1 Kids have opportunities to be physically active	2.1.1 Continue to seek funding to deliver annual events at all local primary schools to encourage school kids to walk, ride or scoot to and from school.	Council	Lead	Medium
	2.1.2 Develop a strategy to strengthen partnerships between local sporting clubs and schools.	Middle Years Steering Group	Facilitate	Low
	2.1.3 Identify and promote measures to remove the gender in children's organised sport.	Council	Facilitate	Medium
	2.1.4 Improve the walking and cycling network around local primary schools to provide safer and better quality walking and cycling routes to school.	Council	Lead	Medium
2.2 Kids have opportunities to connect with the environment and engage in nature play	2.2.1 Support the development of resources that encourage children and families to engage with nature play.	Council	Facilitate	Low
	2.2.2 Provide more opportunities for children to engage in climate change action and implement environmental sustainability practices.	Council, Local schools	Support	Medium
	2.2.3 Promote off-road cycling tracks appropriate for middle years children and families, including clear signage and quality maps.	Council	Facilitate	Low
	2.2.4 Continue to advocate for and support The Meeting Place to teach Jaara Jaara knowledge, culture and beliefs to local First Nations children.	Council	Support	High
	2.2.5 Promote resources that encourage children and families to connect with local Indigenous culture.	Council	Facilitate	Medium
	2.2.6 Support local schools to integrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures into the school curriculum.	Nalderun Aboriginal Services	Support	Medium
2.3 Kids have access to age appropriate child friendly spaces for all seasons	2.3.1 Ensure our middle years children and families are able to provide input into the development of public facilities (i.e. playgrounds and walking and cycling paths).	Council	Lead	High
	2.3.2 Seek opportunities to provide play spaces that cater for middle years children by offering age appropriate play environments.	Council	Lead	Medium
	2.3.3 Explore ways to make Castlemaine Skate Park more accessible for middle years children and families.	Council	Lead	Medium
	2.3.4 Increase the number of events and activities for middle years children and families at local swimming pools.	YMCA	Facilitate	Low
	2.3.5 Develop and implement a process for allowing community groups to access and utilise sporting facilities at Castlemaine Secondary College out-of-school-hours.	Castlemaine Secondary College	Support	Low
	2.3.6 Develop a framework to support the implementation of the Victorian Local Government Association's Child Friendly Cities and Communities Charter.	Council	Lead	Medium

We will measure our success by seeing:

- Improvements in the walking and cycling network around local primary schools.
- An increase in the number of children participating in walking and cycling to school events.
- An increase in the number of schools integrating First Nations perspectives into school curriculum.
- An increase in the number of annual events and activities delivered for middle years children and families at local swimming pools.
- A framework developed to support the implementation of the Victorian Local Government Association's Child Friendly Cities and Communities Charter.
- An increase in the number of community groups accessing facilities at Castlemaine Secondary College.

Priority Area 3: Connected Kids and Families

Families know what's going on and can access useful and coordinated services, accessible activities, flexible employment and out-of-school-hours care.

What we want to achieve Objectives	How we will do it Actions	Lead Responsibility	Council role	Priority Level
3.1 Families know what is going on and can access useful and coordinated services.	3.1.1 Establish a steering group to oversee the delivery of our Middle Years Plan.	Mount Alexander Youth Connect Network (MAYCN)	Facilitate	High
	3.1.2 Develop a resource for families and middle years service providers with information on local health and wellbeing services.	Middle Years Steering Group	Facilitate	Medium
	3.1.3 Utilise our regional, State and Federal networks to advocate for the priorities in this Plan.	Council	Lead Advocate	Medium
	3.1.4 Create a middle years specific page on the Connect Mount Alexander website and promote to service providers and the community as a resource.	Council	Lead	Low
	3.1.5 Implement a 'No Wrong Door' approach to service delivery to assist our families with middle years children to better access services and encourage a more coordinated and timely response between agencies.	Middle Years Steering Group	Support	Medium
	3.1.6 Collaborate with the Early Years Steering Group to align our priorities.	Middle Years Steering Group	Support	Medium
	3.1.7 Facilitate a wellbeing network of schools to identify and share information, data, learning/funding opportunities, events and other initiatives.	Middle Years Steering Group	Facilitate	Medium
	3.1.8 Work with service providers to develop strategies to ensure vulnerable children and their families have equal access to services.	Middle Years Steering Group	Facilitate	High
3.2 Accessible and affordable activities.	3.2.1 Advocate for improved transport options to assist vulnerable families to access local services, facilities and spaces.	Council	Lead	Medium
	3.2.2 Develop a business case for an under 12 year old Mondo Lounge model to provide a safe and inclusive space that is accessible to children across the Shire.	Council	Lead	Medium
	3.2.3 Explore ways to expand the activity program for middle years children at Castlemaine Library.	Castlemaine Library	Facilitate	Medium
	3.2.4 Increase awareness in local clubs and organisations to build their capacity to create all abilities programs and activities.	Council	Lead	High
	3.2.5 Promote training opportunities for local schools, organisations and service providers to build their capability to be inclusive of LGBTIQ children and families.	Middle Years Steering Group	Facilitate	Medium
3.3 Flexible employment and out-of-school-hours care.	3.3.1 Identify strategies to better coordinate out-of-school-hours care (including school holiday programs) in our Shire.	Council	Lead	High
	3.3.2 Identify, promote and encourage under-used facilities to be made available for out-of-school-hours programs.	Council	Facilitate	Medium
	3.3.3 Identify and promote best practice leaders in flexible work options to encourage local businesses and organisations to provide flexible employment options.	Council	Lead	Medium

We will measure our success by seeing:

- A Middle Years Steering Group established.
- A shared resource developed and used by families and service providers.
- A middle years specific page on the Connect Mount Alexander website developed.
- A wellbeing network of schools established.
- A business case developed for an under 12 year old youth space model.
- Training promoted to support local schools and service providers to be more inclusive of LGBTIQ children and families.

Implementation costs

The implementation of the *Mount Alexander Middle Years Plan 2020-2023* will be predominantly undertaken with existing Council resources, and through the in-kind and financial support of key stakeholders as required.

External grants and resources will also be explored as and when required.

Risk Analysis

The main risks identified as impacting the implementation of the Plan are: the inability to deliver the actions, sustained engagement of key stakeholders, community ownership of the plan and the ability to source external funding when required. These risks will be addressed by:

- Tasking the Middle Years Steering Group with overseeing the implementation of the Plan, including the regular review and delivery of actions;
- Establishing key stakeholders as co-signatories of the Plan and developing regular communications and updates on the Plan delivery and achievements;
- Developing a plan on a page summary of the aims, objectives and actions in easy English terminology and designing the look and feel of the plan with a more community lens rather than corporate; and
- Identifying actions that require external funding and those that can be undertaken within the existing funding and support of key partners.

Review and Evaluation

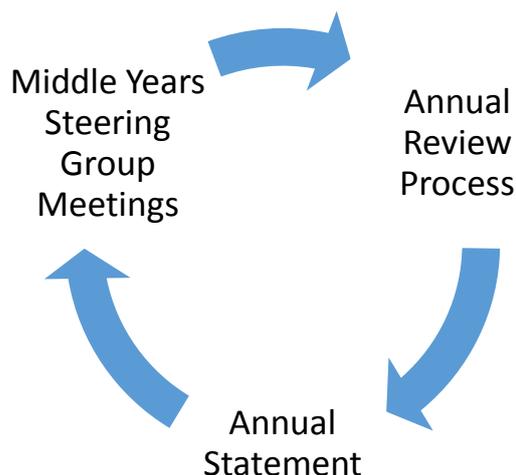
It is acknowledged that the outcomes in the *Mount Alexander Shire Middle Years Plan 2020-2023* will take time and due to the outcomes being both systemic and individualistic in nature, monitoring their progress is crucial to the plans success.

The establishment of a Middle Years Plan Steering Group will ensure that the Plan remains an inspirational and progressive document.

Regular conversations, forums and bulletin updates will ensure that the community and key stakeholders are regularly informed of the Plan's progress and successes, and that each achievement is acknowledged, shared and celebrated.

This approach will be supported by an annual review process that will allow for actions to remain responsive to new and emerging priorities and needs. Annual statements will also be produced to share the findings of each review and provide an outline of the focus for the following year.

In December 2023, an evaluation of the Plan will be undertaken with learnings and outcomes used to inform the development of future middle years planning.



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