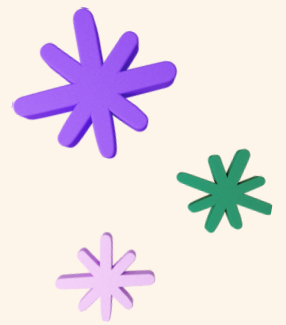


Youth Strategy

2024-28



Acknowledgement of Country

Northern Grampians Shire Council acknowledges the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia, Jupagulk and Dja Dja Wurrung people as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we call Northern Grampians. We pay tribute to all First Nations people living in Northern Grampians, give respect to elders past and present, and extend that respect to all First Nations People.



Thanks

The development of this strategy would not have been possible without the contribution of the young people connected to Northern Grampians Shire who completed our Youth Strategy surveys and participated in the workshops that helped to establish the priorities and actions within this strategy. Thank you for your commitment to making Northern Grampians a place where young people love where they live.

Thank you to the parents and carers who also contributed their voices to this strategy.

To the members of the Youth Strategy Reference Group and other supportive key stakeholders, who helped to guide the development of the strategy and assisted facilitating workshops: Budja Budja Aboriginal Cooperative, Central Grampians and Employment Local Learning Network, East Wimmera Health Service, Cr Eddy Ostarcevic PhD, Cr Lauren Dempsey, Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Cooperative, Grampians Community Health, North Central Local Learning and Employment Network, St Arnaud Secondary College and Stawell Secondary College.

Contents

Message from the Mayor	4
How we got here	5
Important documents	6
Council demographics and diversity	8
How did we engage	10
Strategy Action Plan	14
Glossary and terms	23
References	23

Message from the Mayor



I am very pleased to present Northern Grampians Shire Council's Youth Strategy, a five-year plan that outlines our strategic commitment to young people and an acknowledgement of the importance of young people's involvement and contribution to our community.

Young people have an incredible ability to see things from a different perspective and also have the drive to make things happen. It is important for young people to have a voice, and now more than ever it is our duty to listen. Their contribution is vital to creating a rural community that is vibrant and progressive, and a place where they can thrive in the short, medium and long term. We want young people in Northern Grampians Shire to love where they live.

The Youth Strategy identifies three key themes, each with their own focus objectives:

- Young people are connected and have a voice
- Young people are safe and well
- Young people achieve in education, training and employment

Council looks forward to using this strategy to drive and advocate for improvements in the delivery of services, the creation of opportunities, and the strengthening of connections for the benefit of all young people who live, work, study and play in Northern Grampians Shire.

Mayor Rob Haswell

How we got here

What is a strategy and why should we have one?

Development of a Youth Strategy provides an opportunity for young people to communicate their concerns and needs to local government. In 2014, Northern Grampians Shire Council's Youth Action Council launched their Youth Strategy (2014-17), the first ever youth strategy for the Shire. Since then, engagement with young people has been project-based, for example the recent development of the North Park Precinct Skate Park. In the current Council Plan, 2021-2025, Council determined to undertake a Youth Strategy and thus embed a more strategic approach to working with young people to plan their future.

Young people are the future of our community. The Youth Strategy is a clear step towards prioritising the empowerment of young people in our municipality, to have a role in decision making and to ensure that the diverse needs of young people connected to Northern Grampians Shire are considered.

Background research and strategy development

This strategy has been collaboratively developed with young people who live, work, study or play in Northern Grampians Shire; council staff; service providers to young people; parents and carers of young people; and the community. This process was coordinated by a project reference group with representatives from Council, council staff, schools and service providers to young people.

When preparing this strategy, key research has been completed and relevant policies and strategies consulted. This included:

- Review of the socio-demographic profile of young people in Northern Grampians Shire, and identification of the key concerns that emerged from the data
- Analysis of the factors that impact on the lives of young people in Northern Grampians Shire
- Review of local, state and national reports, policies and strategies that are relevant to young people and supporting future directions and opportunities

Defining 'youth'

The age range for young people or youth varies across national and international groups and organisations. For the purpose of this strategy, we are defining youth as any young person aged from 12 to 24 years.

The period of childhood preceding youth, often called 'the middle years' (from approximate age of eight to 12 years), involves a cohort of children that are also experiencing significant change and are often overlooked in both policy and planning. Where possible we aim to expand our work through the youth strategy to involve our community members from this group.



Young people skate at the new Stawell Skate Park.

Important documents

The UN Convention on the Rights of a Child

“The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, or UNCRC, is a special agreement made by governments from all around the world (including Australia) to ensure every child, no matter who they are, where they live or what they believe, has rights.

After listening and learning from the experts, most countries that make up the United Nations agreed on 54 different rights that every child under 18 should have to live a safe, healthy and happy life.” (UNICEF Australia, 2024)

Most pertinent to our Youth Strategy are:

Article 12

‘Children have the right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them and to have their opinions taken into account.’

This demonstrates the responsibility that all levels of government that make decisions that impact on young people have to provide young people with the opportunity to share their opinions on matters that will affect them. The Youth Strategy has been informed by young people, and also proposes that an ongoing youth advisory structure be explored in Northern Grampians Shire Council.

Article 31

‘Children have the right to relax, play and to join in a wide range of leisure activities.’

Furthermore, young people’s participation in social opportunities, connection to outdoor environment and physical activity has proven benefits for physical and mental health (Better Health Channel, 2023; White, M.P., Alcock, I., Grellier, J. et al, 2019). As providers of open spaces, recreation facilities, holiday programs and other events, our council plays a direct role in assisting young people to exercise their right to be involved in a range of leisure activities.

The Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI)

A child-friendly city is a city, town, municipality or any system of local governance committed to fulfilling child rights as articulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is a city or municipality where the voices, needs, priorities and rights of children are an integral part of public policies, programmes, and decisions. (UNICEF, 2023)

A “Child Friendly City” is a city or community aiming to become a place where children and young people:

- Have a good start in life and grow up healthy and cared for
- Have access to essential services
- Experience quality, inclusive and participatory education and skills development
- Express their opinions and influence decisions that affect them
- Participate in family, cultural, city/community and social life
- Live in a clean, unpolluted and safe environment with access to green spaces
- Meet friends and have places to play and enjoy themselves
- Are safe and protected from exploitation, violence and abuse
- Have a fair chance at life regardless of their ethnic origin, religion, income, gender or ability.

Northern Grampian's Shire Council's Youth Strategy has been developed with these nine components acting as guiding principles. We want young people to love where they live, and to thrive. To achieve this, we need to listen to their ideas, concerns and priorities for Northern Grampians Shire and continually work to understand and address barriers to inclusion and participation in our communities.

Victorian State Government Youth Strategy

In August 2022 the Victorian State Government launched their youth strategy. Created in consultation with thousands of young people during their hardest years in recent history (the coronavirus pandemic), their strategy, 'Our promise, Your future', sets out a framework for the Victorian State Government's work over a five-year period. The priorities identified in Victoria's youth strategy, listed below, have also been closely reviewed and reflected in the creation of the themes and objectives within our council's youth strategy. The six priorities of the Victorian State Government Youth Strategy are:

- Young people are healthy and well
- Young people are safe and secure
- Young people achieve their goals through education, training and employment
- Young people are respected and involved in decisions in their communities
- Young people are confident and strong in their identity and culture and are supported in their community
- Services are coordinated, responsive and accessible.

Northern Grampians Shire Council Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

In 2017 Northern Grampians Shire Council adopted their Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy which commits to creating and sustaining an environment where children are safe, valued and protected. This policy applies to all Councillors and staff, and people engaged as a contractor, agency staff, volunteers and students over the age of 18 on placement. Northern Grampians Shire Council firmly commits to the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, and children and young people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, in addition to the provision of a safe environment for children and young people with a disability, as well as other vulnerable groups in this age cohort. This policy also highlights Council's legal responsibilities including risk management, duty of care and mandatory reporting.

Northern Grampians Shire Council Plan (2021-2025) and Community Vision (2041)

The Council Plan outlines the strategic objectives of Northern Grampians Shire Council and how it will work toward achieving them. In the current Council Plan, 2021-2025, Council determined to undertake a Youth Strategy to prioritise the support of young people. The Northern Grampians Shire Community Vision sets community priorities for the next 20 years and informs strategic planning and decision-making processes for the future of Northern Grampians Shire. Many of the priorities in the Community Vision mirror those identified by young people and featured in this strategy. The key objectives and actions identified in this document also work alongside the broader goals in the Council Plan.

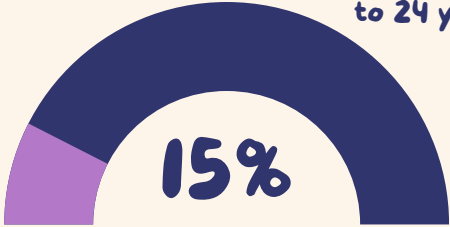
Shire demographics and diversity

Population

There are 1,736 young people (aged 10 to 24) in Northern Grampians Shire, making up almost 15 percent of the population in our municipality. (Census, 2021) Based on population forecasting, this is predicted to decline to 1,320 by 2036 (Victoria in Future projection, 2023).



Percentage of young people in Northern Grampians aged 10 to 24 years.



Diversity

Thirty-three young people aged 12 to 24 years identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

Fifty-five young people (4.7 percent) aged from 12 to 24 have a disability that required them to seek daily assistance with communication, mobility and/or self-care.

Filipino, Somali and Tagalog most common languages (other than English) spoken at home for young people 12 to 24 years old in Northern Grampians Shire. (Census 2021)

Disengagement

The number of Northern Grampians young people who are not in any paid work or enrolled in any education is almost double the Victorian average for 15-19 year-olds (Census 2021).

To be considered ‘fully engaged’ a young person must be studying or working full-time, or both studying part-time and working part-time. A ‘partially-engaged’ young person either works or studies part-time.

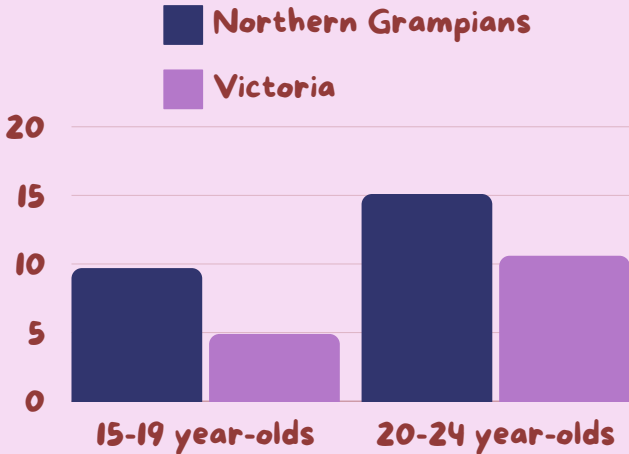


Table 1: Percentage of 15-24 year-olds that are disengaged from work and education.

The Resilience Project

From 2018 to 2021 Northern Grampians Shire Council and both primary and secondary schools in the municipality enlisted the support *The Resilience Project* to provide a program to help build mental health resilience among students, staff and the wider school communities. The project focused on gratitude, empathy, mindfulness and emotional literacy as key elements to build resilience, to give participants the tools they need to grow a strong foundation for good mental health. As part of the program, students from years three to 12 completed the Resilient Youth Australia Survey that reported on three key areas: connected (to themselves and others), protected (to protect themselves and be protected by others) and respected (to respect themselves and be respected by others). Important data from the 2021 survey showed:

Students in Years 7-12:

63%
of young people have an adult in their life they can talk to.

35%
of young people can talk about things that upset them.

50%
of young people get at least 8 hours of sleep most nights

Students in Years 3-12:

27%
of children and young people were very hopeful about their future.

63%
of children and young people had little to no hope or only some hope about their future.

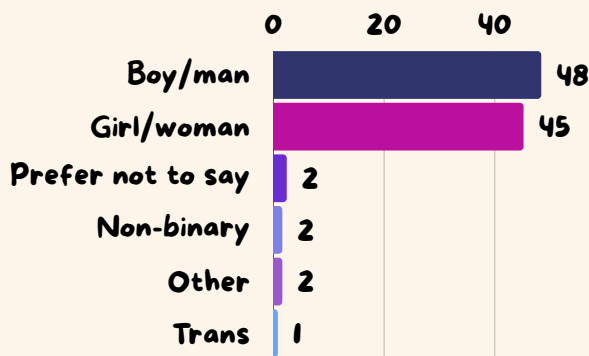
This last statistic, which demonstrated that on average only just over one quarter of the young people surveyed (822 students) were very hopeful about their future, is alarming. It is important to note however, that when the most recent survey was conducted, young people were being confronted with one of the most challenging events in their lifetime – the coronavirus pandemic. It is also encouraging to note that hope can be cultivated, and ongoing support of young people from our communities plays a vital role improving the outlook that they have for their future.

How did we engage?

Youth Strategy Survey

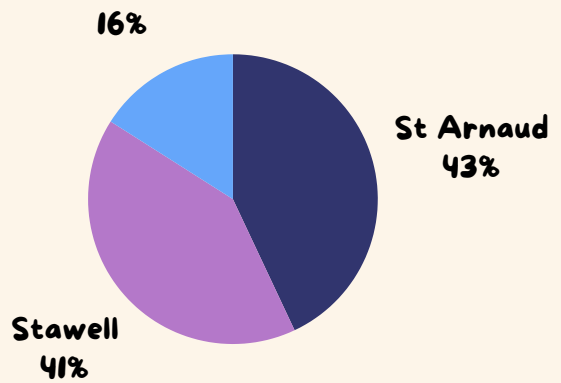
In August 2023 we conducted a survey to find out more about young people aged 12 to 24 who live, work, study or play in Northern Grampians Shire. We were very pleased to have 250 young people connected to Northern Grampians Shire complete the survey, with the majority from the 13 to 16 years age range. The demographics and findings of the survey are detailed below.

Gender (%):



Location (%):

Other towns/localities



Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander:



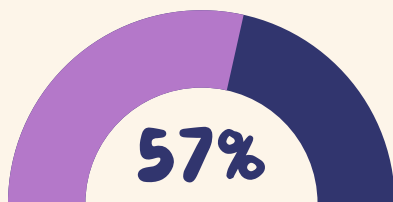
Identify as LGBTQIA:



Person with a disability:



Percentage of young people who believe they can pursue their passions in Northern Grampians Shire:



Top reasons why young people like living, working, studying and/or playing in Northern Grampians Shire:

I have friends/family here



I enjoy the natural environment



Biggest worries for the 18-24 age group:

Boredom/nothing to do

77%

Mental health problems

54%

Social isolation

54%

Favourite activities to do in Northern Grampians Shire (top five):

Gaming



32%

Football



29%

Gym



28%

Movies/films



26%

Basketball



25%



Local parks are a favourite space for young people to come together in Northern Grampians Shire.

Favourite place/space in Northern Grampians for socialising and recreation:

Sport parks and facilities

33%

Local parks and lakes

26%

(e.g. Lord Nelson Park, Cato Park, North Park, Central Park, swimming pools)

Top ideas to improve Northern Grampians Shire for young people:

- Improve local environment/open spaces
- Youth events
- Youth spaces
- Youth-focused mentoring/guidance
- Whole of community events

Events and activities young people would like to see more of in Northern Grampians Shire:

Movie nights, live music, sporting clinics/events



Workshops with students at St Arnaud and Stawell Secondary Colleges

In September and October 2023, we facilitated workshops with student leadership groups (a total of 33 students) from years seven through to 12 to take a closer look into the emerging priorities from the youth survey and co-design solutions to tackle these issues.

The top four priorities across both schools were:

- Mental wellbeing
- Discrimination/bullying
- Boredom/nothing to do
- Rural isolation/transport access

Co-designed solutions from young people included:

Mental wellbeing

- Youth-targeted promotion of local mental health support services that are available
- Reduce wait times for mental health support by increasing services available
- Creation of safe spaces and opportunities for emotional expression (youth boxing classes, emotional journalling initiative)
- Face-to-face presentations and talks about mental wellbeing
- Creation of mental health support groups for young people and parents supporting young people

Discrimination/bullying

- Increase awareness of the impact of discrimination and promote pro-social behaviours (e.g. what is a good friend)
- Local campaign to bring more awareness to discrimination in Northern Grampians Shire
- A 'Where to go?' campaign for both victims and perpetrators of bullying or discrimination
- LGBTQIA+ support groups

Boredom / nothing to do

- Targeted activities for youth at community events/shows and single day activities (e.g. go-kart racing)
- Creation of a youth space with arcade, food
- Improve promotion of local events and clubs/groups available to young people
- Enhance open spaces for outdoor activities (basketball court in central location, mountain bike tracks in local bush/forest areas, more recreational fishing opportunities)
- Increase creative opportunities for YP through groups
- Improved access to events/activities through transport provision
- Creation of youth group with regular guest speakers

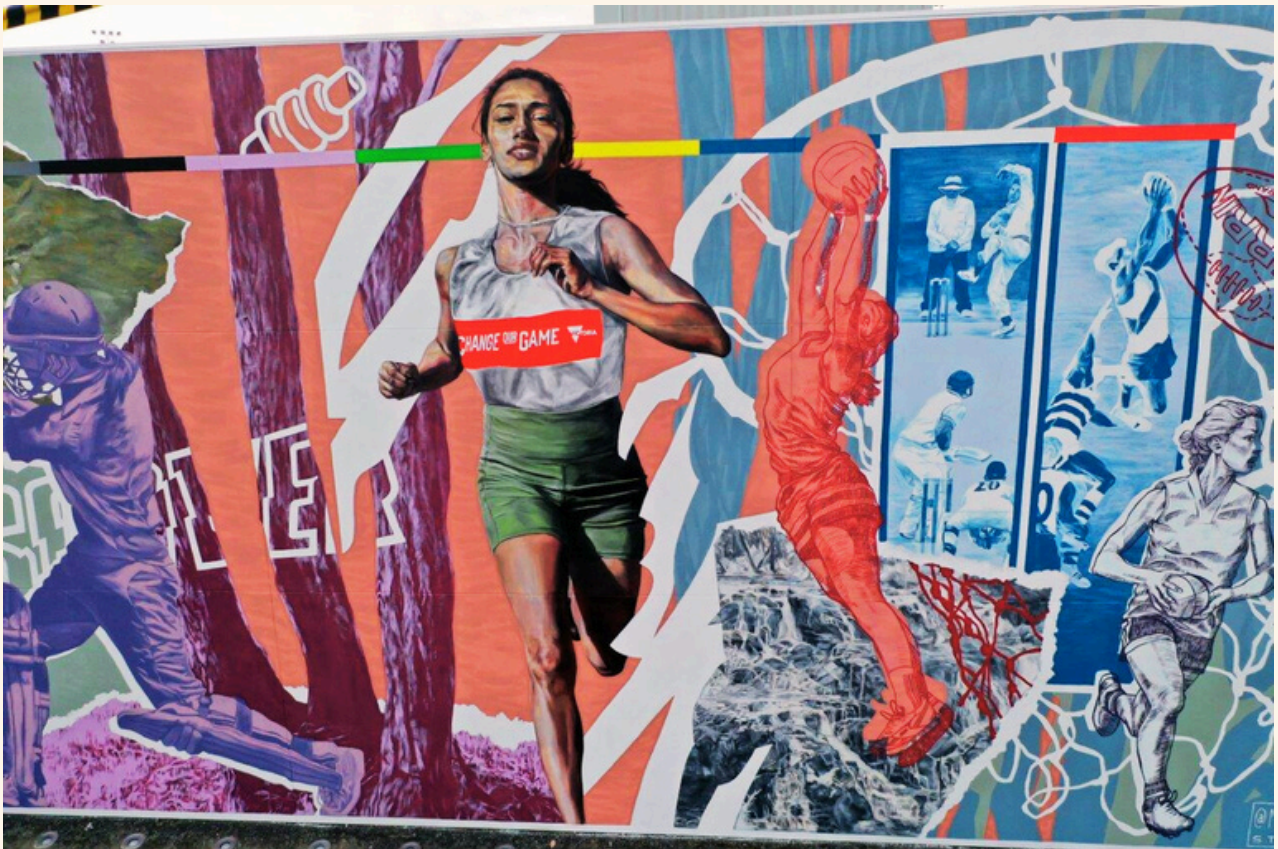
Rural isolation / transport access

- Return of the train service to/from Stawell
- Increase the number of bus services through Stawell and St Arnaud
- Better promotion of public transport availability in NGS and process for purchasing tickets
- Improve safety for e-scooter use with dedicated pathways

Review of draft strategy with young people and our community

In July 2024 we returned to young people and the wider Northern Grampians Shire community to present and review the draft Youth Strategy 2024-2028. This included:

- Targeted engagement with secondary students at Stawell Secondary College and St Arnaud Secondary College
- Pop-up community engagement sessions at St Arnaud Library and Stawell Town Hall
- Presentation of strategy draft on Council's 'Have your say' webpage
- Reference group review of the strategy draft



Central Park (Stawell) mural that young people in Northern Grampians Shire contributed to in 2023.

Strategy Action Plan

The next seven pages map out the key actions for NGSC’s (Northern Grampians Shire Council) Youth Strategy for the next five years. They are categorised by key themes and the objectives we aim to achieve throughout 2024 to 2028. Implementation of actions under the strategy are inclusive of all young people who live, work, study or play in Northern Grampians Shire.

Council’s role:

- Advocate - NGSC will publicly recommend or support the action described
- Investigate - NGSC will research opportunities for resourcing of the action described
- Partner - NGSC will work with other key stakeholders to deliver the action
- Deliver - NGSC will deliver the action

Theme 1: Young people are connected and have a voice

Being connected to community can take place in various ways. It might be when a person feels like they belong, are included and are valued for who they are. It can also be connecting with sporting, recreational and volunteering opportunities that a person enjoys.

In a municipality that is youth-friendly, young people are active agents where their voices are heard, valued and influence decision making processes. Young people are experts in their own lives and care about the communities they are connected to. They also bring enthusiasm and new ideas for the future of our shire. It is also vital that young people are recognised as a diverse group including different genders and sexualities, First Nations people, those living with a disability, culturally and linguistically diverse or newly arrived people, young parents, students, workers and those living in isolated areas.

Objective 1: Increase community connection

Action	Council’s role	Budget (recurrent / grants)	Proposed Teams / Stakeholders
Seek partnerships to deliver or support intergenerational programs	Partner	Grants	Strategic Planning and Prosperity, schools, Aged Care providers, Neighbourhood Houses

Objective 1: Increase community connection (continued from previous page)

Action	Council's role	Budget (recurrent / grants)	Proposed Teams / Stakeholders
Build capacity of Council to better engage and work alongside young people to strengthen their inclusion and connection to community and civic life	Deliver	Grants / Recurrent	Strategic Planning and Prosperity
Support place-based connection and inclusion opportunities for young people who are living with a disability, those identifying as LGBTQIA+, First Nations young people and those from culturally diverse backgrounds	Advocate, Partner	Grants / Recurrent	Strategic Planning and Prosperity



Participants involved in an intergenerational project in Northern Grampians Shire.

Objective 2: Elevate youth voice

Action	Council's role	Budget (recurrent / grants)	Proposed Teams / Stakeholders
<p>Investigate the resourcing of a Youth Officer role within council to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase targeted youth engagement across IAP2 spectrum • Develop partnerships to strengthen the youth service sector and identify and address gaps (e.g. creation of youth action group or network in NGS) • Explore opportunities to create a youth advisory group/council • Explore opportunity for a social media channel to connect with children, young people and families across NGS • Promote positive perceptions of young people, including good news stories, about young people connected to NGS 	Investigate	Grants	Strategic Planning and Prosperity

Objective 3: Reduce rural isolation

Action	Council's role	Budget (recurrent / grants)	Proposed Teams / Stakeholders
<p>Increase number and/or change times of public transport services throughout NGS to better meet the needs of young people</p>	Advocate	Grants / Recurrent	Strategic Planning and Prosperity

Objective 3: Reduce rural isolation (continued from previous page)

Action	Council's role	Budget (recurrent / grants)	Proposed Teams / Stakeholders
<p>Improve access to key information (timetables, ticketing) for Public Transport in NGS for young people</p>	<p>Advocate, Partner</p>	<p>Grants / Recurrent</p>	<p>Strategic Planning and Prosperity, Schools</p>
<p>Improve safety for active transport users (cycling, e-scooter use) within townships (Open Space and Active Transport Strategy)</p>	<p>Deliver</p>	<p>Recurrent</p>	<p>Strategic Planning and Prosperity, Communities</p>

Theme 2: Young people are safe and well

Feelings of safety can be impacted by the physical spaces we interact with, for example feeling unsafe in areas that are isolated or not well lit, or feeling safe in spaces that promote inclusivity. Safety also relates to our interactions with other people in person and online, including both those we know (friends, family and colleagues) and those we don't (strangers).

Being well encompasses both physical and mental health and is influenced by a range of determinants including the social and economic environment, the physical environment, and a person's individual characteristics and behaviours (WHO, 2017). This can include factors such as eating healthy food, having access to health care (including preventative health measures), being physically active, and socially connected to others, and the environment we live in.

Objective 1: Increase safety

Action	Council's role	Budget (recurrent / grants)	Proposed Teams / Stakeholders
Identify and activate youth-friendly public spaces that are safe and inclusive in our NGS towns, including places to meet friends, eat, be active, hold youth events (e.g. pools, libraries, open spaces)	Partner	Grants / Recurrent	Strategic Planning and Prosperity, Communities, Infrastructure, sporting and community groups
Implement Child Safe Standards across all NGSC services, policies and frameworks	Deliver	Recurrent	Strategic Planning and Prosperity, People and Culture
Improve safety at Stawell and St Arnaud skate park	Advocate, Partner, Deliver	Grants / Recurrent	Strategic Planning and Prosperity, Communities, Infrastructure
Improve access to information, resources and support for issues related to Family Violence in NGS	Partner, Deliver	Grants / Recurrent	Strategic Planning and Prosperity, People and Culture

Objective 1: Increase safety (continued from previous page)

Action	Council's role	Budget (recurrent / grants)	Proposed Teams / Stakeholders
Engage young people and their families in bullying prevention and awareness, and social media education and initiatives	Advocate, Partner	Grants / Recurrent	Strategic Planning and Prosperity, Communities, Schools

Objective 2: Improve mental and physical health

Action	Council's role	Budget (recurrent / grants)	Proposed Teams / Stakeholders
Explore the delivery of preventative programs that promote resilience and positive mental health (e.g. Live4Life)	Partner	Grants	Strategic Planning and Prosperity, Schools
Conduct self-assessment of council action on social determinants of mental wellbeing (VLGP action)	Deliver	Grants	Strategic Planning and Prosperity
Support drug and alcohol-free events that contribute to positive health and wellbeing of young people (including via council grants)	Partner	Grants	Strategic Planning and Prosperity
Explore opportunity to create and maintain a youth services directory	Partner	Grants / Recurrent	Strategic Planning and Prosperity

Objective 2: Improve mental and physical health (continued from previous page)

Action	Council's role	Budget (recurrent / grants)	Proposed Teams / Stakeholders
Promote access to a range of physical activity opportunities for good physical health (e.g. youth programming at SSAC, outdoor exercise equipment and Market Square basketball court, St Arnaud)	Deliver	Grants / Recurrent	Strategic Planning and Prosperity, Communities
Promote access to a range of healthy eating options at council run facilities and local events	Advocate, Partner, Deliver	Grants / Recurrent	Communities, Strategic Planning and Prosperity, Local Health Promotion Officers
Increase access to preventative sexual health resources (including condom vending machines)	Advocate, Partner	Grants / Recurrent	Strategic Planning and Prosperity, Communities, Women's Health Grampians, Grampians Community Health
Explore opportunities for collaboration with local health services to reduce e-cigarette and tobacco-related harm among young people	Partner	Grants	Strategic Planning and Prosperity

Young people achieve in education, training and employment

To achieve their goals young people need access to quality education and training opportunities. It is therefore important that we play a role in creating spaces within our community that support the various learning pathways utilised by our young people, both locally and online. Diverse experiences and opportunities for life skill development are also imperative, to enhance independence and promote suitable work opportunities and positive employment outcomes.

Objective 1: Increase education and training opportunities

Action	Council's role	Budget (recurrent / grants)	Proposed Teams / Stakeholders
Deliver youth leadership opportunities (gender equity VLGP action)	Partner, Deliver	Grants	Strategic Planning and Prosperity
Deliver life-skill development programs (e.g. financial literacy, cooking and automotive skills)	Partner	Grants	Strategic Planning and Prosperity
Identify needs and opportunities to support young people to study (online or locally), via inclusive and accessible spaces (e.g. libraries)	Deliver	Recurrent	Strategic Planning and Prosperity, Communities

Objective 2: Increase employment opportunities

Action	Council's role	Budget (recurrent / grants)	Proposed Teams / Stakeholders
Explore opportunities to increase access to employment programs such as graduate/apprenticeship/traineeship roles, and work experience placements at NGSC	Deliver	Recurrent	People and Culture
Consider paid pathway opportunities for young people in the delivery of events, projects, and workshops	Partner, Deliver	Grants	Strategic Planning and Prosperity



Capturing farming footage for an intergenerational digital storytelling project in Northern Grampians Shire.

Glossary, terms and references

Acronyms

LGBTQIA+ - The LGBTQIA+ acronym stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual and/or Aromantic, with the '+' representing other identities that don't quite fit other labels, or identities that we don't quite have the language to describe yet. (Minus 18, 2024)

NGS - Northern Grampians Shire

NGSC - Northern Grampians Shire Council

SSAC - Stawell Sports and Aquatic Centre

VLGP - VicHealth Local Government Partnership

Glossary

IAP2 spectrum - IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum is designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any community engagement program. The Spectrum sets out the promise being made to the public at each participation level. The Spectrum is widely used and is quoted in most community engagement manuals.

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