# Integrated Children, Youth and Family Strategy 2027 - 2031

## Community Engagement Report

Greater Dandenong

# Executive Summary

The development of the draft Integrated Children, Youth and Family Strategy 2027–2031 (the *Strategy*) has been informed by a comprehensive, evidence-based planning process. This included the preparation of a background report that brought together local demographic and community data, community insights, relevant legislation, policy frameworks and Council commitments. This is detailed in the *Integrated Children, Youth and Family Strategy Background Report: Planning for Communities* (May 2026).

Council undertook a comprehensive community engagement program between January and May 2026 to validate and refine priorities, identify emerging issues and ensure the Strategy reflects the lived experiences, needs and aspirations of the Greater Dandenong community.

A total of 1,227 participants contributed to the consultation, including 174 children, 598 young people, 335 parents, carers and community members, 96 service representatives (including six members of the RAP Aboriginal Advisory Committee) and 24 Council staff.

Engagement methods included surveys, focus groups, interviews, community events, information sessions, telephone consultations and yarning conversations. Targeted approaches were used to increase participation from culturally diverse communities, First Nations people, vulnerable families and other priority groups.

Across all stakeholder groups, consistent themes emerged, including the importance of

- Supporting mental health and wellbeing
- Strengthening community safety
- Addressing cost-of-living pressures
- Improving access to services
- Creating opportunities for social connection and belonging

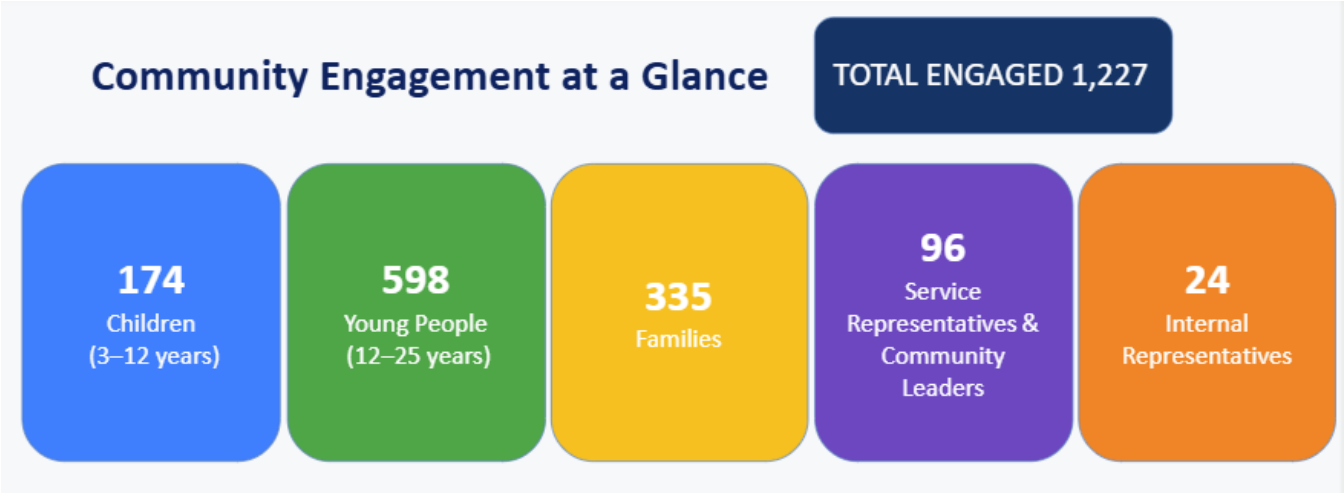
Children highlighted the importance of play, recreation, safety, learning opportunities and caring for the environment. Young people emphasised the need to be genuinely heard and involved in decision-making. Families identified a need for greater support to navigate services and access affordable programs and activities. Service providers highlighted growing complexity of need, the importance of collaboration and the value of early intervention, while First Nations participants emphasised culturally safe services, community-led solutions, cultural identity and strong partnerships.

The consultation findings provide a robust evidence base for the Strategy and reinforce the importance of a coordinated approach to supporting children, young people and families. The insights gained will guide Council's planning, service delivery, advocacy and partnership activities over the next five years, ensuring community priorities remain at the centre of decision-making.

# Summary of Community Engagement

This report provides an overview of the consultation process and outlines the methods used to engage a broad range of stakeholders and key target groups.

*A spreadsheet containing all raw data and individual responses is available on request.




# Consultation approach

## Children (aged 3 – 12 years)

**Total children: 174**

Children's Services engaged directly with 174 children aged 3–12 years to understand what matters most to them and ensure their voices inform future planning and decision-making. To support meaningful participation, a range of age-appropriate consultation methods were used, including, surveys (online and paper-based), and conversations at community events.

These approaches enabled children to share their views, ideas and experiences in ways that felt comfortable and accessible. Creative activities, particularly drawing, supported younger children to express their thoughts, while older children participated through surveys and discussions.

Feedback was primarily collected between February and May 2026 through community events and engagement activities, including the Keysborough Big Picnic, Discover Dandenong Creek, and the Sustainability Festival.

## Young people (aged 12 – 25 years)

**Total young people: 598**

530 young people participated in a short survey, through assertive engagement young people shared their perspectives on health and wellbeing, belonging, education and employment, and youth voice. Surveys were completed across a range of settings, including school holiday programs, sporting tournaments, library pop-ups, Council events and festivals, Youth Services programs, and through local schools and community partners.

Engagement was led by youth workers who held one-to-one conversations with young people to explain the process and encourage participation. Respondent age and postcode data were regularly reviewed, with targeted engagement undertaken to address gaps and ensure a broad cross-section of young people was represented.

A further 68 young people participated in focus groups across Youth Services programs. These discussions provided the opportunity to take a deeper dive into key issues and enabled participants to reflect and expand on themes emerging from the survey findings.

## Families

**Total individuals: 335**

A total of 335 adults, including parents, carers, community members, Elders and service providers, participated in the consultation. A range of engagement methods, including interpreter services and consultation in community-based settings, helped ensure diverse perspectives were captured and contributed to a robust evidence base for planning and decision-making for children and families across the municipality.

Of these participants, 21 vulnerable families were engaged through individual interviews conducted by Council's Family Support case workers. Families were selected from existing caseloads and participated in semi-structured interviews exploring their key concerns, needs and experiences.

## Service Representatives

**Total individuals: 96 (including First Nations)**

Youth sector professionals were consulted through an in-person Greater Dandenong Youth Network meeting. Participants were asked to identify emerging trends and challenges affecting young people, explore future partnership and innovation opportunities, and nominate the highest priority issues facing local youth.

Children's Services consulted service providers from the Greater Dandenong Best Start Child & Family Partnership Group to gather professional perspectives on the needs and priorities of children and families.

These consultations drew on the expertise of organisations working directly with children, families and communities, providing valuable insights into community strengths, emerging needs and service delivery challenges, as well as inform future planning, partnerships and service improvement initiatives.

## First Nations Community Consultation

**Total individuals: 6 - RAP Advisory Committee members**

Culturally appropriate engagement was undertaken to gather the perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families. This included a yarning session with Council's Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) Advisory Committee and drew on insights from previous consultations with the Dandenong & District Aboriginal Co-operative (DDACL) Koori Maternity Services Mums and Bubup Group and the Eyes on Boorais Committee. An additional yarning session with community leaders further explored emerging themes through a cultural lens.

The consultation provided both lived experience insights and strategic guidance, ensuring Aboriginal voices informed Council's planning and future priorities. Key themes highlighted the importance of community-led approaches, culturally safe services and strong partnerships to support positive outcomes for Aboriginal children, young people and families.

## Internal Stakeholders

**Total individuals: 24**

24 Council staff from across the organisation were engaged in a focus group session, where attendees explored existing and potential future collaborations with Children's Services, Youth Services and Family Support that could be captured in the Strategy.