



Family and Children's Strategy **(incorporating the Municipal Early Years Plan)** **2020-2024**

Investing in our future through children, families and partnerships

Mayor's Message

CHILDHOOD IS AN IMPORTANT TIME IN THE LIFELONG DEVELOPMENT OF A PERSON.

It can be a wonderful time for parents, children and families. It is also a time when families and children need support, guidance and connections to community as babies grow into children, then adolescents.

National and international research now clearly links outcomes in adulthood to the support and opportunities provided in early childhood. Services that local government offer play an important role in that support and guidance.

Kingston City Council plays a substantial role in providing support to families and children through the provision of services and activities, such as maternal and child health services, child care and education, playgroups, community centres, libraries, parenting programs and support groups. Council is committed to working in partnership with service providers and the community so that all children in the Kingston community have the best chance of enjoying a healthy, happy childhood.

The Kingston City Council has a vision for families and children where:

- children have the best possible start in life;
- children's rights and views are reflected in policies, laws, programs and resource allocation;
- strong partnerships create an environment that will maximise the development of children and their families; and
- the City of Kingston is developed in a manner that takes account of the needs and aspirations of children and their families.

Through the implementation of the *Family and Children's Strategy 2020-2024*, Kingston City Council supports children as active and valued citizens, whose voices and opinions will be taken into consideration in decision making processes.

The *Family and Children's Strategy 2020-2024* supports the delivery of the Council Plan and the strategic objective to promote family and community wellbeing and participation in community life.

Cr Georgina Oxley
Mayor, City of Kingston



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1. Introduction

WELCOME TO OUR LATEST FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S STRATEGY (F&CS) INCORPORATING THE MUNICIPAL EARLY YEARS PLAN FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES WITHIN OUR MUNICIPALITY. THIS PLAN SUPPORTS THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 0-12 YEARS. A F&CS IS A LOCAL PLAN FOR THE DEVELOPMENT AND COORDINATION OF EDUCATION AND CARE, HEALTH SERVICES, ACTIVITIES AND OTHER LOCAL DEVELOPMENTS FOR CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES.

This F&CS will operate for the next four years and a new Action Plan will be developed and reviewed annually to strengthen our capacity to respond to emerging trends and changes to State and Commonwealth policy direction. As well as guiding our work this plan will be shared with other organisations delivering services to children and their families within our municipality.

The Kingston City Council (Council) has a strong and proud history in the provision of Family and Children's Services and working together with the community to ensure the provision of quality services and environments for children to play, learn and grow in. In recent years Council has increasingly focussed on partnering with children, families, community, service providers and other levels of government in the planning and provision of high quality services to resident families, to ensure that children receive the best possible start in life.

Council's role in the early years largely focuses around five main areas:

1. **Planning and coordination** – acting as a key coordination point and community planner in early years
2. **Service provision** – delivering a range of early years programs, activities and initiatives
3. **Facility planning** – planning, providing and maintaining a range of early years infrastructure
4. **Advocacy** – lobbying and advocating to State and Commonwealth Governments and other key stakeholders on behalf of early years programs, children and their families
5. **Strengthening community capacity** – facilitating community connections and community participation in decision-making, including vulnerable families.



Council has strong connections with the broader service system and families and has a unique role in improving outcomes for children and families through its commitment and understanding of our diverse community. Council's investment includes understanding our community through data collection and research, implementation of effective projects and policies, direct service provision and management, advocacy, client support services, program funding and facilitation.

1.1. Direct Planning and Infrastructure

Council is responsible for the planning and development of new infrastructure which includes the building of new integrated centres. Council has invested over \$20 million into quality early childhood education and care services (ECEC) and service delivery across Kingston, including the development of Council operated Family and Children's Centres in Parkdale, Edithvale and Carrum. These centres deliver state-of-the-art education and care environments that include intimate indoor and outdoor spaces designed to inspire a love of learning.

Other infrastructure that support children and families include outdoor play spaces, support to community kindergartens, School Crossing Supervisors, toy library and playgroup facilities, libraries and bike paths. Council's role in the delivery of community kindergartens is the provision and maintenance of facilities, the administration of the central registration scheme and broad operational support predominately through information, networking and workshops.

1.2. Direct Delivery of Services

Council operates services located in our own purpose built premises and supports other providers within other community and service owned facilities.

These services include:

Maternal and Child Health and Immunisation Service

Our Maternal and Child Health and Immunisation (MCHI) Service currently undertakes approximately 22,000 consultations annually where child health and development assessments are conducted by Maternal and Child Health Nurses who are registered nurses with Midwifery and Maternal and Child Health qualifications.

We also provide families with information, guidance and support on a range of topics including child health and development, maternal and family health, parenting, home and car safety, child accident and injury prevention, immunisation, nutrition, family planning and local support services. We also operate New Parent and Fathers groups that have been specifically implemented in response to identified gaps within the local service system.



Enhanced Maternal and Child Health Service

Our Enhanced Maternal and Child Health (EMCH) program provides an outreach service, led and delivered by MCH nurses. It is focused on achieving improved outcomes for infants, children, mothers and their families who are experiencing a period of increased need, and who could benefit from targeted actions and interventions.

In July 2018, the EMCH program was expanded to support children up to their third birthday with a stronger focus on:

- infant mental health and wellbeing;
- identification of, and support for, families affected by family violence;
- a clearer role for the EMCH program in the context of facilitating system-wide supports; and
- engagement for families from pregnancy and throughout the early years of life.

The high levels of support required often exceeds current state government funding, resulting in the Council providing additional funding to support these families.

Breastfeeding Support Service

This is a program run by a Maternal and Child Health Nurse who is an internationally certified Lactation Consultant. Concerns about feeding can be discussed and observed with assistance given as necessary, to suit individual family needs. The service has a relaxed, flexible approach with follow up and review by telephone or a return visit, if required. The City of Kingston breastfeeding support service is part of the Maternal and Child Health service providing information and assistance for families with breastfeeding concerns.

There is an average of 800 consultations per year provided through the Breastfeeding Service. To support the breastfeeding rates within the municipality, Council provides a drop in service and an early intervention support model.

Supported Playgroups

Supported playgroups are a targeted service that aims to improve the learning, development, and wellbeing outcomes of children from birth until they start primary school.

Improvements in child outcomes are achieved by supporting quality parent-child interactions whilst also providing opportunities for parents to learn about local services, to meet with other parents for support and friendship and to build social support networks in the communities in which they live.

Community playgroups are also provided by volunteer parents for parents and are held at many different venues including community halls, preschools, churches, homes or anywhere people meet.



Centre Based Early Childhood Education and Care

Centre based long day care is the provision of an education and care program to children aged six weeks to five years. The education and care program is operated within specific centres by qualified staff, typically between the hours of 7am and 6pm. The provision of education and care is regulated by the Commonwealth Government, through the Education and Care Services National Regulations with a fee subsidy (claimable by parents) also provided by the Commonwealth Government. This type of education and care is the most common provision used by families for children and most recognisable by the community.

Centre based education and care plays a crucial role and is a central mechanism that enables families to organise and structure family life and meet work, study or training commitments. In meeting the diverse needs of Kingston families Council plays a significant role in the delivery of education and care services. Council has a key leadership role in supporting the ongoing viability of a diversity of child care services

and in ensuring social justice and equity of access. The 'mixed market' environment of centre based education and care in the City of Kingston is divided between private, community based and Council operated services.

Kindergarten

Kindergarten programs can be provided within a building that also provides programs to younger children (for example a long day care centre) or from a separate building. Some kindergarten programs provide both three and four-year-old programs; three-year-old programs are not currently funded and are delivered on a full fee-paying basis. Partial funding of three-year-old kindergarten will commence in 2022. The Council owns most of the kindergarten facilities in the municipality, and parent committees and early years managers operate the kindergarten programs, including being the licensee (approved provider) and employing kindergarten staff.

Family Day Care

Family Day Care is an approved, licensed care and education service that is provided in the homes of

registered and professional Early Childhood Educators. All Educators are overseen by the Council's highly qualified Early Years staff. Kingston Family Day Care currently provides care and education for more than 500 children across the City of Kingston. Educators registered with Council's Family Day Care service provide care and education in their own homes for other people's children.

Council's Family Day Care Coordination Unit supports Educators with training, resources and regular home visits and ensures that the educator and their home meet government standards and safety requirements. The coordination unit also helps parents select a suitable educator and are there to monitor children's wellbeing, progress and learning while in Family Day Care. The coordination unit works in close partnership with educators to ensure they uphold organisational values and meet requirements set by legislation, and the National Quality Framework. The Coordination unit also manage distribution of Child Care Subsidy (CCS).



Family Support

Our Family Support team provides a free and confidential service committed to providing support, information and referrals to families with children up to the age of 18. Family Support Service staff work with families to achieve specific goals as identified by families. We recognise that from time to time everyone has difficulties and may need additional support. Sometimes, these difficulties can be addressed within the family. Sometimes, you can turn to extended family, friends or colleagues for help. There may be times when you may benefit from talking with someone who is outside of the situation, and who can provide some professional assistance.

Service may include: Parenting; supporting family relationships; routine management in the home; referrals; budgeting; promotion of self-esteem & confidence; social skills development and support.

Service Delivery:

Parenting Support Groups – Provides the opportunity to socialise with other parents and carers in the local area, meet with family services staff and participate in regular informative and recreational activities.

Positive Parenting Service – Sessions are run throughout the year with a focus on promoting child development and supporting parents/carers to increase their knowledge and understanding around parenting issues.

Information and referral – Family support workers are able to assist in providing information and/or referrals that may be required by families.

Case Management – Family support services are available to families with children aged 0-18 years, dependant on place of residence.



Outside School Hours and Holiday Programs

Council offers fun and exciting Before and After School Programs for primary school age children between the ages of four and 13 years at various locations across the municipality. Our programs run every day of the school year through the school term (excluding public holidays) in a supervised, relaxed, safe and fun environment.

Our programs provide fun activities and games and social opportunities that children will love. Parents who work, study or have other commitments can relax knowing their children are having fun and are supervised by caring and trained staff. Holiday Programs are provided to primary school aged children during the school holidays and term breaks.

As with centre-based childcare and education, outside school hours programs are delivered by a range of providers, some of which are delivered by schools and a range of private providers. Council provides four before school care programs and five after school care programs and holiday program operates two venues across the city during school holidays.



2. Links with other Council Plans

ALL LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES ACROSS VICTORIA HAVE CLEARLY DEFINED ROLES WITHIN THE ASSESSING OF THE OVERALL PROVISION AND PLANNING OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES.

The Local Government Act Victoria (1989) describes Council’s role as;

- Facilitating the involvement of community members and council staff in the development, improvement and coordination of Local Government.
- Coordination of other public bodies to ensure that services and facilities are provided, and resources used effectively.
- Providing adequate planning for the future of it’s community, and
- Representing and promoting the interests of the community by being responsive to the community needs.

In line with these requirements Council has established several strategies and plans. The F&CS works within Council’s overarching planning framework and links to the following Council Plans:

- *Council Plan 2017-2021*
- *Safe and Secure Action Plan 2018-2021*
- *Health & Wellbeing Action Plan 2018-2021*
- *Disability Action Plan 2015-2019*
- *Aboriginal Policy and Action Plan 2014-2019*
- *Multicultural Action Plan 2018-2021*
- *Prevention of Family Violence Action Plan 2019-2021*
- *Kingston Active Youth Spaces Strategy*
- *Kingston Planning Scheme*



3. Background

3.1. Research Evidence about the Importance of Investing in the Early Years

Research findings from the past decade unequivocally agree that the first years of life are a critical period of intense learning for children; these years provide the foundation for later academic and social success. Although early experiences do not determine children's ongoing development, the patterns laid down early tend to be persistent, and some experiences have lifelong consequences. The value of investing to ensure that all children get the best start in life is increasingly evident to governments around the world. Key to this focus has been the acknowledgement that investment in the early years, in both time and money, has been shown to be far more cost-effective than investments made at any other time. (AIHW 2011a, 2011b, 2012; Heckman & Masterov 2004; Keatsdale 2003; Moore 2006; Productivity Commission 2015; Silburn et al. 2011).

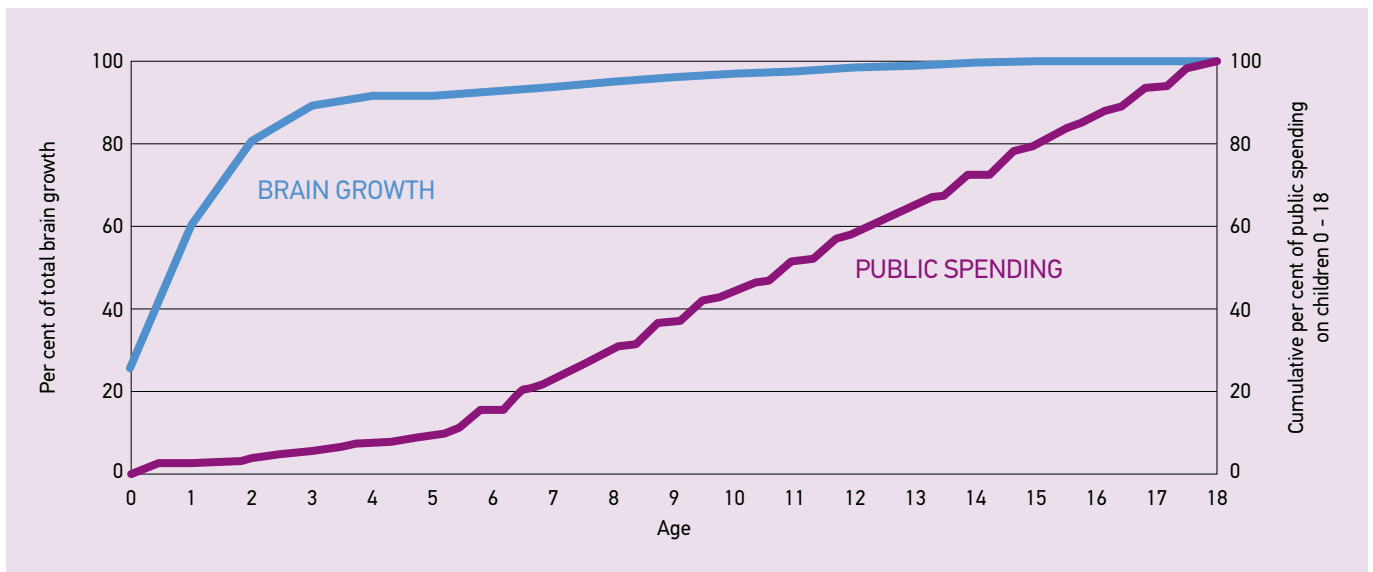
In Australia, the need to invest in early childhood was formally recognised in 2009 by the Council of Australian Governments with its endorsement of *Investing in the Early Years – A*

National Early Childhood Development Strategy (COAG 2009). This strategy articulated a vision that, by 2020, 'all children have the best start in life to create a better future for themselves and for the nation'. This initiative is supported by a large body of research demonstrating that investing to support and strengthen all aspects of early childhood development brings long-term benefits to children over the course of their lives and to the whole community. It placed a high priority on developing an ECEC system that best meets the needs of key stakeholders, including children, parents, communities and employers. All Australian governments have committed in recent years, under a series of national partnership agreements and reform initiatives, to increase children's participation in high-quality ECEC in the year prior to full-time schooling, with a specific focus on increasing participation of Indigenous and disadvantaged children. As a result, there have been a range of early childhood program and policy changes in Australia. Specifically targeted areas include universal access to high quality ECEC, the implementation of quality standards for education and care and its workforce, paid parental leave and

broader availability of family support and early intervention services. (Literature review of the impact of early years education and care on learning and development 2015).

The key rationales for government assistance to ECEC rely on the existence of community wide benefits. Various studies (Bennett 2008; CCCH 2000; Hewitt & Walter 2014; Melhuish 2004; OECD 2006; PwC 2011, 2014; Zubrick et al. 2008) suggest these benefits stem from:

- the contribution to enhanced, healthy child development;
- increased workforce participation of parents, with the potential to boost economic output and tax revenue, reduce long-term unemployment and reliance on welfare support, and promote social engagement;
- equity of access to developmental opportunities during early childhood, which helps overcome disadvantage and its longer-term social consequences;
- better transitioning of children into the formal education system; and
- reduced risk of harm to vulnerable children in the community.



The growing consensus on the positive value of investment in the early years follows substantial economic studies of cost and benefits on a number of high quality programs. High quality early childhood programs that have been rigorously evaluated for their preventive effects and their long-term benefits to individuals and society provide the strongest evidence regarding the characteristics of effective early childhood interventions.

Reflecting the significance of the early years, brain development and the

consequences of disadvantage and vulnerability; is the importance of early intervention. Research highlights long-term social, educational and economic dividends that can be delivered by investing in services for young children and their families. Investment in family support, early intervention and preventative programs represents an efficient use of public funds and significant long-term savings for communities in areas such as crime rehabilitation, housing, health and employment.

Common across the research into various developmental stages is an emphasis on resilience, supportive home environments, school and community (including friends and peers). The presence of these factors, particularly in the early and middle years, is seen as setting children up for positive future outcomes, with benefits to the wider community and governments.



Kingston
School
Holiday
Program

Join us
for
a
fun
day
of
learning
and
exploring



4. Government Policy Directions

THE F&CS AIMS TO PROVIDE STRATEGIC DIRECTION IN THE PLANNING FOR CHILDREN RESIDING IN THE CITY OF KINGSTON. IT HAS BEEN DEVELOPED BASED ON THE INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL RESEARCH THAT INDICATES THE CRITICAL ASPECT OF INVESTING IN THE EARLY YEARS OF CHILDHOOD BY GOVERNMENT.

The following are the national and state policy context that services for children and their families operate within.

National policy context

- *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020;*
- *The Council of Australian Governments;*
- *National Early Childhood Development Strategy July 2009;*
- *National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education / Achieving Universal Access to Early Childhood Education 2008;*
- *National Quality Framework 2012;*
- *Belonging, Being & Becoming: the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia;*
- *My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Age Child Care in Australia;* and
- *Education and Care Services National Law and Regulations.*

Victorian policy context

- *Charter of Human Rights*
- *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework: For all Children from Birth to Eight Years*
- *Children, Youth and Families Amendment Act 2014*
- *Child Wellbeing and Safety Amendment (Child Safe Standards) Act 2015*
- *Health and Child Wellbeing Legislation Amendment Act 2018*
- *Education and Care Services National Law and Regulations*
- *The Early Years Compact 2017-2027*
- *Department of Education and Training Strategic Plan 2018-2022*
- *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*
- *Children's Services Regulations 2020*



Other policy reforms address the issue of universal access for all children, which include children from Indigenous cultures, socially disadvantaged or vulnerable children, and children with additional needs. This principle specifies the concept of 'Universal Access' as enabling participation for all children in ECEC settings by identifying and addressing the barriers experienced by differing community groups.

Significantly, the review of the key policies that relate to young children identified a lack of policy pertaining to children aged between eight to twelve years of age. This age group is often referred to as the middle years.

The Victorian Government has been focussing on targeting services to those most vulnerable families and has released The Roadmap for Reform: strong families, safe children (2016). The focus of child protection in Victoria will shift from crisis response to prevention and early intervention. There will be increased in-home support services for vulnerable families, extra child protection workers, more culturally-sensitive support for Aboriginal children and a boost to the number of foster and kinship carers.

In 2018 the Victorian Government announced it would be investing \$5 billion over ten years so that every child in the state will have access to two years of kindergarten. This means that an extra year of play-based learning will be added to Victorian children's education. The learning is led by a qualified teacher.

Victoria will be the first state or territory in Australia to introduce a subsidised kindergarten program for all three-year-olds. A rollout schedule for this initiative will commence in 2020 (in specified rural areas) with full state-wide implementation scheduled for 2029. There is a large body of work that will be required to ensure that there is capacity within early years services and the staffing capability to meet the need.





5. Demographic and Social Data

5.1. About Kingston

Kingston has a rich Aboriginal history, and today we have a proud vibrant Aboriginal culture. The Boon Wurung people of the past connected with the land and waterways in the area. Activities and campsites dependent on the seasons have left their evidence of middens and scarred trees throughout Kingston. In good weather they camped along the foreshore while in poor weather they sought shelter in woodland or near rocks.

Further inland lived the Wurundjeri-baluk clan of the Woiworung tribe. All these people belonged to a nation of Aboriginal people known as the Kulin nation who occupied most of Western and Central Victoria. A camping reserve was set up for the Boon wurung at Mordialloc in the early 1840s and this site is now marked with the Aboriginal Flag flying beside the Mordialloc Creek.

In December 1994, the City of Kingston formed following the amalgamation of the former cities of Moorabbin, Mordialloc, Chelsea, Springvale and Oakleigh. In the intervening years,

Kingston rose to the challenge to build a vibrant and lively municipality which residents could feel proud to call home.

The City of Kingston is located in the south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne, its northern boundary lying approximately 15 km from the Melbourne city centre along the north-eastern shorelines of Port Phillip. It covers an area of 91 km² and has an estimated population of 161,129 people.

Kingston is one of the state's main employment centres, having one of the largest and most concentrated industrial sectors in Victoria. There are approximately 15,500 businesses with over 70,000 people employed throughout the City of Kingston. Community and business networks play an important role in linking and supporting local businesses. Almost 30 per cent of the community work locally and are able to enjoy shorter travel times and an improved work-life balance.

5.2. Who are we and how do we live?

Kingston is a diverse community spanning a wide range of ages, household types and cultures. Our community is constantly growing; by 2036 Kingston's population is expected to reach 186,967, making up an anticipated 77,276 dwellings.

Kingston is a culturally diverse city with residents from over 150 countries who speak over 120 languages. 31 per cent of Kingston's population was born overseas, with 22.7 per cent from non-English speaking backgrounds including Vietnamese, Indian, Sri Lankan, Greek, Italian and Chinese societies.

In terms of age structure, in 2016 there were 9,924 children aged 0-4 years living in the City of Kingston (6.2% of the population) with that number forecast to increase to 10,591 (6.1% of the population) by 2024. In 2016 there were 13,334 children aged 5-11 years living in the City of Kingston (8.4% of the population) with that number forecast to increase to 13,681 (7.9% of the population) by 2024.



In terms of household or family types, in 2016 there were 20,537 (33% of household or family types) who were couples with dependent children living in the City of Kingston, with that number forecast to increase to 21,746 (31.8% of families) by 2024. In 2016 there were 6,133 sole parent families living in the City of Kingston (9.9% of household or family types) with that number forecast to increase to 6,691 in 2024.

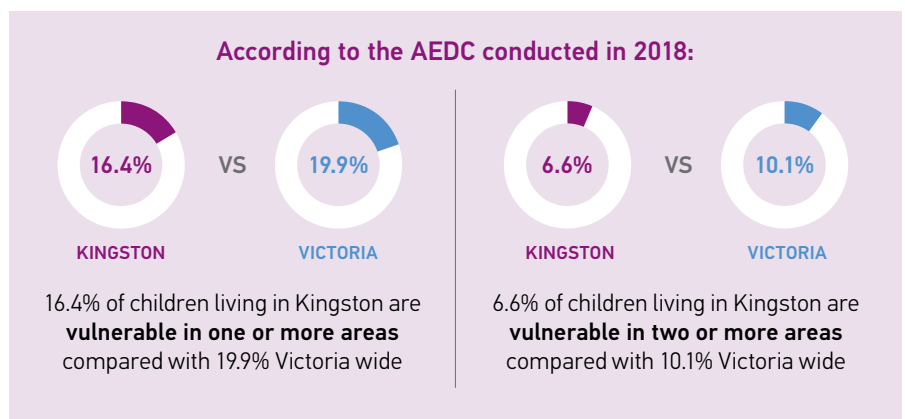
In the City of Kingston, 40.7% of the dwellings were medium or high density, compared to 33% in Greater Melbourne.

5.3. How are our children fairing?

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) is a measure of how young children are developing and is conducted every three years nationally.

Like a census, it involves collecting information to help create a snapshot of early childhood development in communities across Australia. Teachers complete a checklist for children in their first year of formal full-time school. The checklist measures five key areas of child development:

- physical health and wellbeing
- social competence
- emotional maturity
- language and cognitive skills (school-based)
- communication skills and general knowledge







6. Methodology

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE F&CS HAS BEEN LARGELY GUIDED BY EXISTING, NEW AND EMERGING STATE AND COMMONWEALTH POLICY DIRECTIONS; WE HAVE REFLECTED ON SOCIAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC DATA, PREVIOUS STRATEGIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS. WE HAVE ALSO BEEN ABLE TO DRAW UPON EXPERTISE FROM A RANGE OF INTERNAL SERVICE PROVIDERS, PREVIOUS AND ONGOING COMMUNITY CONSULTATION DATA.

This F&CS continues to place children and families at the centre of our planning, provides ongoing support to our staff and the invaluable work they do in our community, as well as positioning us for the future.

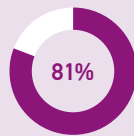


7. Key achievements from the Family and Children's strategy 2013-2017

THE F&CS 2013-2017 CONTAINED A RANGE OF ACTIONS WHERE COUNCIL DEPARTMENTS, INCLUDING PARTNERSHIPS WITH KEY COMMUNITY AND GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS, HAVE WORKED TOGETHER TO ACHIEVE A NUMBER OF KEY ACHIEVEMENTS AND HIGHLIGHTS.

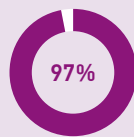
The information below provides a high-level snap shot of the key achievement highlights:

Services are more accessible



81% of all Council owned early years education and care facilities have been developed, redeveloped or upgraded

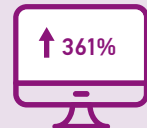
The number of supported and facilitated playgroups delivered has increased from 2 sessions to 11 per week



97% of families are offered a four-year-old sessional kindergarten place at the kindergarten of their first preference

Families are well informed

The number of families accessing information about services on Council's web site increased by 361%



Families are more active



The number of Kingston residents that visited parks, gardens and reserves every day increased from 14.3% to 18.3%




8. Action Planning


A NEW ACTION PLAN WILL BE DEVELOPED AND REVIEWED ANNUALLY TO STRENGTHEN OUR CAPACITY TO RESPOND TO EMERGING TRENDS AND CHANGES TO STATE AND COMMONWEALTH POLICY DIRECTION. AS WELL AS GUIDING OUR WORK THIS PLAN WILL BE SHARED WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS DELIVERING SERVICES TO CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES WITHIN OUR MUNICIPALITY.

Action Plan Objectives:

1. Respond to changing community needs and government policy directions;
2. Position our most vulnerable children and families at the heart of our service delivery; and
3. Continuously improve our systems, processes and staff capability.




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