



Rural City of
Wangaratta

Our strategy to
engage, elevate,
and empower
young people
in our region.

LEVEL UP YOUTH


ENGAGE, ELEVATE, EMPOWER



2026-2030

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We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands, on which the Rural City of Wangaratta communities reside.

We pay our respect to their Elders past, present and emerging, and celebrate and respect their continuing cultures. We are committed to walking beside all traditional owners as we move toward reconciliation.



FROM THE MAYOR

On behalf of the Rural City of Wangaratta, I am proud to present our Level Up Youth Strategy 2026–2030. The Level Up Youth strategy incorporates the feedback of more than 870 young people and reflects their experiences and aspirations. From mental health and employment to safe spaces and community connection, it sets a clear path to guide our efforts to create a more inclusive, vibrant, and supportive community for all young people.

I want to thank every young person who took part in the survey and contributed their ideas to help shape this strategy that will assist Council to deliver programs based on your specific needs.



Mayor Irene Grant



LEVEL UP YOUTH STRATEGY

FROM THE CO-DESIGN CREW

**Welcome to Level Up Youth
– the Youth Strategy for the
Rural City of Wangaratta.**

This strategy has been co-designed by young people, for young people. It's a framework for action and a tool for Council and community to better understand, support, and respond to the needs of youth in our region. But more than that, it's a message of hope, pride, and progress.

Level Up Youth is built on three pillars: Engage, Elevate, and Empower.

Engage is where we are now — how we connect with young people and build stronger relationships.

Elevate is about lifting youth voices and creating real, short-term impact.

Empower is our long-term commitment — to ensure young people flourish and feel part of shaping their own futures.

This isn't just a document to sit on a shelf. It's a living strategy, designed to grow and change as our needs evolve. It reflects the real experiences of young people, our concerns, our ideas, and our goals. Whether you shared feedback, filled out a survey, or joined our co-design team, you've helped make this possible. Being part of this project has been something special.

As one of our young co-designers said:

“It was so special to see such an amazing project come to light. I hope Council continues to prioritise youth and amplify our voices.”

Level Up Youth is here to make sure we all get a say in the future we are building together. Thank you for being part of the journey. Let's level up — for our youth, for our future, and for the Northeast.

The Level Up Youth Co-Design Crew



LEVEL UP YOUTH



WHAT

Level Up Youth is a whole of council strategic approach to engaging, elevating, and empowering all young people within our region.

The term Level Up comes originally from video game culture, where it means advancing to the next stage, gaining new abilities, or unlocking new opportunities. Today it's associated with growth, achievement, removing disparity and moving forward.

We are calling our Youth Strategy "Level Up Youth" because it's a call to action for council, key stakeholders and community to level up to our young people by working more collaboratively and strategically with them and for them.

This strategy is about raising the bar for how we engage with, support, and back young people in the Rural City of Wangaratta, so together we can invest in their potential, celebrating their leadership, and ensuring they have what they need to grow, belong, and thrive.

WHO

This Youth Strategy is for all young people aged 12-25 within the Rural City of Wangaratta. It is also for Council and key stakeholders who work with young people (eg. secondary schools, youth services providers, sporting clubs, community groups) in our region.



SNAP SHOT

WHY

This Youth Strategy is a commitment to all young people and a roadmap for Council and all key stakeholders in the pursuit of a shared vision that:

“Every young person in Wangaratta is supported to grow, lead, and shape their future, and our community, in a way that reflects their hopes, strengths, and potential.”

HOW

Level Up Youth has been co-designed by Council staff and young people with input from internal and external stakeholders including almost 900 young people.

It explains how we will work with and for young people. Clearly articulating our three key deliverables – to engage, elevate and empower young people - and how these play out across our five priority areas for young people.

- 1 **Safety & Belonging**
- 2 **Health & Wellbeing**
- 3 **Youth Voice & Leadership**
- 4 **Places & Spaces**
- 5 **Participation in Education, Training & Work**

Refer to our
Implementation
Plans on pages
40-43

The matrix of deliverables and priority areas provides a high-level overview of key activities that can be documented, shared and tracked in annual implementation plans for each year of the five-year strategy.



DID YOU KNOW?



According to ABS 2021 Census data Victoria has the second highest population of young people with over one million young people aged 12-25 living in Victoria.

In the Rural City of Wangaratta, individuals aged 12-24 account for 14.2% of the total population. Of these 4,246 young people, approximately two thirds reside within the township of Wangaratta.

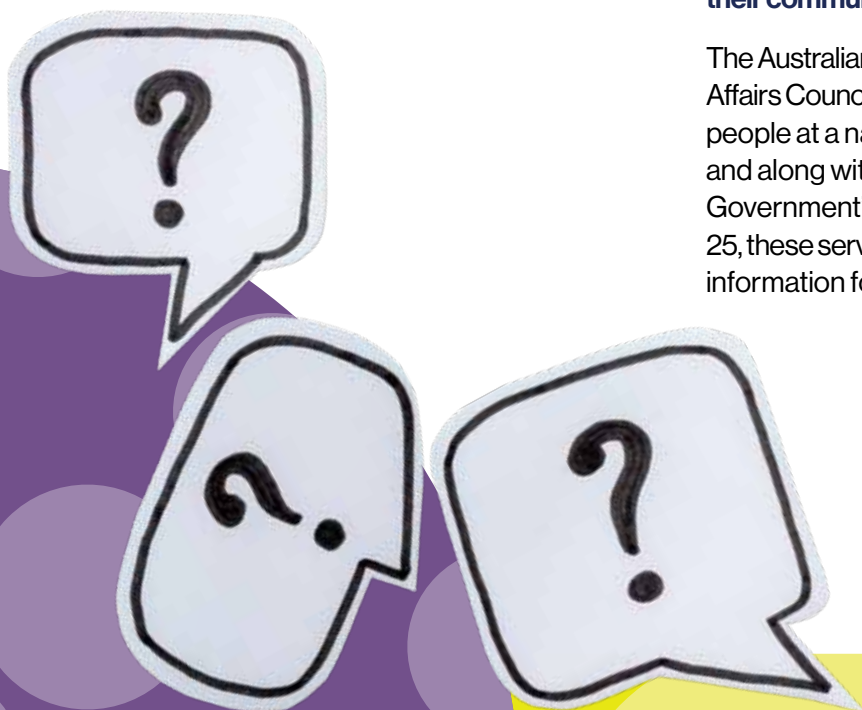
Last year Mission Australia surveyed 4,335 young Victorians (that is 89 less than our total youth population) who were aged 15-19, the data reflects the following statistics.

56% of them thought the cost of living was the most important issue in Australia today.

55% of them believed alcohol and 65% of them believed drugs are a problem.

54% of them felt proud to be a part of their community.

The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition and the Youth Affairs Council Victoria are the peak bodies for young people at a national and state levels respectively, and along with Youth Central which is the Victorian Government's website for people aged from 12 to 25, these services offer important resources and information for young people.





The Rural City of Wangaratta (Council) provides services for our young people within our community in several ways. Our work is guided by State Government programs under the 'Our Promise, Your future: Victoria's youth Strategy 2022–2027, the Rural City of Wangaratta's Community Vision and the Council Plan.

Community Vision

The Rural City of Wangaratta is a place for everyone

Community Wellbeing

We want our community to feel connected, inspired and treated with respect. To have access to programs, services and infrastructure that help us lead fulfilled and healthy lives.

Council Plan 2025–2030

Provide a platform for young people to advocate for the issues that matter to them.



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56% thought the cost of living was the most important issue in Australia today.

55% believed alcohol and 65% of them believed drugs are a problem

54% felt proud to be a part of their community.

COMMUNITY VISION

2045

The Rural City
of Wangaratta
is a place for
everyone.

We are a welcoming, connected,
and caring community.

We value our urban and rural communities,
ensuring shared opportunity and quality of life.

Our natural environment supports our wellbeing
and forms a strong part of our cultural identity.

Our strength is our resilience and active
participation in shaping a future for
everyone to thrive.



COMMUNITY WELLBEING

We want our community to feel connected, inspired
and treated with respect. To have access to programs,
services and infrastructure that help us lead fulfilled
and healthy lives.

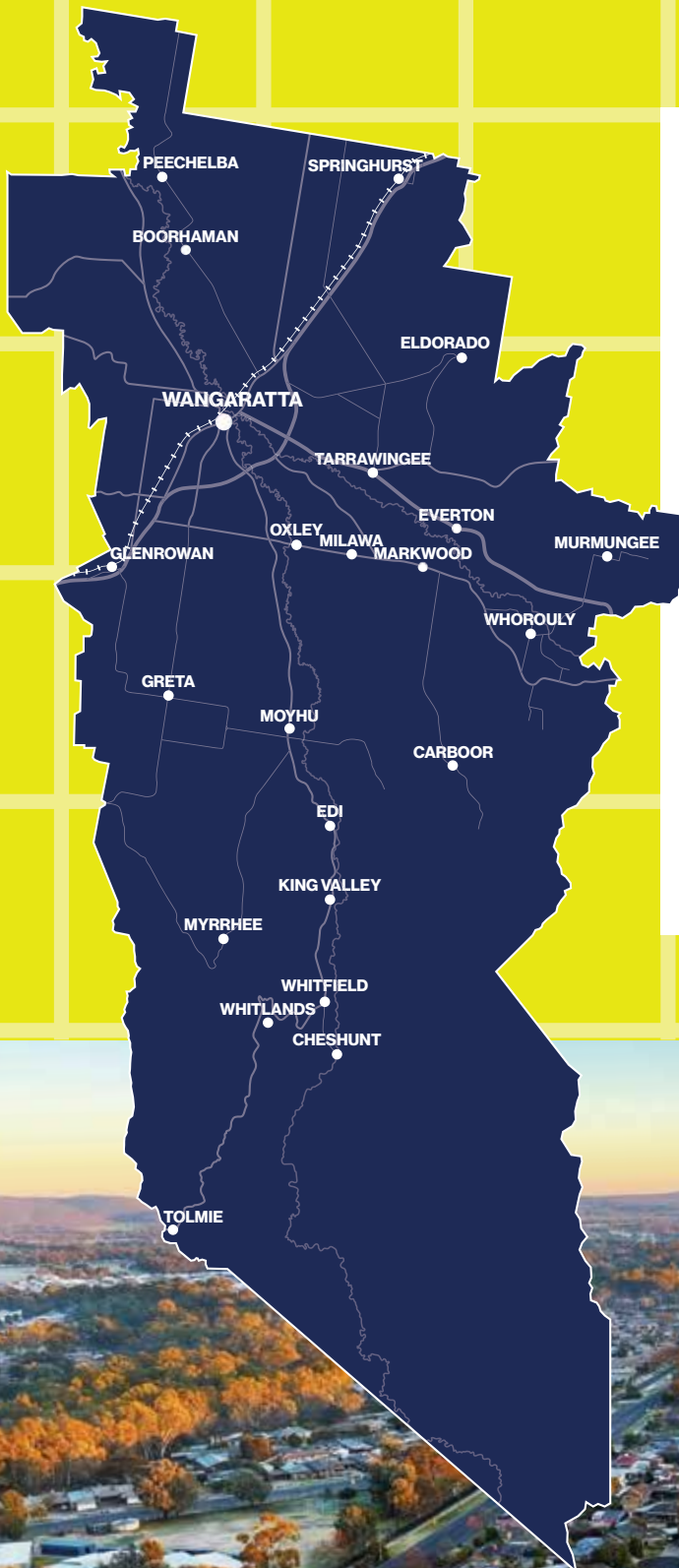
COUNCIL PLAN

Provide a platform for young
people to advocate for the
issues that matter to them

2025
-2029



HOW YOU MIGHT KNOW US



The Rural City of Wangaratta covers 3,646 sq kms, has a current population of 30,002 and borders onto six other local government areas.

You might know us for looking after your rates, roads and rubbish, but you might also know us from many of our services that regularly provide a variety of activities, events and dedicated services and spaces to young people in the region.



Rural City of
Wangaratta



OUR SERVICES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Youth Services

Providing direct services, engagement, and opportunities to our regions Young People.

- Youth Council Program
- Annual Engage & Amplify project funding support and delivery
- Youth Hub venue and connected programming

Wangaratta Sports & Aquatic Centre

- Employment opportunities
- A space to be active, engaged and involved.
- A place to meet and be seen.

Wangaratta Performing Arts & Convention Centre

- Theatre programming for young people, with a focus on school theatre programs connected to curriculum
- Theatre Trainee Program partnership with the Arts Centre Melbourne and Council
- Perform on stage or work behind the scenes with local school, dance, music and drama productions

Wangaratta Art Gallery

- Education programs, activities and workshops specifically designed for young people.
- Dedicated educational programs aligned with school curricula.
- Offer internships, work experience and student placements for young people
- Provide a space to be engaged or involved





Wangaratta Library

- Dedicated Youth Space
- Dedicated Youth programs such as the annual Geek Con Event
- Free access to printed books and online resources including eBooks, eMagazines, eComics and online streaming platforms.

Events

- Delivering free and low-cost events on behalf of Council to the community ensuring inclusion and accessibility for young people.
- Support community groups and commercial organisations to deliver events within Wangaratta for the benefit of the residents, visitors and economy.
- Allow access to events and activities via the 74 open areas including sporting fields, courts and parks, 2 skate parks, parkour and pump track, our public parks and gardens.



WHAT WE

In the first half of 2025 the Rural City of Wangaratta took the following steps to develop Level Up Youth – our new five-year Youth Strategy 2026-2030.

1

Got talent: We partnered with a consultant (Youth Gurus), to lead the development of our draft Youth Strategy 2026-2030, including a Youth Census and a Youth Co-design process.

2

Reviewed key documentation: We conducted a literature review of key documents including but not limited to Rural City of Wangaratta's Council Plan, Rural City of Wangaratta Draft Youth Strategy (2010), Rural City of Wangaratta 2022 Youth Survey, and Victorian State Government Youth Strategy documents.

3

Recruited local talent: We recruited a small but dynamic Youth Co-design Crew (including young people previously and currently involved with Youth Council, Amplify and other council run programs) who met in-person and online eight times across a six-month period to inform the development and design of this strategy.



PIP

This Strategy
was informed by
872 young people
aged 12-25!



4

Engaged more young people: With guidance from the Youth Co-design Crew, we designed the WHAT YOUTH WANT Youth Census. Completed by 872 young people aged 12-25 across a six-week period the results of Youth Census helped inform the development of this strategy.

5

Engaged wider community: After concluding the Youth Census we shared our findings and sought further input from key stakeholders internal to Council via an online workshop, and with external key stakeholders via target outreach and an online survey.

6

Looked at what we had learnt: Next, we analysed all the data we had captured locally and had compiled from other data sources (eg. Mission Australia, VicHealth, Youth Affairs Council Victoria) and reviewed it with the Youth Co-design Crew to identify key and priority areas for young people in our region.

7

Designed our strategy: Council Staff and the Co-Design Crew worked together to design the layout and colour palette of the document, creating a fun, vibrant piece that captures important information as well as the actions we will be accountable for.

8

Tested it with others: After a busy six months it was then time pull it all together and test it with internal and external stakeholders for further refinement, before we take it out for public exhibition and comment.



WHAT WE HEARD



This section highlights the key issues and ideas (clustered by theme) that were raised by young people aged 12-25 in the WHAT YOUTH WANT Youth Census.

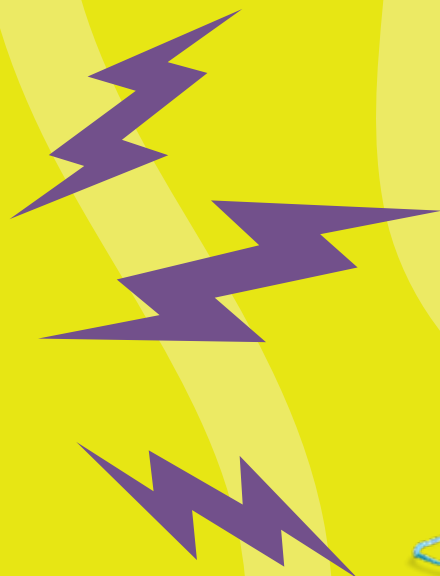
Community and Environment

- **Vibrant and Welcoming Community:** Many young people appreciate the sense of belonging and the friendly community atmosphere in Wangaratta. However, there is a call for a more vibrant environment with expanded retail options and more diverse entertainment facilities.
- **Safety Concerns:** Safety is a significant concern, particularly at night. Young people have expressed the need for more street lighting and safer public spaces.
- **Infrastructure Improvements:** There is a strong demand for fixing potholes and improving road conditions outside Wangaratta. Additionally, better public transport and more reliable bus services are needed to enhance connectivity.

Opportunities and Activities

- **Employment and Education:** Young people are seeking more job opportunities, especially in emerging fields like technology and creative industries. There is also a need for job systems that accommodate students' schedules and provide work experience opportunities.
- **Recreational Activities:** The youth have expressed a desire for more recreational activities, such as arcades, mini-golf, and laser tag. They also want more spaces to hang out, relax, and engage in non-sporting activities.
- **Cultural and Creative Opportunities:** There is a call for increased support for arts and music, including more youth acting opportunities, music events and cultural events.





Health and Wellbeing

- **Mental Health Support:** Many young people have highlighted the need for better mental health support, including more accessible services and support groups, particularly by the 16 yrs + age bracket.
- **Substance Abuse and Crime:** Concerns about youth crime and substance abuse, particularly vaping, are prevalent. There is a need for more initiatives to address these issues and provide healthier alternatives for entertainment and socialisation.
- **Bullying:** Real life experience, concerns and fears were captured, especially for the ages 12-16yrs.

Cost of Living and Housing

- **Affordability Issues:** The high cost of living and housing is a significant concern for young people. They are worried about future financial stability and the ability to afford necessities.
- **Housing Availability:** There is an identified need for more affordable and appropriate housing options for young people. This concern was captured from the 16+ age bracket.

Inclusivity and Representation

- **Youth Involvement:** Young people want more opportunities to be involved in decision-making processes that affect their lives. They seek platforms where their voices can be heard and lead to real change.
- **Diversity and Inclusion:** There is a desire for more inclusive spaces that cater to diverse needs, including neurodiverse-friendly areas and support for various cultural and religious communities.

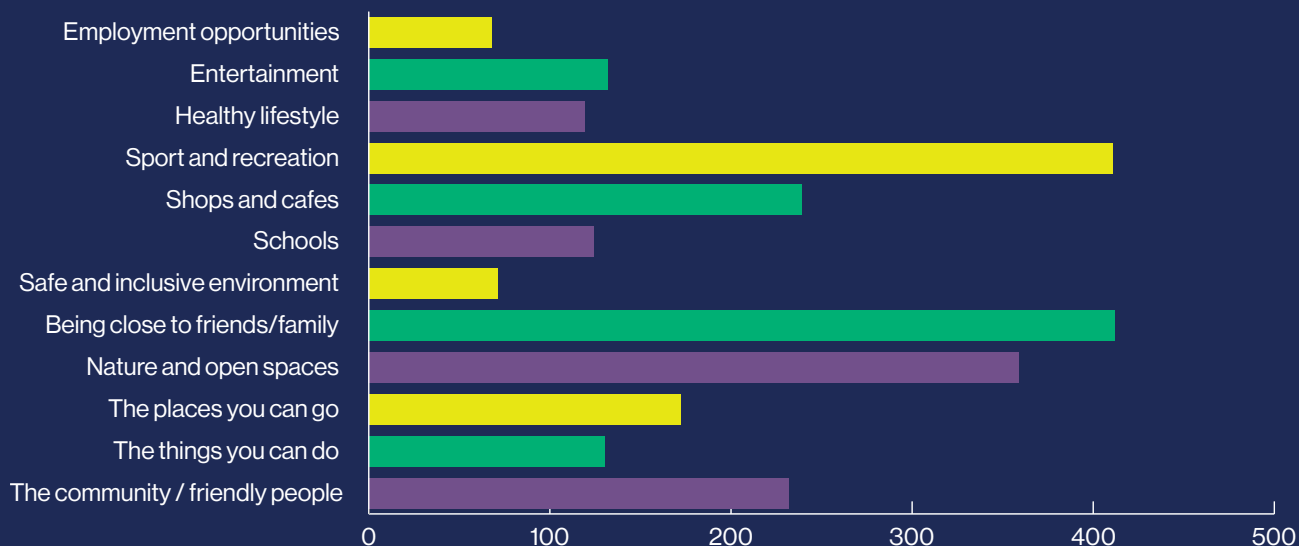
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and music



WHAT WE HEARD



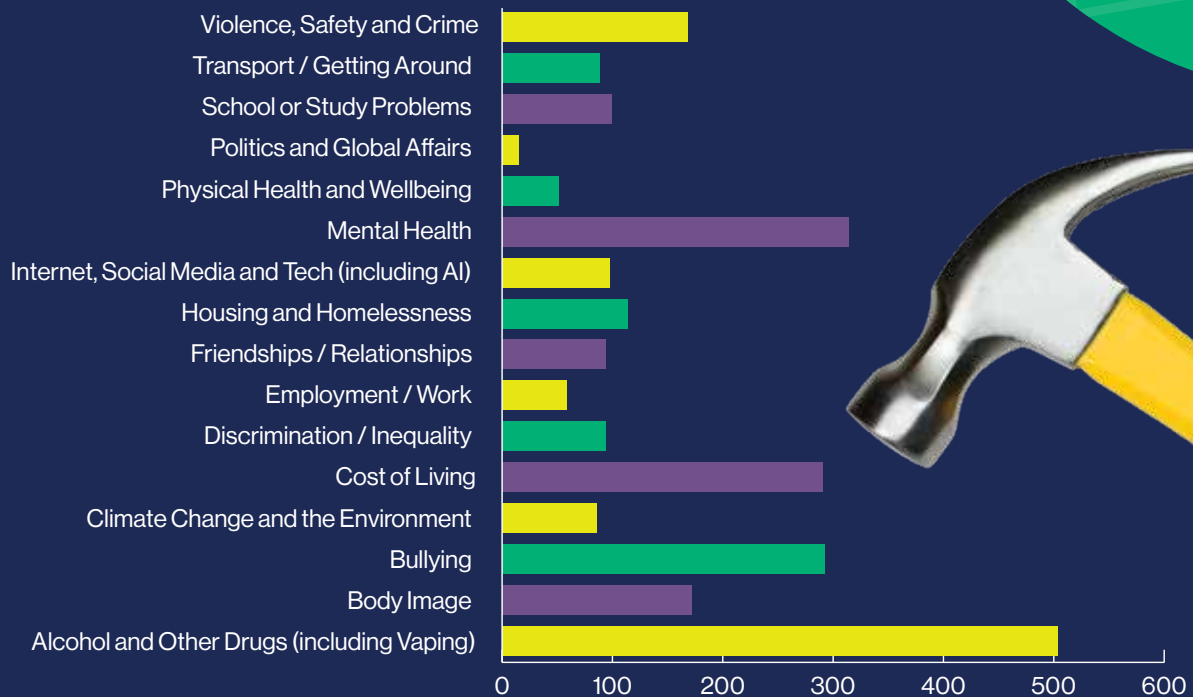
What Young People Like Most About Living in the Region



Young people in Wangaratta value social connectedness, sport and recreational opportunities, access to outdoor spaces, and the welcoming community atmosphere. These align with broader research such as Mission Australia's 2023 report, which highlights relationships, recreation, and belonging as key wellbeing drivers.

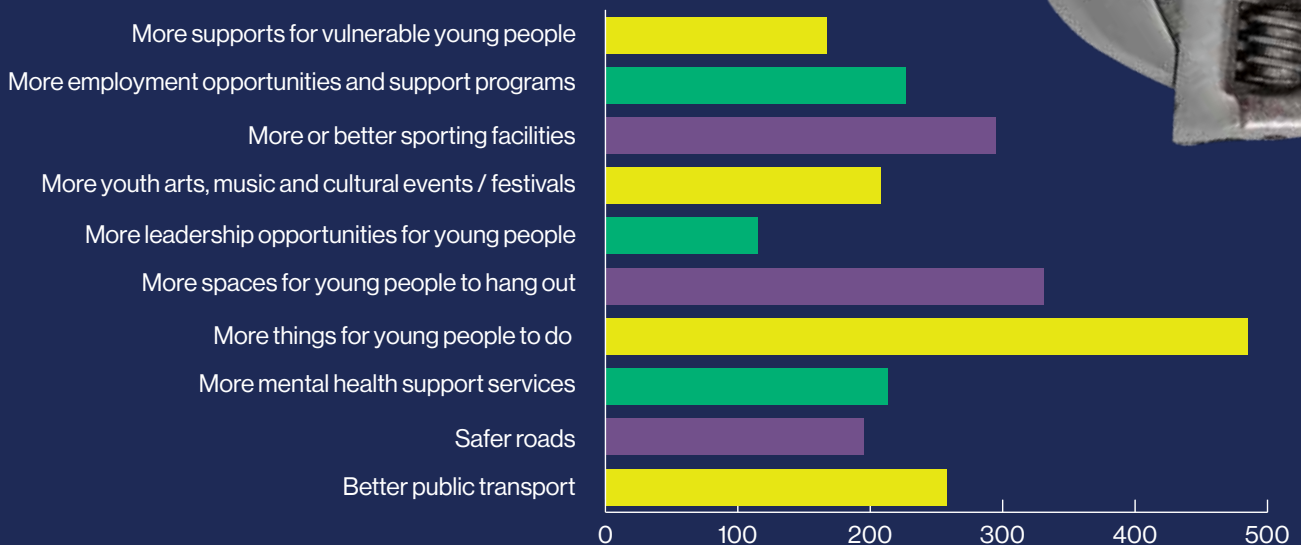


Most Important Issues Identified by Young People



Concerns around vaping, mental health, bullying, and cost of living mirror national trends. Youth vaping has risen significantly (Cancer Council, 2023), and mental health remains the most cited concern among Australian youth (Headspace, 2022).

What Would Improve the Region for Young People



More than half of all young people who completed the Youth Censes want more things - activities, events and programs – for young people to do. Calls for more youth friendly spaces, better sporting facilities and better public transport were also frequently mentioned.



OUR KEY DELIVERABLES

The ***Level Up Youth Strategy 2026 - 2030***
is built around three bold action areas or deliverables



ENGAGE

ELEVATE

EMPOWER

– that together reflects how we'll work with and for young people across the Rural City of Wangaratta.

These key deliverables are **more than just words.**

They're our commitment to young people and the way we will work in partnership with young people and other key stakeholders to turn our shared vision into action.

Whether it's through meaningful participation, access to new opportunities, or platforms for leadership, these deliverables outline what young people can expect to see, feel, and be part of over the next five years across all five of our priority areas.

ENGAGE

Definition: *To participate or become involved in.*

Synonyms: connect, interact, involve, attract, immerse

We will engage young people by creating inclusive, welcoming spaces where they can connect, contribute, and belong—whether that's through local programs, creative activities, or simply having a place to be themselves. We commit to listening, involving, and valuing young people in all areas of community life.

CASE STUDY

Wangaratta Library – Geek Con Event

GeekCon is Wangaratta's very own comic, gaming, and pop culture convention, designed to be inclusive and engaging for people of all ages and abilities. Inspired by the major conventions held in capital cities, GeekCon was created to give rural communities access to the excitement of pop culture without the need to travel long distances. The event features a wide range of activities including cosplay competitions, gaming tournaments, creative workshops, and themed market stalls, all aimed at celebrating fandom and creativity in a welcoming environment.

By hosting GeekCon locally, Wangaratta Library and its partners have made comics, gaming, and pop culture more accessible to people who might not otherwise have the opportunity to attend large-scale conventions. The event has become a highlight on the community calendar, drawing in families, teens, and enthusiasts from across the region. Geekcon aims to help people get creative, enjoy gaming, and brings the community together through shared interests and fun activities.



ELEVATE

Definition: *To raise or improve to a higher level.*

Synonyms: uplift, raise, boost, promote, advance, grow

We will elevate young people by championing their ideas, talents and ambitions—amplifying their voices through creative platforms, learning opportunities and recognition. We will invest in spaces and experiences that celebrate youth potential and support personal and professional growth.

CASE STUDY

Wangaratta Sports and Aquatics Centre (WSAC)

WSAC have recently introduced a Recreational Gymnastics program which is staffed by young people employed at the centre. The team have been trained in Fundamental Gymnastics skills and have been empowered to design and implement a program for children aged 2-12.

The program has engaged primary school aged children in safe, fun, non-competitive physical activity and is planned and coached by 18-25yo staff members. Many of the team involved also work in other areas of WSAC, and this program has allowed them to expand their learnings and employment opportunities.



EMPOWER

Definition: *The process of equipping young people with the skills, confidence, and opportunities to actively shape their own lives and contribute to their communities.*

Synonyms: strengthen, invest, enable, equip, give agency to

We will empower young people by backing them with the tools, skills, and confidence they need to lead, make decisions, and shape their own futures. We commit to sharing power, building leadership, and creating real pathways for youth-led change.

CASE STUDY

Youth Council – Edward Browne

The opportunities that the council and the Youth Services team have given to me over the past two years have been nothing short of wonderful - I love the events highlighting the talent of our local young people that the team dedicate so much time and effort to - we all really do appreciate it.

In 2024 the help and support in the first half of the year for the sport and rec fest was terrific and Kayla, Lucy and I would have not been able to do any of it without the Youth Services team providing their vast community connections.

Late last year I began advocating with Jake Fehily & Julia Baron from VicSRC about getting an official 'Rural Vic Youth Congress' program. I'm really excited for this opportunity, and I can't wait to work with the new youth council about this in early 2026!!!!

Youth Council has opened opportunities for me like the Co-Design consultation group for the Strategy. In addition to that, I have also applied to the Yacvic and Victorian University's Centre for excellence - young people and disasters which I'm proud to now be part of.

Youth Council and the service Council provide for me and my desire to advocate and have a say has changed my life.



OUR **5** PRIORITY AREAS

Our five priority areas in the *Level Up Youth Strategy 2026–2030* reflect the real and evolving needs of young people in the Rural City of Wangaratta. These priorities are grounded in youth voice, informed by community data, and shaped by Council's capacity to act.

- 1 Safety & Belonging
- 2 Health & Wellbeing
- 3 Youth Voice & Leadership
- 4 Places & Spaces
- 5 Participation in Education, Training & Work

The priority areas chosen to represent the spaces where Council can lead, partner or advocate effectively, and make a meaningful difference with and for young people.

While we can't solve every issue alone, Council is well placed to convene partners, invest in programs, influence local decision-making, and create environments where young people can thrive.





HOW THEY WORK

These five priority areas provide the strategic backbone of the Level Up Youth Strategy.

They give structure to our goals, shape the actions we commit to, and help us stay accountable to the issues that matter most to young people in our region.

Each priority area is explored through the lens of **Engage, Elevate and Empower**—our action pillars that reflect how we plan to connect with young people, raise their voices, and support their leadership. By working across these levels, we ensure our response is not just about short-term programs, but long-term, meaningful change.

Ultimately, these priorities help us focus our efforts, track our progress, and **make sure that every young person in Wangaratta has the chance to feel safe, be heard, and reach their potential.**



1

SAFETY & BELONGING

(Inclusion, Connection, Identity, Housing, Lighting, Bullying, Crime and e-safety)

Every young person deserves to feel safe, accepted and like they belong, wherever they are in the Rural City of Wangaratta.

Young people have told us they want communities that are welcoming, respectful, and free from discrimination, bullying and violence. Whether it's in schools, on the street, in clubs, or online, feeling safe is a basic human right and the foundation for confidence, connection and identity.

This priority area focuses on building inclusive environments where all young people—regardless of background, ability, gender, culture or identity—feel valued and protected. It's about creating stronger connections between people and places, and building a community culture where difference is celebrated and belonging is the norm.

What young people said:

”

“I think Wangaratta is a great town to live in. The schools are amazing, the parks are the best and there are plenty of job opportunities. Most of all the people are amazing.”

“I think that Wangaratta just isn't safe around when the sun goes down as there are streetlights in the main streets but as soon as u leave that part of town there is not lighting and not as safe for teenagers to be walking home from work etc.”

“Overemphasis of sport - especially netball and football - culture in the town can be exclusive and isolating for those not involved. May be useful to have other outlets / activities.”





OUR RESPONSE

The Rural City of Wangaratta plays a critical role in creating safe, inclusive environments where all young people feel they belong. As the level of government closest to community, Council has strong connections with schools, sporting clubs, community groups and service providers. Council can play a role in leading a local response to bullying, discrimination and social isolation.

Through inclusive policies, youth-friendly events, and thoughtful urban design, Council can foster spaces and systems that reflect the diversity of young people and promote a culture of welcome, respect and connection.

EXAMPLE ACTIONS

ENGAGE

Host, partner and participate in inclusive youth pop-up events across the municipality that celebrate diversity and promote safe, welcoming environments.

ELEVATE

Support and promote awareness campaigns from organisations such as Centre Against Violence (CAV) & Respect Victoria. Eg; 16 Days of Activism. Wear it Purple Day

EMPOWER

Engage our Youth Council, Amplify Youth Group, and future representative youth groups to advise on policies, strategies, and services that impact people in underrepresented and minority groups

2

HEALTH & WELLBEING

(Mental & Physical Health, Bullying, Vaping, Alcohol, Drugs, Fitness, Body Image)

Young people across Wangaratta have told us loud and clear: health and wellbeing are a top concern. From the pressures of school, friendships and body image to the growing impacts of vaping, substance use, social isolation and the cost of living, young people need more support, earlier.

This priority area recognises the importance of accessible, youth-friendly mental health services, stronger education around health and safety, and spaces to simply unwind, play sport or be with friends.

Promoting wellbeing also means tackling the root causes of harm – like bullying and stigma – and supporting recreational options that are healthy, fun and inclusive. When young people feel mentally and physically well, they're more likely to thrive in all areas of life.



What young people said:



"I would like for it to be easier to reach out to people for help with things like bullying, vaping/drugs addiction, and more."

"We need to ban vapes."

"The cost of living is not viable for people to live and puts lots of stress on young people."

"I should be thinking about my work and uni NOT how much things cost."

"I'd appreciate better support for teens mental health. As someone who has faced a variety of issues the lack of clarity and response has made it difficult, there are issues such as bullying and harassment present both in person and online and the lack of initiative is poor."





OUR RESPONSE

While Council is not a direct health service provider, it is uniquely positioned to support youth wellbeing by partnering with local health agencies, creating safe and inclusive public spaces, and delivering programs that promote mental health, active lifestyles and harm reduction. Council is obliged to support the health of the community as outlined in the Public Health and Wellbeing Act and linked into the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan and Council Plan.*

By coordinating efforts across sport, recreation, arts, youth outreach, and community development, Council can ensure that young people in Wangaratta have access to positive environments, relevant supports, and the tools they need to thrive both physically and mentally.

EXAMPLE ACTIONS

ENGAGE

Work with local organisations to promote healthy lifestyles and mental, emotional, physical and sexual health in young people.

ELEVATE

Partner, support and promote local mental health and wellbeing services, programs and events.

EMPOWER

Enable opportunities for young people to be trained as Mental Health Youth Champions to lead peer conversations, provide first-point support, and advocate for system change.

3

YOUTH VOICE & LEADERSHIP

(Advocacy, Youth-led, Co-design, Decision Making, Leadership Opportunities)

Young people aren't just the future, they're right now. Across our region, young people want to be involved in decisions that affect them. They want to be taken seriously, supported to lead, and given the chance to shape their community. This priority area is about shifting from "talking about youth" to "working with youth."

That means creating real roles for young people on committees, in planning and advocacy, and in designing the programs and services that serve them.

It's about building leadership pathways for all young people, not just the loudest voices, and recognising that youth voice isn't a one-time consultation, it's a long-term commitment to power-sharing.



What young people said:

”

"I think it's pretty cool that there's an organisation where youth get a say in things."

"Young people in North East Victoria need more opportunities to be heard and involved in decisions that affect them... We want to feel like our voices actually matter and do lead to real change."

"I would love to get the opportunity to work with you guys... Let's work together on making our town a place where everyone feels valued and connected."

"If you really want to help us you should hold more things that we are able to give our opinion to help better the community."

"I think that it is great that you have given us an opportunity to share our view on things."





OUR RESPONSE

Council is in a powerful position to embed youth voice in local decision-making. As the body responsible for strategic planning, community engagement and enabling service delivery, the Rural City of Wangaratta can directly influence how young people are heard and how their ideas shape real outcomes.

Through youth councils, advisory groups, consultations, and co-design processes, Council can model meaningful youth participation and create pathways for young leaders to be seen, supported, and taken seriously across the region.

EXAMPLE ACTIONS

ENGAGE

Create accessible platforms (e.g. online polls, idea walls, youth cafes) for young people to share feedback on Council decisions.

ELEVATE

Enhance the reach and impact of the Rural City of Wangaratta's Youth Council and provide leadership workshops, guest speaker sessions, and drive success through project delivery.

EMPOWER

Develop youth focused leadership through programs for young staff and community members.

4

PLACES & SPACES

(Transport, Accessibility, Safety, Upgrading Facilities, Youth Hub, Social Spaces)

Young people need safe, accessible, and inviting places to be, places to connect with friends, try something new, express themselves, or simply hang out. In a regional area like Wangaratta, there aren't always enough spaces designed with young people in mind.

This priority area focuses on making local places—both built and natural—work better for youth. That means improving parks, sports facilities, and youth hubs. It also means addressing issues like poor lighting, transport gaps, and the lack of spaces that feel safe for all people.

When young people feel welcome in the spaces around them, their connection to community grows.



What young people said:

”

“Better routes for busses and more frequent as it can be hard getting from town to town.”

“I feel there is often not enough affordable, fun things for us to do.”

“I come to Wangaratta often from Myrtleford as there is almost nothing for the older half of the youth to do in Myrt... and I would love to see more Neurodiverse friendly spaces.”



OUR RESPONSE

Council has direct influence over many of the places where young people live, learn, play and connect, parks, libraries, sports facilities, halls, streets, and community spaces. This gives the Rural City of Wangaratta the ability to make real changes to how safe, accessible and welcoming those environments are.

Through smart planning, youth-informed design, and ongoing investment in public infrastructure, Council can ensure that young people feel ownership over local spaces and are invited to shape how they look and feel.

EXAMPLE ACTIONS

ENGAGE

Ensure Young people are engaged on Council and community capital works and place making projects that impact youth activity and connection to place.

ELEVATE

Work with young people to co-design upgrades to public spaces, including seating, shade, Wi-Fi, lighting, and public art.

EMPOWER

Identify and attract funding opportunities to enable youth-led placemaking projects, such as murals, pop-up skate jams, or community garden activations in rural towns.



PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION, TRAINING & WORK

Education, training and work are key pathways to independence, but not all young people in Wangaratta have equal access to those opportunities. Some face barriers like transport, financial pressure, lack of work experience, or limited course options.

This priority area is about removing those barriers and creating smoother, more supported transitions from school into training, work or further study. It includes building stronger partnerships with schools, TAFEs, local businesses, and employers to provide real-world experience and mentoring.

We want all young people to feel prepared, supported, and confident in taking their next steps, wherever that may lead.



What young people said:



"There should be more opportunities for young people to explore what kind of jobs they would enjoy when they're older. Such as workshops held for young people or opportunities for work experience."

"I need lots of help getting a job."

"I would like if there were more employment opportunities for younger people, especially ones that don't require much work experience for people who are looking for their first job."

"I feel that Wangaratta is severely lacking in safety, as well as opportunities for youth in the sense of employment... I would immediately choose to live in a different town if I had the means."

"Living in Wangaratta is awesome as there are essential shops, good places to eat out and the education and facilities are great."





OUR RESPONSE

While Council doesn't oversee education systems, it is a key convener and connector across the local economy. The Rural City of Wangaratta is well placed to bring together schools, TAFEs, employers, industry groups and youth services to open up local training and employment pathways.

Through advocacy, partnerships, and program funding, Council can support initiatives that make it easier for young people to access skills, experience and job opportunities, especially those who may face systemic barriers.

EXAMPLE ACTIONS

ENGAGE

Partner with education providers and future organisations to showcase career pathways and local training providers

ELEVATE

Partner with local businesses to offer youth-specific internships, work experience, training opportunities and mentoring programs.

EMPOWER

Establish a Youth Enterprise Microgrant Program to support young people to start social enterprises, creative businesses, or community impact projects.

WHAT WE WILL DO

Annual Implementation Plans

Our annual implementation plans are where the Level Up Youth Strategy becomes real. Using the matrix of key deliverables (engage, elevate, empower) and our five priority areas we will map out our actions that will deliver on our Youth Strategy on an annual basis.

Prior to the start of each calendar year, we will hold Youth Strategy Planning Sessions with young people (including Youth Council), our community partners and service providers and council staff/representatives.

These sessions will help us shape up our implementation plans by reflecting on what our community and young people need, what's working (and what's not), where we need to grow/change, and how we can adapt or tailor our actions going forward.

SEE OUR PLANS ON PAGE

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ACTIONS



Actions identified within our implementation planning process will be worked up with tangible tasks, timelines, responsibilities, and success measures develop for each action within a **Theory of Change** framework:

- **What we will do** (e.g. “Deliver mental health drop-in sessions in youth-friendly venues”)
- **Who is responsible** (e.g. the Youth Services team, in partnership with headspace)
- **When it will happen** (e.g. quarterly sessions starting mid-2026)
- **What will it achieve and how will it be measured** (eg. Increased confidence in young people’s ability to recognise the signs and symptoms of a mental health problem, measured through pre and post surveys)
- **Resources needed** (e.g. venue hire, youth facilitators, promotional materials)
- **Partnerships** (e.g. NESAY, Department of Health, local schools)

A summary of our Annual Implementation Plans will then be made publicly available via our social media and the youth section on our website.

The power of this youth strategy is in its ability to provide everyone, inclusive of young people, community, Council and key stakeholders, with a clarity of purpose and direction for the next five years, whilst also allowing for change and growth related to the wants and needs of young people.

This strategy clearly articulates how Council will work with and for young people - engage, elevate, empower - across the five priority areas, but remains flexible and dynamic in how this is actioned year to year via youth-informed annual implementation plans ensuring that the strategy and what it delivers is as relevant, responsive and fit for purpose in year five as it is in year one.

TRACK OUR PROGRESS



Monitoring and evaluating is key to making sure the Level Up Youth Strategy doesn't just sit on a shelf—it lives, evolves, and delivers meaningful outcomes for young people in the Rural City of Wangaratta.

It's about keeping the strategy responsive, youth-led, and grounded in the real experiences of young people in our community.

Our approach to this will focus on three main areas:

7

Tracking Delivery of Key Actions

Each action within our annual implementation plan will be tracked annually through an internal delivery plan. This includes:

- What we've delivered (events, programs, consultations, campaigns)
- Where and how it was delivered
- Participation numbers and demographic reach
- Who we partnered with

This helps us stay on course and ensures accountability across Council teams and partners.



2

Measuring Outcomes for Young People

Beyond activities, we want to understand what's changing in the lives of young people. We'll measure short- and medium-term outcomes aligned with our Theory of Change. For this we'll be using a mix of tools, including:

- Youth surveys (including a follow-up to the Youth Census)
- Feedback forms from events and programs
- Case studies and personal stories
- Focus groups and youth-led reflection sessions

3

Reflecting, Learning and Adapting

We will embed a culture of reflection across the strategy. Each year, we'll hold a Youth Strategy Reflection Session with young people, Councilstaff, and community partners to:

- Review progress
- Share what's working (and what's not)
- Identify emerging needs
- Adjust actions as needed

These sessions will also guide our annual Youth Strategy Report Card, which will be made available to the community and young people via our social media and the youth section on our website.

Our Report Card will capture and share key information from across the year and will highlight key actions within each priority area including:

- A snapshot of a successful initiative or event
- Quotes or reflections from young people involved
- Photos, artwork or short videos
- Key lessons learned and how we'll build on them



IMPLEMENTATION PLANS

1

SAFETY & BELONGING		Responsibility	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
ENGAGE	Host, partner and participate in inclusive youth events across the municipality that celebrate diversity and promote safe, welcoming environments.	Youth Services / Arts Culture & Events / Community & Recreation / Grit & Resilience					
	• Plan and deliver safe and inclusive events through the Amplify Program and other Youth event opportunities.	Youth Services Team					
	• Support and foster partnerships with local organisations in running safe and inclusive events that highlight calendar highlights such as Harmony Day, Pride Fair, Reconciliation week or NAIDOC events.	Youth Services/ Community & Recreation / Events / Library					
	• Work towards opportunities to establish youth peer groups that focus on fostering inclusivity and diversity across the municipality.	Youth Services Team Leader					
ELEVATE	Support and promote awareness campaigns from organisations such as Centre Against Violence (CAV) & Respect Victoria. Eg; 16 Days of Activism, Wear it Purple Day.	Youth Services Team Leader					
	• Support and promote the 16 days of activism via partnerships and awareness campaigns.	Youth Services					
	• Continue to advocate and support opportunities for E-safety online programs and education through local secondary schools and the community.	Youth Services					
	• Continue to support and advocate for education or programs on consent for the secondary school or community	Youth Services Team Leader					
	• Promote and support Centre Against Violence Consent programs, within local sporting clubs.	Youth Services/ WSAC/ Community & Rec					
	• Research the capacity and opportunity to deliver 'Youth 4 for Life' in partnership with local secondary school providers.	Youth Services Team Leader					
EMPOWER	Engage our Youth Council, Amplify Youth Group, and future representative youth groups to advise on policies, strategies, and services that impact people in underrepresented and minority groups.	Youth Services					
	• Encourage youth representative platforms to actively engage with the council through advocacy and key roles, ensuring a strong youth voice in planning and delivering events and programs.	Youth Services / Marketing & Comms / Events / Gallery/ WPACC/ Library					
	• Work with local secondary school providers and local health services to access expert strategies and advice on removing stigma for young people regarding Inclusion and Diversity groups.	Youth Services Team Leader					

2

HEALTH & WELLBEING		Responsibility	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
ENGAGE	Work with local organisations to promote healthy lifestyles and mental, emotional, physical and sexual health in young people.	Youth Services Team Leader					
	• Promote local wellbeing services and their events; collaborate where possible. eg. headspace, Centre of Excellence in Rural Sexual Health.	Youth Services / Community Wellbeing Officer					
ELEVATE	Partner, support and promote local mental health and wellbeing services, programs and events.	Youth Services Team Leader					
	• Identify opportunities for RCoW Creative and Cultural Services to deliver online, or in person programs (for example) using creative formats like podcasts, zines, or short films, visual arts or other creative practices.	Youth Services / Arts Culture and Events / Community & Recreation / Grit & Resilience					
	• Promote youth designed mental health awareness programs to secondary schools and service providers.	Youth Services Team Leader					
	• Promote and support educational sessions, workshops or forums that focus on positive outcomes of health, resilience, and wellbeing in young people.	Youth Services / WSAC / Gallery / Library					
	• Promote access to mental, sexual & physical health resources.	Youth Services / WSAC					
	• Ensure Inclusion of sport and recreation in youth activities designed within the youth services events program.	Youth Services / WSAC					
EMPOWER	Enable opportunities for young people to be trained as Mental Health Youth Champions to lead peer conversations, provide first-point support, and advocate for system change.	Youth Services					
	• Provide training or workshops in mental health and wellbeing to Youth Councillors and other youth panels or groups.	Youth Services Team Leader					
	• Provide opportunities for young people to showcase their talents, through performance events, exhibition opportunities and creative expression.	Youth Services / Arts Culture and Events / Community & Recreation / Grit & Resilience Services					

IMPLEMENTATION PLANS

3

YOUTH VOICE & LEADERSHIP		Responsibility	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
ENGAGE	Create accessible platforms (e.g. online polls, idea walls, youth cafes) for young people to share feedback on Council decisions.	Youth Services Team Leader / Marketing & Communications					
	• Ensure opportunities of young people's decision-making platforms have advocacy through training and governance guidance of the Youth Councillors.	Youth Services Team Leader					
	• Continue to consult and ensure the desire of music and creative outlets are enabled via the Amplify program.	Youth Services					
	• Provide pop-up and temporary youth cafes, coffee vans and activation events to ensure young people can share feedback in decisions affecting them.	Youth Services / Team Community Engagement Advisor / Marketing & Comms / Community & Rec / WSAC					
ELEVATE	Enhance the reach and impact of the Rural City of Wangaratta's Youth Council and provide leadership workshops, guest speaker sessions, and drive success through project delivery.	Youth Services Team Leader					
	• Provide training, workshops and speakers to develop young people's leadership potential including established youth representative groups (Youth Council and Amplify) and additional Youth Forum opportunities for other young people.	Youth Services Team Leader					
	• Plan and review the Youth Council membership and relevance of Advisory Committee Charter to the Young people interested in advocacy and governance.	Youth Services Team Leader / Governance / Manager Arts Culture & Events					
EMPOWER	Develop youth focused leadership through programs for young staff and community members.	Youth Services / Learning and Development					
	• Encourage and connect young people's voice on council working groups and committees and local community boards.	Youth Services Team Leader					



4

PLACES & SPACES		Responsibility	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
ENGAGE	Ensure Young people are engaged on Council and Community Capital works and place making projects that impact youth activity and connection to place.	Youth Services Team Leader / Infrastructure Services					
	• Launch a "Rate My Space" youth survey to gather feedback on local hangouts, parks, and facilities across the region.	Youth Services Team Leader / Infrastructure Services					
	• Ensure consultation occurs with youth advisory groups in planning stages of capital works, asset renewals and redevelopments of council owned property.	Youth Services Team Leader / Infrastructure Services					
ELEVATE	Work with young people to co-design upgrades to public spaces, including seating, shade, Wi-Fi, lighting, and public art.	Youth Services Team Leader / Infrastructure Services					
EMPOWER	Identify and attract funding opportunities to enable youth-led placemaking projects, such as murals, pop-up skate jams, or community garden activations in rural towns.	Youth Services Team Leader / Manager Arts Culture & Events					

5

PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION TRAINING & WORK		Responsibility	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
ENGAGE	Partner with education providers and future organisations to showcase career pathways and local training providers.	Youth Services / Learning & Development					
	• Partner and promote education & training, work experience and work placement opportunities to secondary schools, youth advisory groups and community.	Youth Services / Learning & Development					
ELEVATE	Partner with local businesses to offer youth-specific internships, work experience, and mentoring programs.	Youth Services / Learning & Development					
	• Provide a pathway for young people to obtain qualifications to enter the workforce (e.g. continue to foster traineeships such as the Wangaratta Performing Arts and Conventions Centre Traineeship - Certificate III in Live Production & Technical Services through funding support and partnerships.	WSAC / Venue Manager WPACC / Youth Services Team Leader / Learning & Development / People & Culture					
	• Continue to attend local secondary schools career days promoting local government career pathways.	Youth Services / Learning & Development					
EMPOWER	Investigate the possibility of establishing a Youth Enterprise Microgrant Program to support young people to start social enterprises, creative businesses, or community impact projects.	Youth Services Team Leader / Economic Development Community & Recreation					



References

Page 6: Victoria has the second highest population of young people with over one million young people aged 12-25 living in Victoria ABS 2021 Census

Author, Australian Bureau of Statistic,
<https://dbr.abs.gov.au/region>

Page 6: Last year Mission Australia surveyed 4,335 young Victorians (that is 89 fewer than our total youth population) who were aged 15-19, the data reflects the following statistics.

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Annual Youth Survey | Mission Australia

Page 7: Rural City of Wangaratta Council Plan 2025-2030

Page 19: Rural City of Wangaratta Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (within Rural City of Wangaratta Council Plan 2025-2030)

YOUTH



Rural City of
Wangaratta

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