



SWAN HILL
Rural City Council

Best Value Report
FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

September 2002

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Executive Summary

Family and Children's Services consists of seven Council programs, which combined provide a wide range of services to families with children under 13 years of age. These services are provided in response to policies and programs identified, and determined, by the State and Federal Governments. These services are heavily subsidised by way of grant funding.

According to the latest census data (2001), within the Swan Hill Rural City municipality there are 4,929 children under the age of 15, within a total population of 20,710. Each year Family and Children's Services expend in excess of \$1.56 million, of which The Federal and State Governments provide \$1.45 Million.

The Federal and State Governments determine the service levels to be provided, and the methodology and policies to be employed in delivering these services. Council is generally unable to influence these matters, however, in relation to the Maternal and Child Health program, Council has determined to provide a service well in excess to the levels determined by the State Government, to ensure that community needs are met.

The Best Value Review has identified that the services have achieved many of the requirements of 'Best Value'. Specifically the services have:

- Assessed, in various ways with the community, the level of services to be provided,
- Determined that they are responsive to community needs
- Ensured accessibility by the intended target groups
- Developed standards to measure the quality and the cost of the service delivered, and
- Continuously improved the services being provided.

The services are subject to constant review, both by government agencies and program staff, who actively seek innovative ways to improve the way the services are delivered, and the standards achieved.

Due to the nature of the services, benchmarking has not been actively pursued until recently. Of the seven programs that deliver family and children's services, four are currently involved in a benchmarking process.

Limited reporting to the community and service recipients on standards and service levels has been undertaken to date. This will be addressed in the forthcoming year, to ensure that this principle of Best Value is also achieved.

This report demonstrates that the Family and Children's services have substantially achieved the principles of Best Value.

Introduction

The Family and Children's Services Best Value report considers the following services as a group as they share common service objectives, being, the provision of services to families with children from birth to twelve years of age. It is perceived that the community also perceives these services as being complimentary to each other. Additionally, all of these services are provided at various locations throughout the municipality, rather than from a centralised location. Care is delivered not only to families within the Swan Hill municipality but also to families in adjoining municipalities, including New South Wales.

As it is the view of Council that Best Value relates to good management practice, grouping these services together is an appropriate way to review how they meet the greater objectives of Council, as set out in the Corporate Plan. Completing individual service reviews may not necessarily achieve this greater goal.

The programs that make up Family and Children's Services for Swan Hill Rural City Council are:

Program No	Program Name
5810	Before and After School Child Care)
5820	Vacation Child Care) Out of School Hours Care
5821	Mobile Vacation Child Care)
5840	Education – Preschools
5850	Family Day Care
5855	Children's Services Resource Development Officer
5870	Maternal & Child Health

Corporate Plan Direction

The corporate plan has been developed by Council to provide direction and guidance to the organisation in developing and providing services to the community.

The Community Development and Well-being Goal provides direction for Family and Children's services. Specifically:

To enhance community well-being by facilitating community participation and the provision of support networks and services that maintain the dignity, health, safety and well-being of our diverse community.

The corporate plan goals are supported by strategies to achieve the desired outcomes. Family and Children's services specifically address the following strategy:

Facilitate or provide appropriate services necessary to support the well-being of the community.

The outcome to be achieved through this strategy is a *Healthy and independent community*.

Within this context, the broad service objective for Family and Children's Services is:

Provide or facilitate a range of services to families with children aged from birth to twelve years, to foster the development of children and contribute to the health and well being of families in this municipality.

Community Focus

The community focus of these services is different from that of the organisation. The communities objectives for these services is believed to be:

- To monitor the health and development of children.
- Provide support for families with children that is:
 - Safe
 - Reliable
 - Affordable
 - Equitable
 - Meets the needs of the family

Services Provided

A brief description of the services currently provided under the heading of Families and Children's Services is as follows:

(5810) (5820) (5821) Out Of School Hours Care

Out Of School Hours Care provides the following services for primary school children aged five to twelve years:

- After School Program (1986 – Current)
- Swan Hill Vacation Care Program (1986 – Current)
- Pupil Free Day (1995 – Current)
- Swan Hill Mobile Vacation Care Program (1997 – Current)
- Robinvale Vacation Care Program (1999 – Current)

These Programs, funded partly by the Commonwealth and by user fees, provide centre based care that focus on meeting the broad range of children's social, emotional, physical, intellectual and recreational needs. All programs cater for permanent, roster and casual care, with the community being able to access any program as required. Four hundred and seventy families currently use the Out Of School Hours Care services, with 90% of those parents being in the workforce.

There has been a 200% increase in the overall service provided by Out Of School Hours Care over the past four years, in response to community demand.

(5840) Preschools

Council is the owner of the seven preschool buildings in the Swan Hill municipality, and is the licensee for only two of these, Swan Hill North and Swan Hill South. The Swan Hill Preschool Association assumes responsibility for enrolments, fee setting and day-to-day operations of these two preschools. As Licensee, Council is the employer of the preschool staff and accordingly, staff terms and conditions are set by Council and wages are paid via Council's finance department.

For the remaining five preschools, Council acts as a landlord, thereby only being responsible for maintenance of the buildings. Council does not charge a rental fee or occupancy fee to any of the preschool committees operating from the facilities. Council conducts an annual inspection of the preschool buildings and maintains them as required.

(5850) Family Day Care

Family Day Care is a community based childcare service offering supervised care of children up to twelve years of age, in the private homes of registered care providers.

The Care providers work as independent contractors to Council. Family Day Care aims to provide affordable quality and flexible home-based childcare that meets the individual needs of parents and children. Whilst Family Day Care must be open to the general community, Commonwealth Government Priority of Access guidelines deem that priority is given to children at serious risk of abuse or neglect, children whose parents have work or study commitments, families in crisis and children/families with disabilities.

In-home care is a new service introduced in January 2001. This service provides care for children in their own home where a family does not have access to a childcare service, or where childcare needs cannot be met by an existing service. The service began with seven places allocated and has recently increased by another fifteen places, due to demand for this service.

(5855) Children's Services Resource Development Officer

This program consists of a specialised officer as a resource to the community to enable increased access to all Commonwealth funded childcare services for children with disabilities and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The Children's Services Resource Development Officer visits the childcare services and liaises with parents and other community agencies to ensure inclusion occurs. (Children with disabilities access the services in greater numbers, compared with children from culturally and linguistically diverse families, as their parents are more aware of services available.)

(5870) Maternal and Child Health

The Maternal and Child Health Program provides services to families with children aged from birth to six years. This service, funded in part by the State Government, monitors early childhood health and development, provides maternal support, parent education, and implements preventative strategies to pre-empt or remove causes of problems. The service has two key features:

1. *Health surveillance*, which aims to optimise the health of children by monitoring their growth and development through the ten key ages and stages and encompasses.
2. *Support to parents and families* to enhance the social well being of all members of the family.

Community Need For These Services

Need Recognised by Other Government Departments and Agencies

The need for services, as perceived by other tiers of government, may be measured by the funding provided to Council to promote these services to the community.

(5810) (5820) (5821) Out Of School Hours Care

Funding for Out Of School Hours Care programs is provided through a combination of Government grants, subsidies for disadvantaged and special needs children, childcare benefits and employment programs (staff). These funds make up approximately 75% of the Out Of School Hours funding for 2000-01 of \$205,822. The remaining 25% derives from fees charged to users.

(5840) Preschools

Funding conditions for the construction of preschools required that the buildings be used as preschools. The facilities are purpose built.

The Swan Hill North and Swan Hill South preschools receive subsidies from the State Government Department of Human Services via Council as the licensee. Subsidies are based on enrolments, in the amount of \$1,453 per capita. Enrolment fees are \$400 per child or \$150 for Health Care Card Holders.

(5850) Family Day Care

Family Day Care is funded under the Commonwealth Child Care Program. Funding for 2000-01, based on an equivalent full-time formula, was \$689,821. This amount can alter if utilisation varies during any quarter.

(5855) Children's Services Resource Development Officer

A grant of \$27,890 per annum is received from the Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services to fund the 0.6 equivalent full-time position of Children's Services Resource Development Officer; to enable the support for all Commonwealth funded children's services within the Swan Hill municipality.

(5870) Maternal and Child Health

Maternal and Child Health is funded by the State Government's Department of Human services. Funding is based on the number of children enrolled with the Maternal and Child Health Service and on the award salary of the Maternal and Child Health Nurses. For the year 2000-01 the State Government made a contribution of \$129,112, specifically for the

health and development checks occurring at, or near, the ten key ages and stages of a child's development.

Additional funding of \$58,900 was received for the "Creating Cultural Links" project, which finished 30 June 2001. In October 2000, Maternal and Child Health received additional funding for an Enhanced Home Visiting Service.

Services provided by Maternal and Child Health go beyond Swan Hill Rural City Council municipal borders, e.g to residents of Buloke Shire, Gannawarra Shire, and in New South Wales, as families who come to Swan Hill to do their shopping etc. are accessing services. This trend in the use of the service by non Swan Hill Rural City residents is increasing.

Need Recognised by Council

In December 2001 Council adopted the Municipal Health Plan, which analysed the health needs of the community and identified that the Family and Children's Services provided by Council are necessary to the continued health and well-being of the community.

The Plan does not identify any unmet needs in the area for families and children from a health perspective, which indicates that current services address community needs.

(5810) (5820) (5821) Out Of School Hours Care

Council contributed funds to develop the Out Of School Hours Care services. With the rapid increase in demand and subsequent growth of the service, the programs are now expected to operate on a breakeven basis. Out Of School Hours Care generated a small surplus in 2000-01, as can be seen from the table on page 11.

(5840) Preschools

Council does not perceive any additional need for preschool services within the municipality over and above those provided by the State Government. However, to support the existing services, and in acknowledgment of the importance of preschool education to the community, all seven Preschool buildings are provided, and maintained, free of charge by Council. Total cost to Council for maintaining the preschool buildings in 2000-01 was \$19,001.

(5850) Family Day Care

Council acknowledges the importance of this service to the community and provides funding to meet the balance of operational costs of the program that is not met by grants or user fees, when required. Family Day Care generated a small surplus in 2000-01.

(5855) Children's Services Resource Development Officer

This service is an initiative of the Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services, which is only auspiced by Council. As a result, Council expects this service to run at breakeven, and does not expect to provide additional funding to enable the service to operate. In 2000-01 Council's contribution to this program (see following table) was to cover the funding shortfall.

(5870) Maternal and Child Health

State Government funding for Maternal and Child Health Services is based on only ten key visits per child. Council recognises that for a number of families, additional support in the early years of child development will deliver positive results in the region's future citizens.

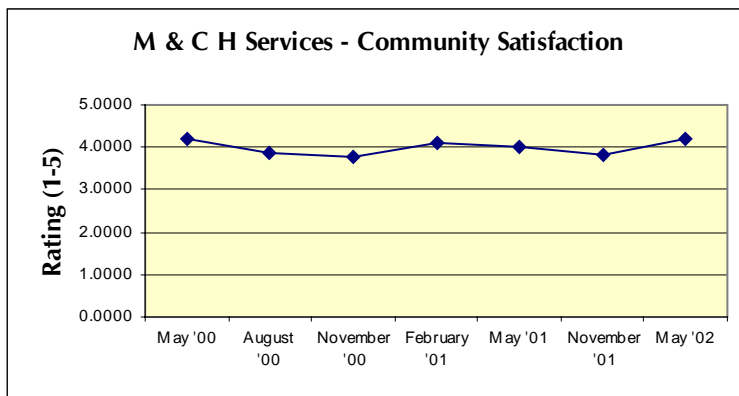
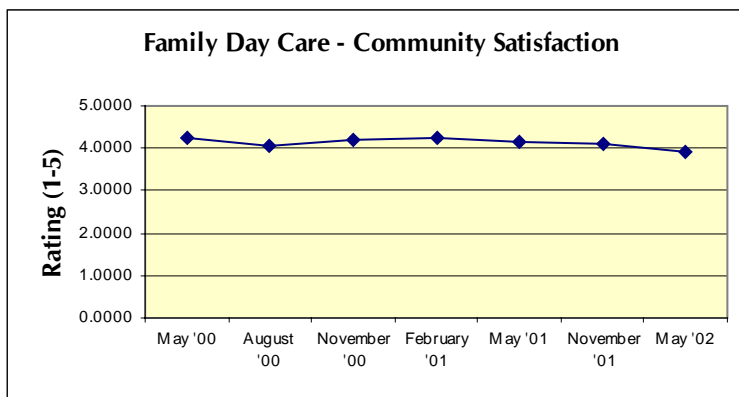
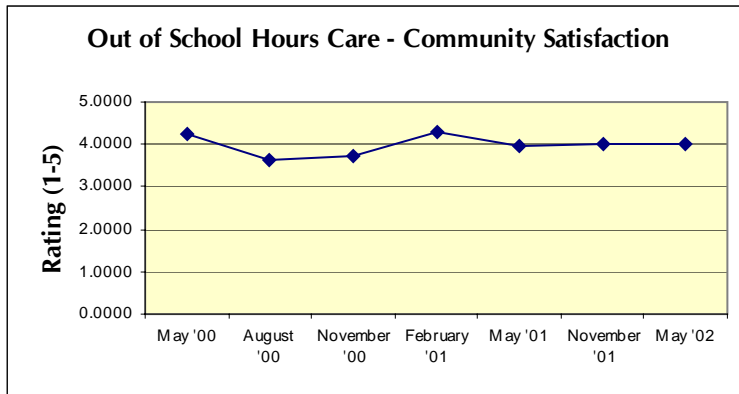
As some families need no additional assistance, it is recognised that others need occasional help, and some require significant assistance. Therefore, Council has determined that it will not limit the number of visits a child makes to the Maternal and Child Health service. Council also accepts that there are families that access the service, but do not live within the municipality.

Refer to the following table for costs of delivery of service for the year 2000-01. Note that Council's assessment of additional needs for Maternal and Child Health Services resulted in Council more than matching the State Government funding to the service in 2000-01.

Actual Costs to Programs for Financial Year 2000-2001

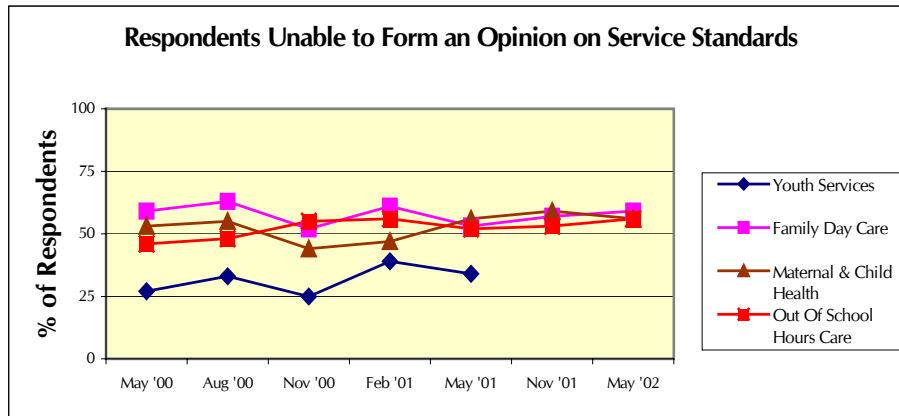
	Family Day Care	Preschools	Out Of School Hours Program	Maternal & Child Health	Children's Services. Resource Development Officer.	Total
<i>Income</i>						
Operating Subsidies	689,821	151,392	33,016	129,112	27,890	1,032,230
Special Projects Subsidies			15,300	58,900		74,200
User Fees	118,481	13,244	157,507	2,871		292,103
Other	40,706	5322			2,204	48,232
Total Income	850,008	169,958	205,822	190,883	30,094	1,446,765
<i>Expenditure</i>						
Wages & related	812,085	151,828	143,929	250,757	31,943	1,390,542
Repairs & Maintenance	5,850	17,076	5,853	9,925	738	39,441
Premises fees	725		4,965	4,330		10,020
Travel/Vehicle	10,937	112	4,632	22,836	759	39,276
Consumables: Paper, Phone etc.	6,271	2,127	7,665	16,961	854	33,878
Other	1,550	12,816	908	3,229		18,503
Capital Expenditure		5,000	5,701	13,721		24,422
Total Expenditure	837,417	188,959	173,652	321,759	34,294	1,556,082
Total Council contribution to the Service	(12,590)	19,001	(32,170)	130,877	4,200	109,317

Council's assessment of community need for these services is supported by the community's perceived need, as can be seen by the following graphs. The community's need has been identified from regular community consultation undertaken from May 2000 to today.



Consultation

In the main, funding bodies, both Federal and State, determine service levels for the programs grouped under Family and Children's Services, and the standards to be achieved. Council has provided additional funds where it perceives that there is a real benefit to the community from an increased level of service/s.

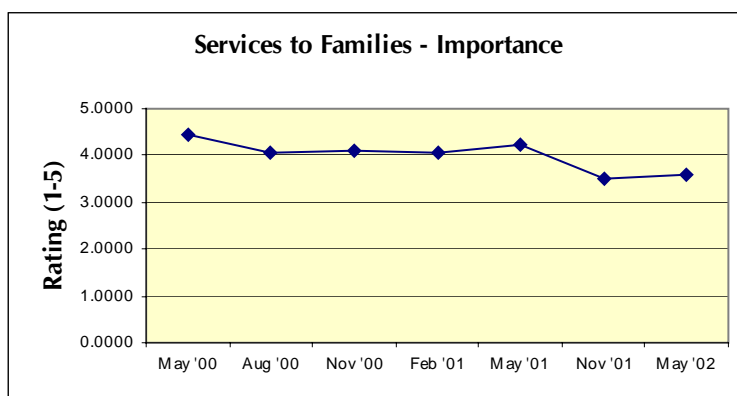


The Swan Hill Rural City Council undertakes regular community surveys to identify the level of satisfaction and perceived importance of a wide range of services.

The community has been surveyed seven

times since May 2000, on each of the services included in this review. The results of these surveys, as identified in the graphs below, reveal that there is a high level of respondents who are unable to form an opinion on particular aspects of services provided, approximately 50-60% (refer graphs below). This is due to the respondent, or their family members, not having children in the birth to twelve-year age bracket. However, the importance of having these services available to the community is consistently rated highly by all members of the community, rating between four and five on scale of one to five.

Of those who are able to form an opinion on the Family and Children's Services provided, the services are consistently rated highly, between four and five on scale of one to five.



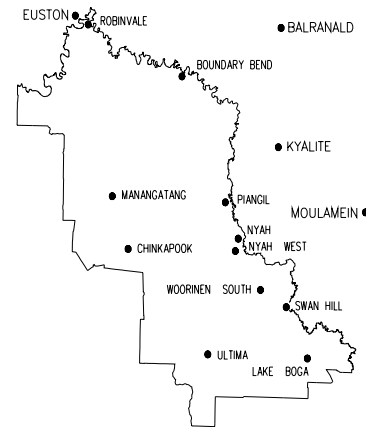
Service Responsiveness To Community Needs

Surveys show that the community is consistently satisfied with services provided. As a general statement, there is no evidence that the services are not responsive to the needs of the community.

The funding bodies determine how the services should be addressed and delivered.

Accessibility Of Services To Target Groups

The Swan Hill municipality covers an area of 6,132 square kilometres. Approximately half of the municipal population resides in Swan Hill, with a further twenty percent residing in Robinvale. The remainder of the population resides throughout the municipality. To provide accessible family and children's services to the community, both distance from a facility and cost of using the service by the recipient need to be considered. Services are available throughout the municipality as follows:



Out of School Hours Care

- Nyah West, Primary School
- Robinvale, Community Centre – Vacation Child Care
- Swan Hill, Swan Hill Primary School – After School and Vacation Child Care
- Swan Hill, Swan Hill North Primary School and St Mary's Primary School are used on pupil free days.
- Ultima, Ultima Hall
- Woorinen, Woorinen Primary School
- Kerang (Shire of Gannawarra), St Joseph's Primary School – Mobile Vacation Child Care
- Sea Lake (Shire of Buloke), Community Centre

The costs of providing the Out Of School Hours Care service are calculated on a breakeven budget. Families using the service may have their childcare costs offset by Commonwealth funded Childcare Benefits.

Preschools

- Lake Boga, Lalbert Road
- Manangatang, Community Centre
- Nyah West, Lloyd Street
- Robinvale, Leonora Street
- Swan Hill North, Pye Street
- Swan Hill South, Gray Street
- Woorinen South, McCalman Street

Fees are set by each Preschool Committee of Management, based upon recovery of costs and ability of families to afford the fees.

Family Day Care

The location at which Family Day Care is provided is only limited by the people suitable to undertake the role of carer. Currently, carers are located in and around the following locations:

- Lake Boga
- Manangatang
- Nyah/Nyah West
- Robinvale
- Swan Hill
- Ultima
- Woorinen
- Berriwillock (Shire of Buloke)
- Sea Lake (Shire of Buloke)
- Euston (NSW)

The cost of using the service is calculated on a breakeven budget. Families using the service may receive Commonwealth Childcare Benefits to help pay for the service. In 2000-01, approximately two hundred families accessed the service. Fees totalling \$191.00 were written off for this period, which indicates that overall, families are able to afford the fee structure.

Maternal and Child Health Centres

Centres are located throughout the community and operate a variety of hours based upon need. The Maternal and Child Health nurses have dual registration to operate in Victoria and New South Wales, and undertake home visits within the municipality and adjoining areas, including New South Wales.

Location	Frequency	Day/s of Operation
Lake Boga	Weekly	Thursday
Manangatang	Fortnightly	Tuesday
Nyah West	Weekly	Wednesday
Piangil	Fortnightly	Tuesday
Robinvale	Three times per week	Monday Wednesday Thursday
Swan Hill	Daily	Mon - Fri
Swan Hill and District Aboriginal Cooperative	Weekly	Monday
Ultima	Fortnightly	Tuesday
Woorinen South	Weekly	Friday

Fees are not charged for this service.

Best On Offer (Benchmarking)

Best Value legislation suggests that Council may wish to compare a service to the best on offer both in the public and private sectors. Such a comparison is usually undertaken in the form of benchmarking. The status of benchmarking being undertaken by the Families and Children's Services is as follows:

(5810) (5820) (5821) Out Of School Hours Care

Community Child Care conducted a State wide comparative analysis of fees charged for Out Of School Hours programs. Fees charged by Swan Hill Rural City Council fit within the parameters charged by other Councils.

(5850) Family Day Care

Family Day Care Victoria (whole of service) has commenced a benchmarking process looking at the following issues:

- Fees
- Salaries
- Responsibilities of staff

As it is early in the process, no further information is available at this time. Benchmarking of other services within the family services group has not been undertaken to date, although some raw data is being maintained by funding bodies.

In addition, Family Day Care is undertaking the process of seeking Quality Assurance certification.

Regular Reporting To Community On Service Standards And Levels Achieved

The Best Value legislation requires that Council regularly report to the community on the achievement of best value principles. Currently, the Families and Children's Services programs do not report to the community, either regularly or infrequently, on the achievement of service standards and levels, or their responsiveness, accessibility and outcomes of regular consultations.

How Continuous Improvement Is Being Achieved

Family and Children's Services programs achieve the requirements set out by funding bodies. In addition, staff are proactive in identifying ways to more fully meet the needs of those utilising their services, and in identifying further areas of need in the community. The following projects have been undertaken to address identified needs and to improve the quality of services provided.

Quality Assurance

National Standards, endorsed in Victoria in 1995 for Family Day Care and Out Of School Hours Care, are core standards for service operation and provide a national benchmark to aspire best practice. Quality Assurance builds on the base of core standards, focusing more on the level and nature of care that is provided for service users. Continuous Improvement targets are set as part of the Quality Assurance process.

(5810) (5820) (5821) Out Of School Hours Care

The Commonwealth began the implementation of Quality Assurance in July 2001, and is currently consulting with the Out Of School Hours Care sector. The Out Of School Hours Care service is due to begin the Quality Assurance process within twelve months.

(5850) Family Day Care

Swan Hill Family Day Care began the Quality Assurance process in October 2001 and expects to complete the process in 2003.

Other Initiatives

(5810) (5820) (5821) Out Of School Hours Care

Out Of School Hours Care has acquired a bus, which travels to various schools to pick up the children, taking them to a central location for after school care. The bus is also used during vacation periods to take children on excursions and to alternate location venues, such as visits to the library etc. This innovative addition to the service has resulted in a significant increase in the accessibility of the service and in the number of people utilising Out Of School Hours Care.

(5850) Family Day Care

Fifteen family day carers have signed up for traineeships for Certificate 3 Community Services/Childcare. The additional knowledge gained by the carers will enable higher quality care to be delivered. It is understood that, Swan Hill Rural City Council is the first Council in Victoria to have facilitated traineeships for family day carers.

(5855) Children's Services Resource Development Officer

There are up to fifty Children's Services Resource Development Officers in Victoria. A major concern that has been identified is a lack of consistency across workplaces in Sponsors' expectations of the role of the Children's Services Resource Development Officer. As a result a working party has been set up by the Commonwealth Government, which includes Children's Services Resource Development Officers, to determine the parameters of the role. A clarification of the role is likely to result in an improved service to our community.

(5870) Maternal and Child Health

In addition to their core service, Maternal and Child Health undertake the following:

- *Accredited Immunisation Practitioners*
All Maternal and Child Health nurses are Department of Human Services accredited Immunisation Practitioners, having completed the theoretical and practical modules of the course. This makes Swan Hill among the first accredited service providers for Maternal and Child Health in the region.
- *St Mary's Primary School Personal Development Program*
This is an annual fee for service program delivered to year 5 and 6 students, covering the issues of puberty and conception. Students and the school have found the program to be extremely worthwhile.
- *Vic Health – 'Active for Life'* *Jan – Dec 2001*
A weekly exercise program for isolated families, conducted at no fee to recipients. The program provides fitness, fun and socialisation and is targeted at single women and their families in the housing commission area in Swan Hill.
- *PRISM (Program of Resources, Information & Support for Mothers)*
5-year study, 1998 -2003
PRISM is a project to improve the physical health and emotional well-being of mothers after childbirth. Swan Hill Rural City Council is one of sixteen Victorian metropolitan and rural municipalities that are taking part in the study, and is acting as one of the eight 'control' groups.

The program began in August 2000 and includes all mothers who gave birth over the following eighteen months. Findings will be available in the latter part of 2004. Study outcomes will be useful for the Municipal Health Plan process and in planning for family and children's services in the municipality.

- *Positive Parenting Program (PPP)*
Triple P is a Positive Parenting Program that promotes good communications and strong relationships between parents and children. The program is designed for families with children between two to ten years of age.

New Initiative Program – “Creating Cultural Links” – Evaluation Report

This program provided services specifically for Aboriginal and Polynesian families in the municipality. A formal evaluation of this program will be released imminently. Findings and recommendations in this report will be helpful in service planning.

Youth Services

From 1992 to 2001 the Swan Hill Rural City Council operated a Youth program, first in Robinvale and later, both in Robinvale and Swan Hill. Over time, Council became concerned that the service may not achieve its stated objectives. This service has been re-auspiced by the Salvation Army, to provide a better, more targeted service to the community in a cost efficient manner. Please refer to Appendix 2 for further information.

Local Employment Growth/Retention

The services grouped under Family and Children's Services have not been outsourced as part of the Compulsory Competitive Tendering, undertaken by Victorian Councils, 1995-1999. All these services are performed by staff of the Swan Hill Rural City Council and Family Day Care carers. All carers live within the region.

Family and Children's Services also focus on the economic welfare of families with young children, as the provision of safe, affordable childcare enables parents to participate in the workforce.

Partnerships With Third Parties To Achieve Service Objectives

(5810) (5820) (5821) Out Of School Hours Care

The following people and organisations work in partnership with Out Of School Hours Care to provide the service to the community:

- Brownies/Guides
- Childcare Community Services, to access other programs.
- Computer specialists
- Golf coaches, Murray Downs Golf Pro Shop
- Library resources
- Music teachers
- Play Works (Melbourne) for special needs children
- Swimming coaches
- Specialist art teachers
- Tennis coaches, Ken Harrison Tennis Club

Council is currently working in partnership with the Swan Hill Central Primary School to construct a purpose built Out Of School Hours facility. It is anticipated that this facility will greatly enhance the service.

(5850) Family Day Care

A partnership exists with the Swan Hill North Preschool for the Play Group to utilise the facilities when there are no preschool activities. This allows enhanced activities for the Play Group without duplicating resources.

(5855) Children's Services Resource Development Officer

Partnerships exist with the following organisations to enable the Children's Services Resource Development Officer to achieve service objectives:

- Playworks (Melbourne) – Children's Services Resource Development Officer's can apply for training, and can also seek additional funding and information for special needs children.
- Early Intervention specialists (Swan Hill and environs) – children with particular needs e.g. speech therapy, occupational therapy or physiotherapy are referred for assessment.
- Multicultural Resource Centre (Melbourne) – promote multiculturalism within children's services. Training available for Children's Services Resource Development Officer's and service staff.

- Children's Services Resource Development Officer rural network – Forum for discussing Work Plans and sharing of issues associated with the service.

(5870) Maternal and Child Health

- The Australian Breastfeeding Association uses a room at the Swan Hill Maternal and Child Health facility to conduct meetings. This augments the Maternal and Child Health objective to encourage breastfeeding.
- A Premature Children Support Group, commenced in February 2002, in partnership with Early Intervention Services.
- A Young Mums Group is a joint initiative of Swan Hill Community House and Maternal and Child Health. The group objectives include; to provide opportunities for socialisation, support related to parenting issues, information relating to family functioning and childcare, and reconnection into education and work.
- Maternal and Child Health nurses introduce the service to prospective parents at the antenatal classes run by Swan Hill District Hospital.
- Robinvale Maternal and Child Health Centre is located at Robinvale District Health Services. This partnership enables medical services to be readily utilised if needed. The same arrangement exists at Manangatang.
- Partnerships exist with other allied health professionals to speak to the new mothers groups, i.e. Podiatrists, Dieticians, local Pharmacists and Physiotherapists.
- A culturally sensitive family preservation program for Aboriginal families, Muthi Miah, has requested a presentation of the Positive Parenting Program (PPP). The approach is a result of interest expressed by Aboriginal families (possibly as a result of the 'Creating Cultural Links' program).

Competitive Neutrality

Competitive Neutrality Policy requires councils to remove or offset any net advantages arising from government ownership of significant business activities. To demonstrate the application of competitive neutrality in the context of Best Value, the following issues should be identified;

- Whether a service is a significant business
- Details of the competitive neutrality measures applied to the significant business
- Justification for any non-application of competitive neutrality measures to a significant business

A significant business for the purpose of competitive neutrality has the following characteristics:

- Provides a good or service for a fee.
- Local monopoly is significant.
- Has a reasonable share of the market.
- Has a waiting list when other competitors have vacancies.
- Has the market power to affect the demand, supply or price of the good or service in the wider market.

(5810) (5820) (5821) Out Of School Hours Care

The Commonwealth has made a determination that all new places for childcare will be publicly advertised. The recent public advertisement for a number of places available for Out Of School Hours programs saw no one in the private sector come forward. These places were allocated to Council as the successful service provider. As a consequence, Council believes that there is no evidence of a competitive market for this service. All additional childcare places will be made available in this competitive manner.

(5840) Preschools

There is no real alternative use for preschool buildings as they are purpose built facilities. Councils in Victoria generally do not charge rent for the use of preschool buildings, therefore we do not believe that a competing market exists.

(5850) Family Day Care

The main competitors for this service are privately run Child Care Centres. There are two Child Care Centres within the Swan Hill township and one may be developed in Robinvale in the future. Council services are not in direct competition with these Centres, as the Family Day Care service differs from that of private providers. The service provided by the private sector operates within set hours and at a fixed location, requiring parents to deliver and pick up their child/ren within the set hours of care.

Family Day Care offers flexible hours; up to twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The service can be provided either at the parent's own home or in the home of a carer. Additional services that a carer may provide can include taking a child to and from school and taking a child to his/her doctor's appointment. There is little comparability between the services provided and therefore competitive neutrality is unlikely to be a factor.

(5855) Children's Services Resource Development Officer

This is a Commonwealth supported service that operates only under the auspices of the municipality. The funding agreement precludes the charging of a fee for service; therefore there are no competitive neutrality issues.

(5870) Maternal and Child Health

Maternal and Child Health is a State Government supported program. Council has the ability to levy a fee for additional services provided above the ten key age and stage visits, but has elected not to do so because many of these services are targeted at families with particular needs. A high proportion of these families would be unable to pay user fees. As Maternal and Child Health services are only undertaken by Maternal and Child Health nurses (part of the funding requirement) it is unlikely that a market exists.

Future Improvement Options

Options to further improve the services in the future include:

- Out Of School Hours Care service to develop an effective partnership to gain a purpose built venue in Swan Hill.
- Develop outcomes, and report on same, of customer surveys undertaken to date by the Out Of School Hours Care service.
- Consultation with preschool committees in relation to occupancy of building needs, and the committees desired future relationship with Council (as a result of the Kirby report). This will enable Council to place all preschools on an equitable footing.
- Completion of benchmarking of Family Day Care services, as identified in the Benchmarking section of this report.
- Undertake regular reporting to service recipients and the wider community on service achievements.
- Identify a new facility in Swan Hill to house a Maternal and Child Health Centre.
- Undertake formal evaluation of the Positive Parenting Program (PPP) by Maternal and Child Health.
- Undertake benchmarking of Maternal and Child Health services.
- Seek to monitor technical expertise for service delivery for Family and Children's Services, i.e. ensure we are able to attract and retain appropriately qualified staff, including maternal and child health nurses and preschool teachers.
- Investigate options for the community to formally participate in determining service levels and standards.

Quality And Cost Standards To Measure Performance Outcomes

Best Value requires that Quality and Cost Standards be developed and reported, by which the community may measure the performance of a service.

(5810) (5820) (5821) Out Of School Hours Care

Quality Standard/s	Year 02/03	Year 03/04	Year 04/05
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet the outcomes of the funding and service agreements. Community Satisfaction Rating (Surveys). Achieve Quality Assurance (QA) Certification. 	90%	90%	95%
	3.5 N/A	3.8 N/A	4 100%

Cost Standard/s	Year 02/03	Year 03/04	Year 04/05
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost per hour of care delivered. $\frac{\\$ \text{ Cost of Programs}}{\text{Total No. Hours of Service Delivered}}$ 	\$2.80	\$3.15	\$3.55

(5840) Preschools

Quality Standard/s	Year 02/03	Year 03/04	Year 04/05
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Premises meet the annual inspection requirements. 	< 10 non compliance points.	< 8 non compliance points.	< 8 non compliance points.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet the outcomes of the funding and service agreements. 	90%	90%	95%

Cost Standard/s	Year 02/03	Year 03/04	Year 04/05
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost of maintaining facilities 	\$14,015	\$15,000	\$16,000

(5855) Children's Services Resource Development Officer

Quality Standard/s	Year 02/03	Year 03/04	Year 04/05
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet the outcomes of the funding and service agreements. 	90%	90%	95%

Cost Standard/s	Year 02/03	Year 03/04	Year 04/05
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$ Cost of service paid for by Council rates. 	\$1,050	\$2,000	\$2,500

(5850) Family Day Care

Quality Standard/s	Year 02/03	Year 03/04	Year 04/05
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achieve the outcomes of the funding and service agreements. Achieve Quality Assurance (QA) certification. Achieve service improvement targets per QA Plan. Community Satisfaction Rating (Surveys). 	90%	90%	95%
	N/A	100%	N/A
	N/A	N/A	50%
	3.5	3.8	4

Cost Standard/s	Year 02/03	Year 03/04	Year 04/05
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost per hour of care delivered. <p style="text-align: center;"> <u>Total \$ Cost of FDC Program</u> Total No. Hours of Service Delivered </p>	\$4.70	\$5.20	\$5.70

(5870) Maternal and Child Health

Quality Standard/s	Year 02/03	Year 03/04	Year 04/05
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Percentage of children enrolled from birth notifications received. No. of families participating in the MCH Enhanced Home Visits Service (EHVS). Community Satisfaction Rating (Surveys) (NB possible rating from 1-5). 	98%	98%	98%
	55	55	55
	4.0	4.0	4.0

Cost Standard/s	Year 02/03	Year 03/04	Year 04/05
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost per Consultation. <p style="text-align: center;"> <u>Total \$ Cost of Operating MCH</u> No. of consultations including centre, home, phone, parenting consultations </p>	\$41.87	\$43.54	\$45.28

Attachment 1

Reference Documents

Appendix 1

BEST VALUE REVIEW - YOUTH SERVICES

August 2002

Brief History Of The Service

The Swan Hill Rural City Council's Youth Program began in January 1992 with the position being originally 4 days per week situated in Robinvale. By 1994 the Youth Program had grown to the extent that 3 youth workers were employed. A Co-coordinator in a full-time position situated in Swan Hill and two part time positions, one existing in Robinvale working primarily with long term unemployed and the other in Swan Hill as a Koori Youth Sport and Recreation worker. In 1996 funding for the Koori Youth Worker position ceased. As a result, the program operated with a co-coordinator and a part-time officer. The Rural Youth Service then operated from the 'One Stop Youth Shop' located in the Swan Hill Town Hall, (full-time), and the Rural Youth Information Service (RYIS) located in Robinvale at the Resource Centre (part-time). Currently the program operates from Swan Hill with the service focus on providing outreach programs and projects to the outlying areas.

Program Services

Until recently, the Department of Human Services determined the focus of the program through its Funding and Service Agreement with Council. However, responsibility for the program now rests with the Department of Education and Training through its Office for Youth.

The Youth Service was established on the concept of the community development approach to service delivery. Both young people and community groups are encouraged to be involved at all levels of the service provided. Users of the services generally can be broken into two categories, they are:

- Those who utilise the service for personal support, and
- Those who use the recreation projects developed by the service.

It is estimated as of June the 30th 2000 there were 4258 young people (approximately 20% of the municipality's population) aged 10-25 years residing in the municipality. The youth service provides for **all young people** aged between 10-25 years but has a focus on 12-18 year olds.

At the time Council began reviewing its involvement in funded services, the program received less than \$27,000 per annum in funding from the state government. This seriously limited Council's capacity to provide a meaningful program. Effectively, Council could only afford to provide one officer, operating out of an office in Swan Hill, to service the needs of the entire municipality.

Corporate Plan

In July 2000, Council released its Five Year Corporate Plan and Annual Business Plan.

The Corporate Plan, which encapsulates the vision of our community through its representative Council, set a direction, which sought to support and build on the rapid and exciting growth of the region.

The business plan contained a number of major reviews and created management strategies. The aim was to ensure that future Councils had sound information and bases from which to make decisions and to be able to optimise the financial and human resources available to manage and deliver both assets and services.

The Finance and Service Provision component of the corporate plan's goal is "To ensure that Council maintains adequate financial capacity to deliver an appropriate range of services". Underpinning the goal were a number of strategies and actions. One of the strategies was to review the full range of programs and services in accordance with the corporate objectives of Council. This in turn was reinforced with the short-term action to review programs that receive significant funding from other tiers of government to identify whether they should be re-auspiced.

It was under this strategy that a review of the provision of Youth Services in our municipality was undertaken.

Re-auspicing of the Youth Program.

During the early months of 2001, Council officers became aware that the Salvation Army was planning an expansion of its services, including the appointment of a Youth Officer. Coincidentally, Council's own Youth Officer tendered his resignation, triggering the opportunity to commence dialogue with the Salvation Army about the future direction of youth services in the municipality.

It was apparent to both the Salvation Army and Council that, by combining the funding available to both organisations, a far better service could be offered. The additional benefits included:

- Establishment of a drop-in centre located at Salvation Army premises.
- Access to support services offered by the Salvation Army, including counselling and drug and alcohol support.
- Access to support staff for the Youth Officer, including an extensive team of volunteers.

In July 2001 Council agreed to re-auspice the Youth Program to the Salvation Army (with the concurrence of the Department of Human Services).

FreeZA Program:

Having successfully integrated the Youth Program into the Salvation Army's services, attention was then directed at transferring responsibility for the FreeZA program. FreeZA is funded by the Office for Youth (Department of Education and Training), and its objective is to provide drug and alcohol free entertainment for young people. The Office for Youth agreed to allow the Salvation Army to administer the program on behalf of Council for the remainder of the current contract. The Office for Youth is so pleased with the quality of the events put on by the Salvation Army; they have awarded the next contract to the Army.

Summary:

The re-assigning of both the Youth Program and the FreeZA program to the Salvation Army is an outstanding example of cooperation between Council and a community-based agency. The benefit to the community is clearly demonstrated in way the Youth Program is now delivered, with its drop-in centre and additional resources. And it has all been achieved at no additional cost to the Government, Council or the community.

Attachment 2

Community Survey Comments

Family and Children's Services Community Survey Comments

May 2000

31 Comments

- Personal knowledge of staff members activities.
- Contact with some of the services.
- Nephews/nieces attend childcare. Always need to update and improve services.
- Should be more facilities for the younger community. Need more events/activities. Organised/supervised activities.
- Shutting down of child & maternal health centre near hospital, very bad, and shut down of pre-school, needs replacing in CBD - should have a maternal & health centre in the north - now time restrictions for new mums.
- Not enough youth activities (too much underage drinking).
- Lack of contact with these areas. So don't know.
- Use it a lot.
- Heard about good programs.
- Only cinema - no night things for youth to go to. Nothing to do.
- Could be a lot more done for youth.
- A casual maternal child health care worker.
- After school & vacation care is great.
- Skating/roller rink would be good.
- Hope after school program doesn't cost anything (general ratepayers).
- Skate park very important.
- No young children.
- Council does too much.
- Vacation program wonderful.
- Lack of publicity of what council does for youth.
- Utilise childcare service. Very happy with FDC service.
- Thinks Marg Free does a very good job.
- More things for kids eg rollerblades.
- Not enough on for youth eg skateboard.
- Observing & newsletters noticed what's available.
- No holiday programs or after school programs in Lake Boga. Council does a good job.
- Lack of opportunity for youth of community ie skateboard. Most services provided by private & non-council organisations.
- When used
- Child carer - doesn't have any problems.
- Rollerblading area - any youth requests seem to take 3 years, at which point is no longer needed.
- Comment from younger parents that services are good.

August 2000
26 Comments

- Lack of free areas for use of the community to enjoy themselves (to do what they enjoy). Equally important to look after the young as it is for the older people.
- Doesn't have children of her own to know much about the services.
- Not enough entertainment/things to do for young people.
- Young people do really well now, compared to what it was like for me.
- Grandchildren coming on, therefore children issues are important.
- She had two older children and a teenager. Need more sporting facilities, run well, so they can keep out of trouble and enjoy themselves.
- Important that services are available but not personally concerned about them.
- Services in Robinvale for teenagers needed - 12-16 year olds.
- Duck pond (playground) in Yana Street is dangerous when it rains because kids get into the water.
- Everything is in Swan Hill, very little in Robinvale.
- Person who has just completed welfare qualifications.
- No use for them.
- My children.
- Likes to have things available for young people to do.
- Children, grandchildren need to be looked after or repercussions occur.
- Young people /youth - pass home and appear to be a lot of no-hopers, miss behaving around the street, particularly in McCallum Street.
- Has young children.
- Needs skate park.
- Make sure children in our town, when they grow up they stay, and they have good facilities to grow up with.
- Only has young children.
- Services to skate rink seem to have been halted, kept a secret and nothing happening, that the public has been aware of.
- Trying to keep up the amenities in Manangatang to keep the young in the area.
- Can see adverse affects if services not provided.
- Needs to have information on child services (recently widowed).
- School program very good.
- Has young family and needs the services.

November 2000
32 Comments

- Have not used services.
- She has children in that age group and they need older programmes set up.
- Vandalism.
- Where can kids skate off the street - hope the skate place goes ahead down the park.
- Would like to see training programs set-up to help unemployed youth in the area.
- Youth needs more entertainment. Sporting great.
- Lack of support for younger adults/teenagers. Council doesn't appear to take an active interest by listening or acting on advice.

- Haven't used services yet.
- Has children so important.
- Has no children so does not affect as yet.
- My Children - M & C Health Centre not adequate due to lack of facilities - only one in Swan Hill.
- Day care is out of reach for lots of families due to costs.
- Kids would like a bowling alley, meeting place, somewhere to socialize.
- Not much entertainment for youth - not much to do.
- Happy with pre-school and crèches.
- No effort for the youth entertainment for 10-17 yr olds in Swan Hill.
- Need more activities for the youth 12-18 yrs old.
- Having children in age group.
- Youth are getting bored.
- Nyah West immunisation closed down - very upsetting have to travel into Swan Hill.
- Concerned re attitude of some young people in community.
- More equipment for kids to play with.
- Older children (teens) need more things to do other than roam the streets.
- Need 10 pin bowling, go carts etc.
- Skating rink promised (will it eventuate and when).
- Young children.
- Provide more youth services.
- Have granddaughter in 2 age bracket.
- M&CH is excellent, but hrs worked are minimal, more time where you don't have to make an appointment. Immunisation - no room to line up need bigger area.
- Vandalism of tree plantings. Graffiti is a concern.
- Council needs to back the community groups.
- Lot of young nieces and nephews and love after school programs.

February 2001
38 Comments

- Problems with youth services, there is no information as to where or how these services can be accessed.
- Young people not interested regardless of the amount of effort.
- Has nieces and nephews.
- Got young children myself.
- The building of skateboard facility a good idea - keep them off the footpaths - not many places to have fun. No facilities for the young ones to let their hair down and not annoy anyone.
- Having small children and operating family day care.
- Two younger kids, plus trouble with getting childcare.
- Only hotel opened - no entertainment for youth.
- More sporting events and things to keep younger people entertained.
- Any dealings have been good.
- Provide services for the youth/sports grounds etc.
- Having young children.

- I am a police officer and the skate park is dragging on far too long.
- Youth services lacking, especially delay on skate park. More activities for youth will keep them occupied and reduce vandalism.
- Can't really comment, have grand children but does not know much about younger youth services.
- Her age being over 18.
- Not enough to amuse young people at night.
- No family.
- Does not seem to be enough childcare.
- Need to do more for younger people.
- Too old, don't know.
- Having a teenager - not enough things to do to keep out of trouble. In Nyah nothing.
- Skating rink taking too long.
- I think there should be home help for rural areas and for those mothers with new babies, especially those with two or more young children.
- Cut back on M&CH services in north swan hill. Kids need more entertainment, including longer pool hours.
- Concrete track near river for unexperienced people. Not into sport. What is there for younger people.
- Completion of park at Ultima, great job. Swan hill very little - nothing seems to be done. Consult with the community before planning new ideas (children).
- Skate park - important it goes ahead. Concerned about things for younger children to do. Recreation centre would be great.
- Youth should be provided with services in the budget.
- Feels we rely on council & education providers too much - go back to family responsibility.
- Work in a school.
- Slow to complete a number of projects, including skate park.
- FDC good for the women who use the service - not so good for the women providing the service. There is an excess of paperwork (daughter was a provider) -not worth their while. Better off on the dole. Lose too many benefits for the little money earned.
- Activities centre in Robinvale for young people to go.
- Adult children.
- Believes we need more activities for the younger generation eg in winter when it is cold.
- She could not comment due to how old she is.
- Need more things for kids eg more activities.

May 2001

24 Comments

- Need a skate park and in-ground heated pool.
- I have 3 small children and feel children's services are important.
- Sports grounds are kept good. Delay in skate park in not good.
- Lack of sporting facilities for youth in Robinvale.
- Youngsters roaming around as there is nothing for them to do.
- Not enough entertainment for under 18's.

- Lives over the road from Kindergarten and is aware of the issues regarding it.
- Promised skating park and hasn't happened.
- More facilities needed for youth in Robinvale.
- Need more youth facilities - particularly skate park.
- More entertainment for the under 18's.
- Skate ramp important, would be good to have one at Nyah/Nyah West.
- Family day care fantastic.
- Skate Park would be good if it happened.
- If the youth are not sports minded there is nothing else for them to do.
- Youth service is non-existent.
- Vandalism streets - bored young people. Skates board.
- Need skate park or similar area. Need BMX track. Not enough for the youth.
- For children nothing out of school to do. No cinema. Council runs disco twice a year. Not enough amusements for children.
- Not enough for underage children - need skate park.
- No lighting in the smaller towns.
- Seems to be more for the aged than younger people.
- She works with children. Kids should be provided facilities out of school.
- Important that young people and young families have support.

November 2001

15 Comments

- Son's children attend after school hours care and loves it.
- Thinks the swan hill maternal & child health centre is fabulous.
- Young bloke in day care and quite well run.
- My granddaughter is very happy with out of school programs.
- Very happy with holiday program.
- Her children are too old to know.
- Childcare facilities quite good.
- No kids.
- No children.
- Working mother. Not much available after school.
- We need more family day carers in Manangatang.
- Has kids that use the services and find them quite good.
- Between working with maternal profession and school programs - parents often comment on excellent services in these areas.
- We do not use child services.
- At Ultima they have had five nurses in three years and hard for consistency.

May 2002

14 Comments

- Skateboards.
- The mobile health service.
- Out of school service for pupil free days.

- Really good – excellent.
- Used maternal care and is very good.
- Has kids.
- Excellent.
- Experience.
- Not enough done in Robinvale.
- Doesn't believe in family day care for stay at home mothers who just want a break. Taxpayer shouldn't have to pay.
- Have used family day care and MCH and contacted after school hours.
- Not familiar.
- Need more family day care spots. More facilities for kids.
- No after school program.