

Swan Hill Rural City Council

YOUTH STRATEGY

2026-2030





Acknowledgement of Country

Swan Hill Rural City Council acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, and pays its respects to their elders, past, and present.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We want every young person in our municipality to have the chance to reach their potential. This Strategy comes from research, facts, and the ideas shared by young people.

This Strategy provides a clear direction for Swan Hill Rural City Council and highlights where Council can have the greatest positive social and collective impact in connecting, providing support, listening and engaging, and building our future.

By building on our strengths and embracing internal improvements, we aim to deliver opportunities more seamlessly across life stages, supporting young people as they navigate important transitions.

Our comprehensive planning process has identified key focus areas we will prioritise in the coming years:

- Empowering Voice and Leadership: Encouraging active participation, connection, and a strong youth voice across the municipality.
- Supporting Wellbeing: Fostering physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing for all young people.
- Growing Skills and Opportunity: Creating pathways for education, training, and meaningful employment.

This Strategy provides a roadmap for action, guiding Council's efforts to support young people in reaching their full potential and contributing to a thriving community.



YOUTH STRATEGY SNAPSHOT

PILLARS

GOALS

Empowering Voice & Leadership

Encouraging active participation, connection, and a strong youth voice across the municipality.

Increase youth participation in Council-led programs

Refresh and promote youth-facing programs and identities

Support youth-led event coordination and delivery

Support leadership development and youth involvement

Ensure youth voice is embedded in Council and community decision-making

Supporting Wellbeing

Fostering physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing for all young people.

Ensure young people have access to fit-for-purpose spaces that meet their needs

Provide accessible and flexible youth support across the municipality

Strengthen early intervention and collaboration across sectors

Growing Skills & Opportunity

Creating pathways for education, training, and meaningful employment.

Build career and training pathways for young people

Strengthen the long-term sustainability of the Youth Support Program (YSP)

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Message from the Mayor



Cr Stuart King

"Young people are not only the future of our municipality – they are a vital part of our community. They bring new ideas, energy, and leadership."

Developing a Youth Strategy is something Swan Hill Rural City Council believes is essential. For many towns across our municipality, this Strategy will help fill gaps that no other service currently addresses.

This Strategy was shaped through conversations with young people, families, schools, services, and local leaders. Their voices, ideas, and hopes are at the centre of what we've created."

Message from Our Youth support Team

Every day, we see the incredible strengths of young people, many facing significant challenges that shape their lives. We witness first-hand the positive influence of timely support and access to services and how this can have life-changing benefits for young people across our municipality. We know that life isn't always easy. Many young people are balancing big responsibilities, managing with limited resources, and feeling pressure to make important decisions about their futures. These realities remind us why youth services are so important, because with the right guidance, opportunities, and encouragement, young people can thrive. And when they thrive, our whole community benefits.

Young people are already stepping up: taking on leadership roles, creating new opportunities, supporting their peers, and showing determination to build stronger, more connected communities. This Youth Strategy reflects what we've heard from young people, stakeholders and the broader community. It sets a clear direction to ensure that young people in Swan Hill, Robinvale, and our smaller towns have the services, spaces, and opportunities they deserve. It's about creating real pathways for growth, connection, and leadership, while recognising the unique strengths of our communities. Thank you to everyone who has shared their voice, ideas, and experiences with us.

About the Strategy

The Swan Hill Rural City Council Youth Strategy 2026–2030 provides clear direction and reflects our commitment to support young people in any community or rural area within our municipality.

This Strategy sets out a shared vision for how Council and its partners can work together so that all young people—no matter where they live, their background, or their circumstances—have the chance to be safe, healthy, connected, and confident in their future.

Young people told us what matters most to them: easier access to services, better mental health support, more opportunities to learn and work, safe spaces to connect with others, and a real say in shaping their community.

This Strategy is our response.

Our Vision

“A thriving municipality where all young people are valued, heard, and supported to reach their full potential.”

Our vision is for a community where all young people are safe, supported, and confident — with fair access to opportunities, no matter where they live. We commit to walking alongside young people, not making decisions for them.

Together, we’re building a municipality where:

- Young people have a real voice and influence decisions
- Their contributions are valued and celebrated
- Every young person’s potential is recognised and supported



Integrated Plan Framework

The Youth Strategy for our municipality is part of a **broader framework that aligns with national, state, and local plans.**

National level

Aligns with **Engage: A strategy to include young people** in the decisions that shape their lives.



State level

Reflects **Victoria's Youth Strategy 2022–2027**, which sets a vision for all young Victorians



Local level

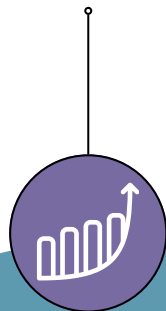
Directly connects with the **Swan Hill Rural City Council Plan, Municipal Early – Middle Years Plan, Council's Workforce Plan, and Annual Budget** to make sure the wellbeing of young people is embedded in Council's day-to-day work.

Alignment with Council Plan

The Youth Strategy strengthens the delivery of the Council Plan, ensuring young people's needs and voices are embedded across all strategic pillars.

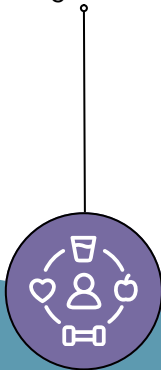
Growth and Development

Builds local workforce through youth training, employment pathways and future skills.



Health and Wellbeing

Expands access to safe spaces and early support to promote mental, physical and social wellbeing.



Infrastructure

Advocates for youth hubs and fit-for-purpose spaces that meet current and future needs.



Community and Liveability

Strengthens youth leadership and participation to foster inclusive, connected communities.



Environmental Sustainability

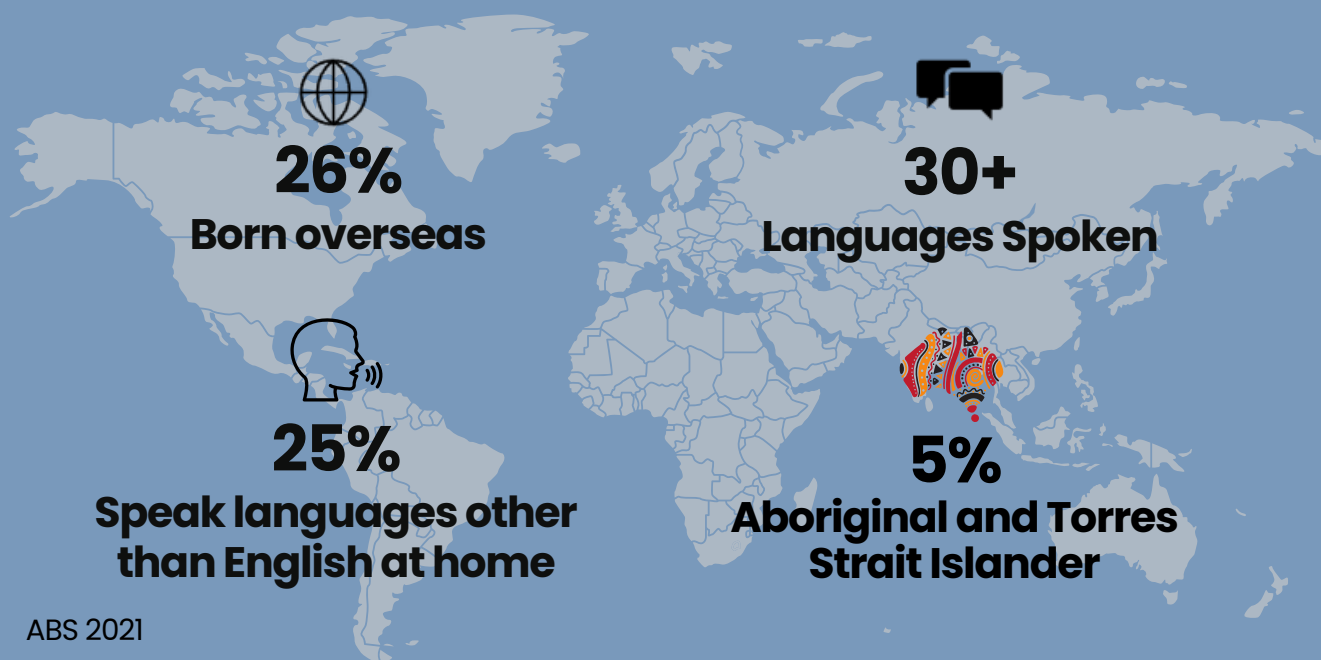
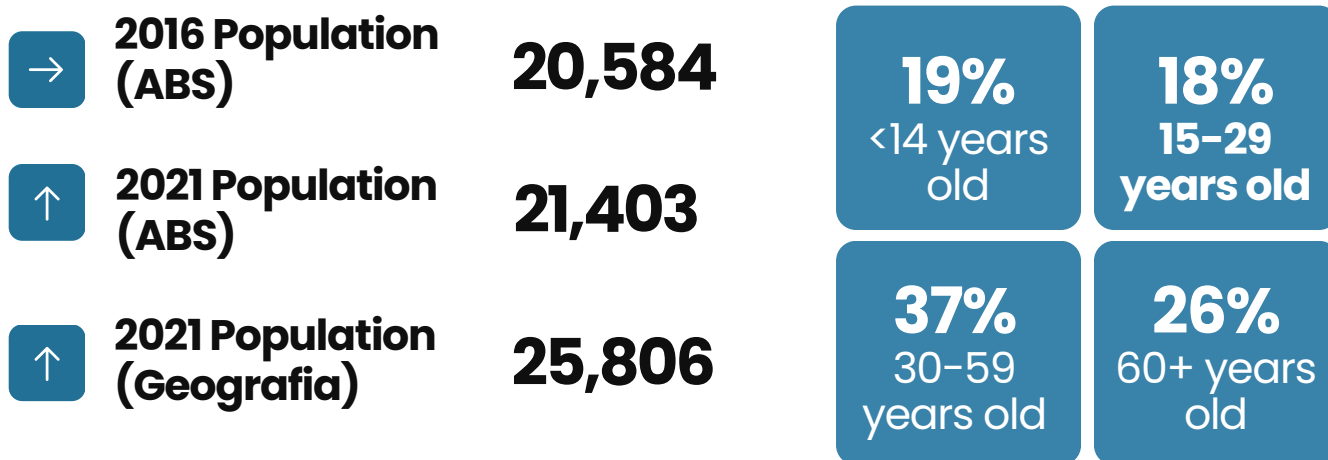
Engages young people in climate and community planning to build resilience.



Transparency and Effectiveness

Embeds youth voice in decision-making to ensure open and accountable governance.

Snapshot of Our Municipality



Workforce



Why we need a Youth strategy

Evidence and insights on young people in Swan Hill Rural City Council



There are around

3,399 young people aged 12–25 years old

ABS Estimated Resident Population (2024)

52.8%

First nations population in Swan Hill Municipality (967) are 24 or under

47.9%

First nations population in Robinvale (278) are 24 or under

↑ 20.6% Compared to previous year for family violence incident

Total Family Violence Incident

2023

579

2024

698

171

Victims of Crime aged 0–24



Youth mortality in SHRCC is more than twice the Victorian average

Youth mortality
(15–24 yrs)
65.3 per 100,000

Victoria

SDR = 100

SHRCC

SDR = 244



Robinvale faces high levels of disadvantage, ranking among Victoria's impacted areas

SEIFA
IRSD Score

Victoria

~1000

SHRCC

940.6



Teenage pregnancy rates are improving from 2012, but remain higher than the state average

Teenage fertility
(15–19 yrs)
number of birth per 1,000 (ASR)

Victoria

9.1

2019

8.2

2020

SHRCC

13.5

2019

10.1

2020



Around one in five young people are not in education, employment or training

Youth engagement
(Learning or Earning 15–24 yrs)

Victoria

88–89%

SHRCC

82%



Youth homelessness occurs at five times the state rate

Homelessness
per 10,000

Victoria

23

SHRCC

111



Many young people leave school earlier, with fewer completing tertiary study than average

Level of Education Completed (%)

Victoria

60%

Year 12 or Equivalent

28%

Bachelor degree or above

SHRCC

41%

Year 12 or Equivalent

12%

Bachelor degree or above

Why we need a Youth strategy

Why We Need a Youth Strategy

Council's Youth Support Program fills service gaps, particularly in Robinvale and smaller rural communities. It provides transport, service navigation, and one-on-one advocacy where no other services exist.

A new strategy will underpin advocacy for a permanent Robinvale youth position and a Children and Youth Hub in Swan Hill.

High youth mortality, elevated teenage fertility, NEET rates, and very high homelessness rates show that there are urgent needs to address.

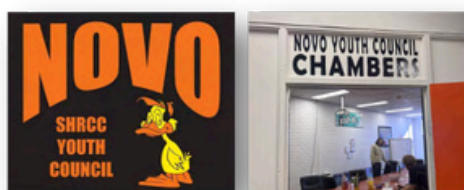
Young people across the Swan Hill municipality face **greater disadvantage and poorer outcomes** than the Victorian average.

Swan Hill Rural City Council's Youth Support Program provides **generalist, flexible support** designed to meet the diverse and evolving needs of young people across our municipality. Our team has the agility to engage young people who may not qualify for other services but still require advocacy, connection, or support.

Co-design is central to our service. Young people are not just consulted, they are active partners in shaping the services, programs, and opportunities that this service delivers.

The Youth Support Program plays a vital role in **filling service gaps across the municipality**, particularly in Robinvale and our rural communities, where service options are limited. Our program is often the only service actively supporting young people in these isolated areas, offering transport, service navigation, and one-on-one advocacy.

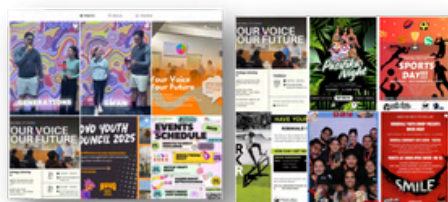
Channels of Communication with Young People



1. Youth Council



2. School Programs & SRCs



3. Social Media



4. In-person Engagement

Programs & Events (2023 to 2024)

1236

Participants

18 +

Events Delivered

17 +

Events Supported

THE VOICE OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Methodology



Survey Responses

470+

A mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches was used to understand what young people need and want, reflecting the voice of young people across the municipality.



Workshops

3

This approach ensures the Strategy reflects young people's voices and the data behind the issues they face, helping shape actions that will make a difference.



Listening Sessions

7



1:1 Consultations

10+



Desktop Research



Data & Artefacts

Youth Segmentation

The Youth Strategy captures the voices of young people by engaging them across three key age groups, recognising their unique needs and life stages.



YOUNG PEOPLE
AGED 12-15



YOUNG PEOPLE
AGED 16-20



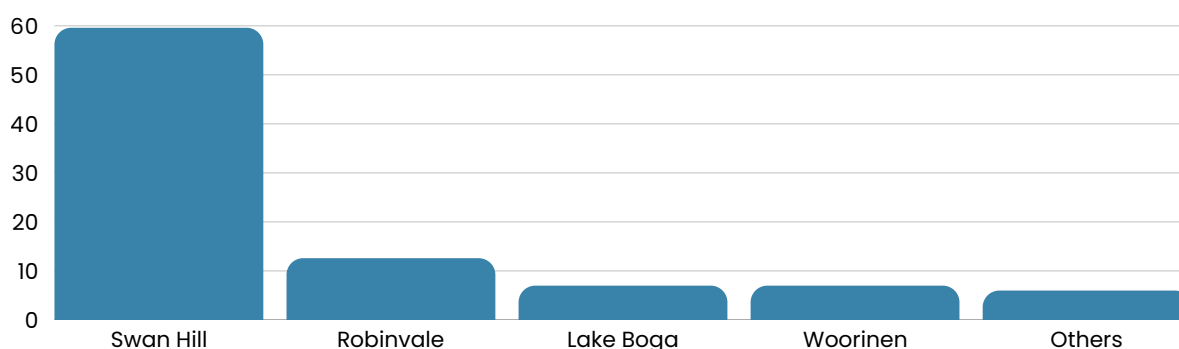
YOUNG PEOPLE
AGED 21-25

KEY ENGAGEMENT FINDINGS

Overview of Survey Respondents



Location of Respondents (%)



Diversity of Survey Respondents (%)



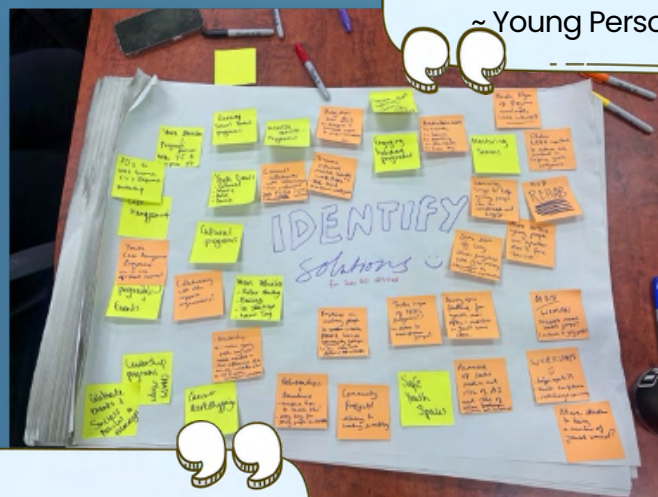
Workshop Findings

Key barriers to participation:

- Transport
- Mental health access
- Lack of safe spaces

What young people want:

- More diverse activities beyond sport
- Stronger connections with trusted adults
- Clearer post-school pathways



“It would be great to just hang out somewhere indoors when it’s raining.”
~ Young Person

“I would love to see more support for young people in Robinvale”
~ Young Person

KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

Most Important Issues in the Community by Age Group

Ages 12-15



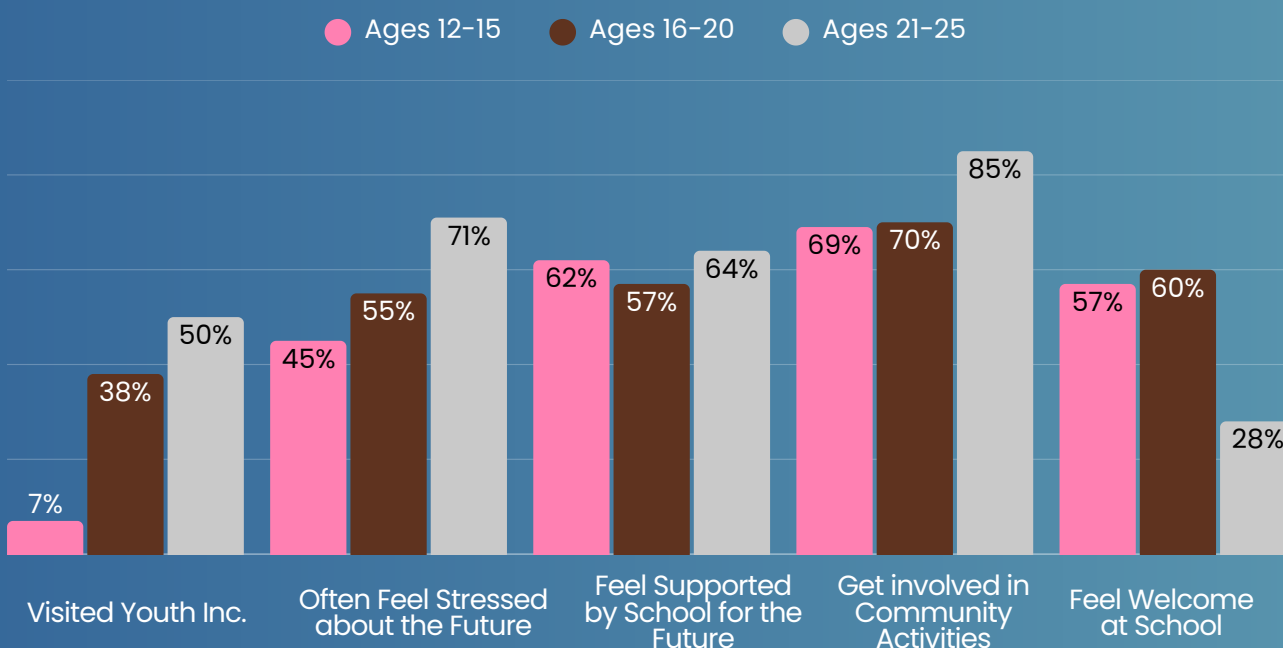
Ages 16-20



Ages 21-25



Survey Responses by Age Group



Top Personal Concerns of Young People

Swan Hill

- 60%** Pressures of Study/Education
- 44%** Mental Health (own)
- 34%** Body Image

Robinvale

- 39%** Pressures of Study/Education
- 37%** Money Problems
- 31%** Mental Health (own)

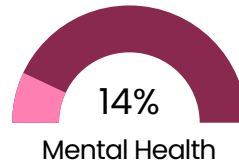
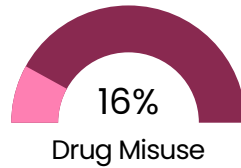
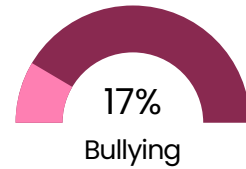
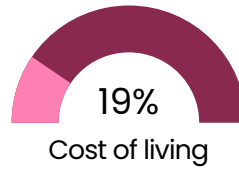
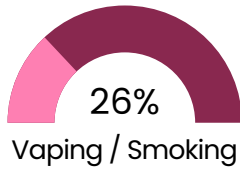
Others

- 27%** Drought and Farming
- 19%** Vaping and Smoking
- 11%** Cost of Living

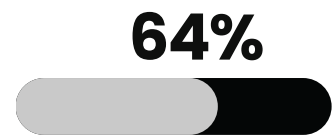
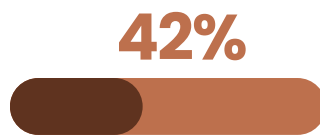
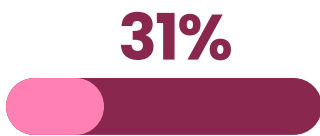
For young people living in more rural communities, **drought and farming** appeared to be a top area of concern.

KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

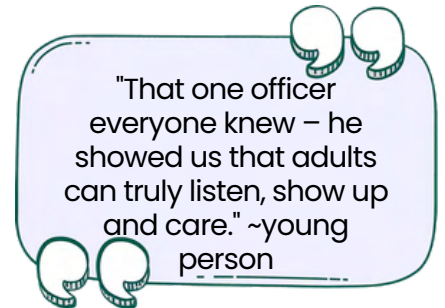
Top 5 Community Concerns of Young People



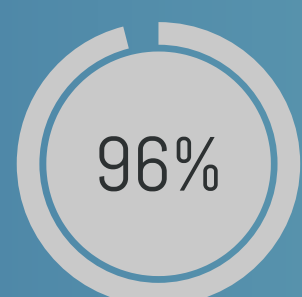
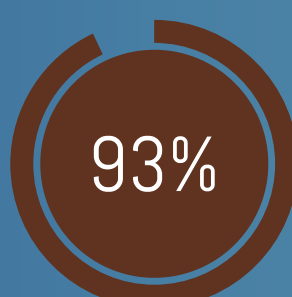
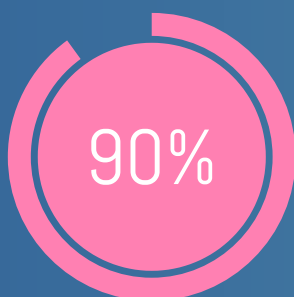
Have had Unpleasant Experiences Online



- Most young people report **good overall wellbeing**, though this becomes less consistent as they get older.
- **Stress** about the future **increases with age**.
- Almost all young people say they have **at least one trusted adult** they can talk to.



Respondents that Engaged with the YSP that had a positive experience:



KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

From 2019 to Now: What's Different

Young people in the municipality are feeling more pressure than before, especially with schoolwork, mental health, and the rising cost of living. These challenges show that daily life for young people is becoming more stressful and uncertain, and support services are more important than ever.

Pressures of study/education are still the #1 personal issue.

2019
57%
2025
56%

Mental health remains a critical concern, as it is still consistently in the top three.

2019
56%
2025
40%

Cost of living and money pressures are new leading concerns.

Personal Concern
25%
Community Concerns
20%

Substance use remains a major concern*.

2019
25%
2025
26%

*It is now expressed as vaping/smoking rather than the broader category of 'drugs' used in 2019

Issues such as boredom, bullying, and crime/community safety, which featured in 2019, have dropped from the top concerns by 2025.

● Recap of issues:
Study/education stress (remains #1 personal issue)
Mental health
Cost of living/financial pressures

Top Priorities for Young People

- More **activities and programs** for young people.
- Stronger pathways for **education, employment, and careers**.
- **Prevention programs** on mental health, bullying, body image, drugs, and respectful relationships.
- More **youth involvement** in advocacy and planning.
- More **events** and festivals designed for young people.

"I'll probably leave when I get the chance, there's nothing here for me."
~Young person

COMPONENTS OF THE YOUTH STRATEGY

Council's Role – How Council supports young people.

It outlines Council's responsibility to listen, advocate, and work in partnership with young people, families, and the community to create opportunities and deliver services that reflect their needs and aspirations.

Guiding Principles – The values that shape our approach.

Guiding Principles describe the beliefs and commitments that underpin all actions, decisions, and priorities. They ensure that work with and for young people is respectful, inclusive, and effective.

Pillars – The big focus areas.

Each Pillar highlights a key area that supports young people's wellbeing, development, participation, and opportunities.

Goals – The outcomes we want to achieve.

Goals describe what Council aims to deliver between 2026 and 2030. They provide both short- and long-term direction, based on what young people and the community have told us matters most.

Strategies – The actions to get us there.

Strategies are the practical steps and resources needed to achieve each goal. They guide implementation and help track progress over time.



Guiding Principles



Pillars



Goals



Strategies

Council's Role

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The guiding principles in this Strategy provide a foundation for decision-making and implementation. They reflect the values and commitments that underpin Council's approach to working with young people. These principles ensure that every goal, strategy, and action remains grounded in what matters most: equity, inclusion, local context, youth leadership, collaboration, and future-readiness. By embedding these principles throughout the strategy, Council can respond to current needs while staying aligned with its long-term vision for young people across the municipality.



Youth Centred Design

Young people across the municipality are recognised as central partners in shaping the programs, spaces, and services that impact their lives.



Place Based Approach

This strategy responds to the unique geographic, cultural, and social context of the municipality.



Equity & Inclusion

Young people, regardless of postcode, background, or circumstance, are supported to access the same opportunities, support, and voice across the municipality.



Collaborative Partnerships

Strong collaboration between young people, Council, schools, families, Aboriginal organisations, and service providers, are essential to creating meaningful and lasting change.



Future-proofing

Preparing our municipality for the future by investing in infrastructure, the wellbeing, skills, and leadership of young people as our future workforce, responding to emerging needs and opportunities across the municipality.

COUNCIL'S KEY ROLE

Council has reviewed its key role in the youth space by listening to young people, engaging with service providers and internal staff, and aligning with the broader Council vision. Through a series of workshops with young people, community stakeholders, and staff, Council reflected on what's working well and where it can make the biggest difference. Some of the existing roles were kept, but we've now clearly defined where Council will focus its energy and resources to best support young people across the municipality.



We Connect

We bring young people and services together. Whether it's linking with schools, health services, government programs, or employers – we help make the system work better for young people in our municipality.



We Provide Support

We aim to deliver flexible, generalist youth support through our Youth Support Officers in Swan Hill and Robinvale, with outreach to smaller towns.



We Listen and Engage

We value the voices of young people and use our resources within the YSP, Youth Council, and Youth Inc. to inform Council decisions – not just youth programs, but all areas such as planning, events, climate, infrastructure, workforce and community development.



We Build our Future

We invest in the next generation – supporting leadership, learning, and life skills that prepare young people to step into work, training and community roles across our municipality.

Pictured: S'i Kae Hā Dance Group Robinvale



OUR PILLARS

Our comprehensive planning process has identified key pillars that we will prioritise in the coming years:

Empowering Voice & Leadership

Encouraging active participation, connection, and a strong youth voice across the municipality.



Supporting Wellbeing

Fostering physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing for all young people.



Growing Skills & Opportunity

Creating pathways for education, training, and meaningful employment.









Pillar 1 : Empowering Voice and Leadership

All children and young people have the right to be heard and to have a say in decisions that affect them. Participation and empowerment are also essential for meeting the Child Safe Standards.





We need to use every opportunity to elevate the voices of young people as citizens with equal rights in decision-making. This not only benefits young people but also strengthens our whole community. Young people have ideas, insights, and lived experiences that can help shape better decisions — we just need to ask and listen.

It's time to refresh and strengthen our Youth Council to ensure it has a clear purpose, strong youth-led identity, and a genuine connection to decision-making.

Council's Youth Support Program also plays a key role in involving young people in decisions about their lives and their futures. This requires ongoing commitment to making sure young people are heard and their contributions are valued.

	GOAL	STRATEGY	COUNCIL'S ROLE	TIMELINE
1.1	Increase youth participation in Council-led programs	1.1.1 Establish a structured engagement strategy with primary and lower secondary school students (Years 6–9) to build strong relationships and increase awareness of the Youth Support Program		2026–2027
		1.1.2 Rebrand key elements of the YSP such as Youth Council, Youth Inc., website to better connect with young people		2026–2027
		1.1.3 Share stories and outcomes from Youth Council alumni to inspire participation		2026–2030
1.2	Refresh and promote youth-facing programs and identities	1.2.1 Develop a structure for Youth Councils in Swan Hill and Robinvale to add value to participation, reflect youth-led identity, purpose, and increase visibility.		2026–2027
1.3	Support youth-led event coordination and delivery	1.3.1 Co-design a calendar of youth events with young people from the outset		2026–2030
		1.3.2 Provide event-planning tools, templates, and training that supports skill development and participation of young people and service providers in delivering youth-led activities		2026–2030

Pillar 1 : Empowering Voice and Leadership

	GOAL	STRATEGY	COUNCIL'S ROLE	TIMELINE
1.4	Support leadership development and youth involvement	1.4.1 Offer tailored youth development programs such as leadership camps, job readiness training, and other life skills initiatives		2026–2030
		1.4.2 Establish and support peer mentoring networks to build confidence and leadership among young people		2026–2029
		1.4.3 Create opportunities for former Youth Council participants to stay involved through alumni networks and resume-building roles		2026–2028
1.5	Ensure youth voice is embedded in Council and community decision-making	1.5.1 Formalise YSP in Council engagement processes and strengthen youth advisory groups		2026–2027
		1.5.2 Offer youth engagement as a service and share practical engagement tools with community organisations		2026–2030

“If young people help plan it, they will actually show up.”
~Robinvale service provider










Pillar 2: Supporting Wellbeing

Young people in our municipality face a range of challenges that directly affect their wellbeing. Rural isolation, lack of transport, rising costs of living, and limited access to services can all cause stress and disconnection. For some, disengagement from education, training, or employment adds further pressure, leading to poorer health and wellbeing outcomes.

As we plan for the future, we must recognise Robinvale and Swan Hill as key service centres. Community feedback showed how important it is to have a permanent Youth Support Program position based in Robinvale. This is not just about equity — it's about building local capacity to support the wellbeing of young people.

Feedback also highlighted a lack of quality spaces for young people to connect and thrive. The proposed Children and Youth Hub in the Swan Hill Showgrounds Precinct reflects the need for inclusive, welcoming spaces that build belonging, connection, and positive wellbeing.



	GOAL	STRATEGY	COUNCIL'S ROLE	TIMELINE
2.1	Ensure young people have access to fit-for-purpose spaces that meet their needs	2.1.1 Advocate for co-located youth and community hubs in Swan Hill and Robinvale		2026–2030
		2.1.2 Embed a youth focus into Council's planning and infrastructure processes to meet future needs		2026–2030
2.2	Provide accessible and flexible youth support across the municipality	2.2.1 Employ dedicated Youth Support Officers in Swan Hill and Robinvale		2026–2029
		2.2.2 Build outreach capacity into youth roles to reach smaller towns and rural areas		2026–2027
		2.2.3 Provide place-based support tailored to local youth needs		2026–2027
2.3	Strengthen early intervention and collaboration across sectors	2.3.1 Embed early intervention principles across all youth programs and services		2026–2030
		2.3.2 Collaborate with schools, health services, and youth service providers to respond early to emerging needs		2026–2030

Pillar 3: Growing Skills and Opportunity

Housing and workforce shortages are having a big impact across the municipality. Young people want to be part of the solution. With the right support and clear pathways, we can grow our local workforce and create positive futures for young people and the wider community.

A purpose-built hub will be central to this vision. It will help attract and retain service providers, and create more opportunities for work experience and skill development. These opportunities will strengthen our communities and encourage young people to return, bringing back their knowledge and skills.

Hubs bring essential services together in one accessible place. By locating services side-by-side, hubs remove barriers such as disconnected systems and the need for families and young people to navigate multiple agencies.

	GOAL	STRATEGY	COUNCIL'S ROLE	TIMELINE
3.1	Build career and training pathways for young people	3.1.1 Develop Council-led traineeships, scholarships, and structured work experience opportunities		2026–2029
		3.1.2 Partner with Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) and local businesses to expand employment pathways		2026–2030
		3.1.3 Invest in programs that support young people as the future workforce		2026–2030
3.2	Strengthen the long-term sustainability of the Youth Support Program (YSP)	3.2.1 Build strong partnerships with local organisations, schools, and service providers to embed YSP into the broader service system.		2026
		3.2.2 Explore philanthropic, government, and external funding opportunities to support the YSP		2026–2030

“We could work better together if we just knew what others were doing.”
~ Robinvale Service Provider

“A lack of job opportunities for young people is concerning”
~ Robinvale Service provider

NEXT STEPS

Swan Hill Rural City Council's Youth Strategy 2026–2030 sets a clear direction for supporting young people across the municipality. Built from the voices of young people, families, and community partners, it outlines practical actions to strengthen wellbeing, education, employment, and community connection.

Over the next five years, Swan Hill Rural City Council will work with young people, schools, service providers, and community organisations to bring this plan to life. A Monitoring Framework will track progress each year to ensure actions are meaningful, measurable, and adaptable to the changing needs of young people across our municipality.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Swan Hill Rural City Council warmly thanks all the young people, families, schools, staff, service providers, and community partners who shared their ideas and experiences to shape the Youth Strategy 2026–2030. Your voices and commitment have created a plan that reflects the real hopes and challenges of young people across our municipality.

Website

youth.swanhill.vic.gov.au

Phone

[5036 2482](tel:50362482)

Email

youthinc@swanhill.vic.gov.au



Pictured: Mt. Evelyn Leadership Camp



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