

# A CHILD FRIENDLY CITY STRATEGY



## FOREWORD

Penrith City Council is pleased to present this Child Friendly City Strategy, which has been developed after extensive consultation with children, families and services across the City.

This strategy outlines how we are planning and working to make Penrith a more child friendly city, where children are active participants and are recognised as contributors to the City and communities in which they grow. This strategy complements the many other strategies and action plans that Council has in place to support the health, wellbeing and lifestyle of everyone in our City.

Penrith is a vibrant and growing Regional City in Western Sydney, set on the Nepean River at the foot of the Blue Mountains. In 2012, around 30,000 or 17% of our residents are children aged under 12 years.

A child friendly city is one that provides accessible spaces for all its residents as well as opportunities to live, learn, work and play in a place that values all contributions from every age. In this strategy children talk about the Penrith City they want to live in and provide us with a vision of how they would like it to look in the future.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the children of Penrith City's schools and Children's Centres and their teachers who contributed thoughts, ideas and experiences in the development of this strategy. Council looks forward to providing updates on our progress toward a more child friendly Penrith City.



Councillor Greg Davies  
Mayor



Alan Stoneham  
General Manager

### STATEMENT OF RECOGNITION OF PENRITH CITY'S ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CULTURAL HERITAGE.

Council acknowledges the unique status of Aboriginal people as the original owners and custodians of the land and waters of Penrith City.

Council values the unique status of Torres Strait Islander people as the original owners and custodians of the Torres Strait Islands and surrounding waters.

We work together for a united Australia and City that respects this land of ours, that values the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage, and provides justice and equity for all.

Penrith City Council's Community and Cultural Development Department would like to acknowledge the assistance of Elton Consulting and the support and feedback from staff and community members in the preparation of this strategy.

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# THANK YOU

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# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Project background and objectives

It is widely recognised that the early years of a child's life are critical to their development into healthy and responsible adults. Access to child care, health services, education, nutritious food, quality built and natural environments, coupled with supportive, caring relationships are essential to children's health and wellbeing.

Children help us to think and care about the future. In many ways they crystallise the often abstract discussions we have about sustainability, liveability and related concepts about the current and future state of our community.

Children are a big part of the community of Penrith. Penrith is known as an area that is popular with families and as a good place to bring up children. Penrith City Council is keen to explore how Penrith can continue to be, and improve on, its place as a child friendly city.

In 2008 Penrith City Council undertook a Scoping Study which sought to provide Council with a clear understanding of the issues that are involved in becoming a more child friendly city and a way forward in planning for the community of children aged between 0 and 12 years. It is also acknowledged that the needs of children under twelve years of age and other members of the community including children older than 12, and the aged in the community also benefit from child friendly outcomes and environments. This strategic framework builds on the five main themes identified in the scoping study.

Those themes were:

- Engagement – utilising a range of mechanisms to engage with children directly as well as those working with children to deliver services
- Health and wellbeing – emphasising the importance of fun and engaging activities, and services, facilities and places that are accessible
- Safety – including fostering positive attitudes towards children
- Personal development – focussing on stimulating, interactive environments where there are a range of opportunities for free and independent play
- Community development – including the importance of strong, connected communities and fostering the development of resilient families.

In building on these themes, this strategic framework is intended to assist Council to support and enhance its capacity to effectively plan for children aged 0-12 years and their families in the Penrith community. This framework is expected to influence the broad range of planning and advocacy that Council undertakes to promote the wellbeing of children and families in Penrith. The framework will be the focus of Council's response to planning for children and their families in the Penrith community.



## 1.2 A Child Friendly City?

Numerous definitions of what constitutes a child friendly city appear in the academic and policy literature. The most commonly cited and respected understanding of a child friendly city is derived from work undertaken by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). UNICEF defines a child friendly city as "a local system of good governance committed to fulfilling children's rights"<sup>1</sup>. UNICEF has identified the following widely cited principles, conceiving of a child friendly city as a place where children:

- Influence decisions about their city and express their opinion on the city they want
- Participate in family, community and social life including cultural and social events
- Receive basic services such as health care, education and social support services
- Are protected from exploitation, violence and abuse
- Walk safely in the streets on their own
- Meet friends and play
- Have green spaces to play in nature with plants and animals
- Live in an unpolluted environment
- Are an equal citizen of their city with access to every service, regardless of ethnic origin, religion, income, gender or disability
- Drink safe water and have access to proper sanitation.

Recent work undertaken by Geoff Woolcock and Wendy Steele for the NSW Commission for Children and Young People<sup>2</sup> identified ten key themes to emerge

from their analysis of the literature on child friendly cities. These themes are:

- Children's sense of agency
- Children's safety and security
- Children feeling respected and valued
- Child health
- Independent mobility
- Access to diverse services and activities
- A sense of belonging and connection to community
- Authentic participation and self determination
- Opportunities for exploratory play
- Contact with nature and green spaces.

It is important to note that child friendly communities will invariably be communities that work and cater for a variety of community members. Characteristics such as safety, mobility, and connection are fundamental elements of well functioning and supportive communities. Kevin Lynch, in his seminal cross cultural work with children, *Growing Up in Cities*,<sup>3</sup> wrote:

*A good city is one in which children can grow and develop to the extent of their powers; where they can build their confidence and become actively engaged in the world; yet be autonomous and capable of managing their own affairs.*

This strategy is informed by these definitions. However, it is also recognised that there are no standard models of what a child friendly city is - each community needs to define that for itself. The basis of this Child Friendly City strategy for Penrith is the further development of a community that is a better place for children to live, learn, grow and flourish, where children are actively engaged and that children's changing needs are monitored and responded to.

<sup>1</sup> UNICEF, Child Friendly Cities, [www.childfriendlycities.org](http://www.childfriendlycities.org)

<sup>2</sup> Woolcock, G. and Steele, W. (2008), Child Friendly Community Indicators – A Literature Review, Urban Research Program, Griffith University, For the NSW Commission for Children and Young People, <http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au/uploads/documents/Child%20friendly%20community%20indicators%20literature%20review.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Lynch, K. (1977), *Growing Up in Cities*, MIT Press

### 1.3 Council's role

It is important to recognise that creating a child friendly city involves a wide range of stakeholders including children and families, community organisations and services, child care providers, schools and all levels of government – Local, State and Commonwealth. This strategy recognises that the main responsibility for funding child and family services rests with State and Commonwealth Governments.

The focus here is primarily on Council's existing and potential roles and responsibilities. It is recognised that Local Government can play an important leadership and coordination role and that it can also ensure that Council's own services, facilities and infrastructure are appropriate for, and responsive to, the needs of children and families in Penrith.

In supporting a child friendly city, one of the key challenges for relatively large councils like Penrith, involves integrating responses across the full range of council functions including social planning, community development and neighbourhood renewal, mobility and access, traffic management, open space and recreation planning, environmental planning, land use, public health, provision of services including child care, libraries, recreation and cultural development and events.

The development of this strategic framework has involved extensive internal consultation to ensure a sound understanding of the different initiatives, programs, services and activities that Council undertakes now as well as those that could occur in the future to contribute to a child friendly city in Penrith.

### 1.4 Sustainability

Council's *Sustainable Penrith Action Plan* cites the Brundtland Commission<sup>4</sup> definition of sustainable development as:

*... Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It is not a fixed state of harmony but rather a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional change are made consistent with future as well as present needs.*

Penrith City Council has adopted the United Nations Environment Program Principles for Sustainable Cities as the Penrith Principles for a Sustainable City. The Penrith principles are:

- Provide for a long term vision for cities based on sustainability; intergenerational, social economic and political equity; and their individuality
- Achieve long term economic and social security
- Recognise the intrinsic value of Penrith's biodiversity and natural ecosystems, and protect and restore them
- Enable Penrith's communities to minimise their ecological footprint
- Build on the characteristics of ecosystems in the development and nurturing of a healthy and sustainable Penrith
- Recognise and build on the distinctive characteristics of Penrith, including their human and cultural values, history and natural systems
- Empower people and foster participation
- Expand and enable cooperative networks to work towards a common, sustainable future

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<sup>4</sup> A report produced in 1987 by the United Nations World Commission on the Environment

- Promote sustainable production and consumption, through appropriate use of environmentally sound technologies and effective demand management
- Enable continuous improvement, based on accountability, transparency and good governance.

The strong future orientation, as captured in Penrith's *Principles for a Sustainable City* and the Brundtland definition of sustainable development, requires that a focus on children is an important part of understanding sustainability. The notion of equity, both between and within generations, also reinforces that children, being the next generation, are critical to understanding sustainability and acting on a sustainability agenda.

The wellbeing of children can be seen as the ultimate indicator of a strong and healthy community. Places and spaces used by children are often those that are safe, accessible, interesting and fun. These are qualities that appeal to a wide range of population groups within any community.

A society that places children's needs at its centre must, of necessity, always look to the future and make provision for it. Children remind us of the meaning and the urgency of the imperative for intergenerational equity, which goes to the core of sustainability. A sustainable society ... places children at its centre.

*Brendan Gleeson and Neil Sipe,  
Reinstating Kids in the City<sup>5</sup>*

Child friendly cities and sustainability are linked, not only because of their focus on the future, but also because of children's increasing interest, and potential involvement, in sustainability issues and education. Children are not only reminders or indicators of sustainability but can also be active agents. As much of the movement towards sustainability requires significant behaviour change, engaging children in sustainability related activities and education is an important investment in the long term sustainability of Penrith.

While sustainability is much more than the physical or natural environment, issues like global warming and depletion of natural resources, are critical for all levels of government and all communities. Environmental awareness and education is critical. In a UK based study of children and the environment<sup>6</sup>, it was found that children have a good understanding of environmental issues and "gain their most powerful understanding from their own natural environment." However, the study also found that "children are losing their connection with the natural environment, and their wellbeing and environmental quality are inextricably linked." This dilemma was strongly echoed in the consultation undertaken for this strategy. A focus of this strategic framework, therefore, is on ensuring that children in Penrith continue to have access to the natural environment to engender that awareness and encourage a sense of stewardship.

<sup>5</sup> Gleeson, B. and Sipe, N. (eds.) (2006), *Creating Child Friendly Cities: Reinstating kids in the city*, Routledge

<sup>6</sup> Thomas, G. and Thompson, G. (2004), *A Child's Place: Why environment matters to children*, Demos and Green Alliance, <http://www.green-alliance.org.uk/uploadedFiles/Publications/A%20Childs%20Place%20Final%20Version.pdf>



# STRATEGIC PLAN 2031

Penrith City Council produced a new Strategic Plan during 2009. This plan, *The Community Strategic Plan 2031*, responds to Penrith's Principles for a Sustainable City. *The Community Strategic Plan 2031* identifies five key themes that are intended to prioritise Council action over the next ten years. The themes, objectives and strategic directions from the strategic plan are summarised in the table below.

| Themes                  | Objectives   | Strategic Directions   |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| A leading city          | <p>Demonstrate leadership, foster resilience and tenacity, and encourage innovation</p> <p>We plan responsibly for now and the future</p> <p>We demonstrate accountability, transparency and ethical conduct</p> | <p>We work together to grow Penrith as a regional city</p> <p>We share aspirations for our region's future and achieve them through collaboration</p> <p>We build our future on the principles of sustainability and understand and respond to the effects of climate change on our region</p> <p>Our communities engage through processes that are structured, consistent, clear and inclusive</p> <p>We expect responsible and ethical behaviour</p>   |
| A city of opportunities | <p>We have access to what we need</p> <p>Have a say in our future</p>  | <p>Our city's services and facilities are provided equitably and can be accessed by those in need</p> <p>Our housing provides choice, achieves design excellence and meets community needs</p> <p>Our economic and employment base is diverse and supports its long term security</p> <p>We speak out for Penrith and our region</p>   |
| A green city            | <p>Our natural habitats are healthy</p> <p>We use our resources wisely and take responsibility for our levels of consumption</p> <p>We encourage sustainable production and technologies</p>                     | <p>The city's catchments are healthy</p> <p>We respond to the impacts of climate change and support the principles of sustainability</p> <p>The city's ecological footprint is reduced</p> <p>Our harmony of urban, rural and natural places is enhanced by defining the city's urban limits</p> <p>The landscape values and productive capacity of the city's rural lands contribute to our future health, liveability and wellbeing</p> <p>The strength of our future economy is built on sustainable businesses</p> |

This Child Friendly City Strategy is closely linked to the objectives and



| Themes          | Objectives   | Strategic Directions   |
|-----------------|--|--|
| A liveable city | <p>Our physical infrastructure is adaptable and responds to changing needs</p> <p>Our public spaces encourage safe and healthy communities</p> | <p>We have access to an interconnected transport network and our reliance on cars is reduced</p> <p>The city's infrastructure responds to community needs and is provided when we need it</p> <p>We feel safe in our neighbourhoods and are proud of our public spaces and local centres</p> <p>Our path and cycleway network is safe and encourages active movement around the city</p> <p>Our neighbourhood, recreation and leisure facilities and programs meet community needs</p> <p>We have safe and well maintained parks that encourage healthy activity and community wellbeing</p> <p>The risk from emergency events to our communities is minimised</p> |
| A vibrant city  | <p>We build on our strengths</p> <p>We play an active role in our communities</p>  | <p>We have vibrant centres and community places in the city</p> <p>Our cultural facilities meet local needs and attract regional interest</p> <p>We encourage the wellbeing, creativity, inclusivity and diversity of our communities</p> <p>Our capacity and wellbeing is enhanced through the support of collaborative networks and partnerships</p>   |

# OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN IN PENRITH

This section highlights some of the key outcomes that Council would like to achieve for, and with, children and their families in Penrith.

The main outcomes for children identified in this strategic framework are based on the key themes identified earlier by Woolcock and Steele for the NSW Commission for Children and Young People. They have been reinforced by consultations undertaken with children and service providers in Penrith for the development of this strategic framework. The outcomes for children are:

- Children in Penrith are respected and valued
- Penrith City Council and other agencies authentically involve children in decision making
- Children in Penrith experience a sense of belonging and connection to their community
- Children and families have access to facilities, services, programs and activities to meet their needs
- Children are encouraged to have a sense of agency and influence over the future
- Penrith is a place where children can lead healthy and active lives
- Children are independently mobile and able to move safely around their neighbourhoods
- Neighbourhoods in Penrith provide opportunities for exploratory and imaginative play
- Children in Penrith have access to nature and green spaces
- Penrith City Centre and its neighbourhoods are safe and secure environments for children.

These outcomes are linked directly to the key themes identified in Penrith City Council's *Community Strategic Plan 2031*. The table on the next page shows how each of the outcomes listed above relates to two, or three, and sometimes four themes from the Community Strategic Plan.

Table 1: How the outcomes for children fit in with the *Penrith Community Strategic Plan 2031* themes

| Outcomes   | Strategic Plan Themes |               |       |         |         |
|--|-----------------------|---------------|-------|---------|---------|
|  | Leading               | Opportunities | Green | Livable | Vibrant |
| Children in Penrith are respected and valued   | ✓                     | ✓             |       |         | ✓       |
| Penrith City Council and other agencies authentically involve children in decision making              | ✓                     | ✓             |       |         |         |
| Children in Penrith experience a sense of belonging and connection to their community                  | ✓                     | ✓             |       | ✓       | ✓       |
| Children and families have access to facilities, services, programs and activities to meet their needs |                       | ✓             |       | ✓       |         |
| Children are encouraged to have a sense of agency and influence over the future                        |                       | ✓             |       | ✓       |         |
| Penrith is a place where children can lead healthy and active lives                                    |                       |               | ✓     | ✓       |         |
| Children are independently mobile and able to move safely around their neighbourhoods                  |                       |               | ✓     | ✓       |         |
| Neighbourhoods in Penrith provide opportunities for exploratory and imaginative play                   |                       |               | ✓     | ✓       |         |
| Children in Penrith have access to nature and green spaces   |                       |               | ✓     | ✓       |         |
| Penrith City Centre and its neighbourhoods are safe and secure environments for children               |                       | ✓             |       | ✓       | ✓       |

The next section of this report provides an overview of the Child Friendly City strategic framework. It shows how two different outcomes for children are focussed on for each key theme.

# STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK OVERVIEW

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY A CHILD FRIENDLY CITY?

Numerous definitions but no absolute criteria UN Principles 'A better place for children to live, learn, grow and flourish'

## SUSTAINABILITY

Future oriented, equity between different generations, equity between members of the same generation

Children and sustainability – awareness, contact with natural environments, stewardship

## STRATEGIC PLAN THEMES


Cover the breadth of issues and activities that are relevant to Penrith City identified in Council's Community Strategic Plan

| Leading City   | City of Opportunities   | Green City   | Liveable City  | Vibrant City   |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A city that provides our jobs, education, services, and entertainments</li> <li>Plans responsibly for a sustainable future</li> <li>Manages its finances, services and assets effectively</li> <li>Behaves responsibly and ethically</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A city with a strong local economy</li> <li>Equitable access to services and facilities</li> <li>Lifestyle and housing choices in our neighbourhoods</li> <li>Speaks out for Penrith and our region</li> <li>Involves, informs and responds</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A city with healthy waterways and protected natural; areas</li> <li>Viable agriculture and rural activities that provide fresh local food</li> <li>A Council with a smaller ecological footprint</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A city with Interconnected, safe public transport</li> <li>An integrated local road and pathways network</li> <li>Infrastructure that responds to community needs</li> <li>Safe inviting parks and public spaces</li> <li>Active and healthy communities</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A city with people and places that are inclusive, foster creativity, and celebrate diversity</li> <li>Design excellence that respects our local identity</li> <li>Opportunities to engage, participate and connect</li> <li>A council that promotes health and wellbeing</li> </ul> |

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR CHILDREN?

|   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children in Penrith are respected and valued</li> <li>Penrith City Council and other agencies authentically involve children in decision making</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children and families have access to services, programs and activities to meet their needs</li> <li>Children are encouraged to have a sense of agency and influence over the future</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children in Penrith have access to nature and green spaces</li> <li>Children are independently mobile and able to move safely around their neighbourhoods</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Penrith is a place where children can lead healthy and active lives</li> <li>Penrith City Centre and its neighbourhoods are safe and secure environments for children</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children in Penrith experience a sense of belonging and connection to their community</li> <li>Neighbourhoods in Penrith provide opportunities for exploratory and imaginative play</li> </ul> |
|---|---|---|---|---|

| A Leading City  | A City of Opportunities  | A Green City   | Liveable   | Vibrant  |
|---|--|--|--|--|
| <b>EXAMPLES FROM PENRITH AND ELSEWHERE</b><br><b>(Penrith examples in bold)</b>   |  |  |  |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Penrith City Council's Child Friendly City Strategy</b></li> <li>• <b>The Story Exchange – Penrith Council</b></li> <li>• <b>Paint Penrith REaD</b></li> <li>• Around the Brim- A child friendly guide to Brimbank</li> <li>• Child Friendly City Accreditation – Bendigo</li> <li>• Child Friendly City Web Site, Bendigo</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Penrith Library Childrens Activities</b></li> <li>• <b>Mobile Play Van</b></li> <li>• <b>Kingswood Park Neighbourhood Action Plan</b></li> <li>• Child Friendly City Web Site, Bendigo</li> <li>• Hands on Democracy</li> <li>• Participation works and Play</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Catchment tours</b></li> <li>• <b>Storm water activities and drain stencilling</b></li> <li>• <b>Enviro Adventure</b></li> <li>• Vauban Car-Free Neighbourhood, Freiburg, Germany</li> <li>• Natural Play Invaders Play England</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Glenmore Park Child and Family Centre</b></li> <li>• <b>Child Care Links Program Family Meal Project</b></li> <li>• 500 Steps to School, Fairfield</li> <li>• Child Friendly by Design, Shellharbour</li> <li>• Healthy Choices for Children, Hobsons Bay</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Food Family Culture</b></li> <li>• <b>Performing Arts Program for Children</b></li> <li>• <b>Penrith Regional Gallery and the Lewers Bequest</b></li> <li>• Blue Mountains Stronger Families Partnerships Alliance</li> <li>• Streets Ahead and Street Time, Brimbank</li> <li>• Southbank Brisbane</li> <li>• Design for Play, UK</li> </ul>  |
| <b>WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO</b>  |  |  |  |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify opportunities to make Councils Website more child friendly including the establishment of a children's web page similar to Bendigo</li> <li>• Continue to advocate for families and children on broader issues</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate a Child Friendly City reference group with relevant stakeholders</li> <li>• Investigate the creation of a Children's librarian and developing a cross library focus on children's services and activities</li> <li>• Identify how to improve the customer service area of Council could be made more child friendly and engaging</li> <li>• Develop an engagement protocol for how we engage with children</li> <li>• Continue to develop its internal capacity and resource bank for engaging with children</li> <li>• Identify projects across Council that children can participate in</li> <li>• Continue to deliver high quality early childhood education and middle childhood after school care programs</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify future master planning and redevelopment projects that could be used as a demonstration project to test how child friendly principles could be applied to encourage greener and more child friendly development outcomes</li> <li>• Ensure future land use, open space and recreation plans considers the preservation of natural areas for children's play</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrate child friendly cities principles for incorporation into planning documents such as Sustainable Blueprint</li> <li>• Promote child friendly city planning principles with stakeholders as a key aspect of creating liveable communities</li> <li>• Develop child friendly city audits and maps to identify places to play, safe routes to school and activity centres through utilising community engagement/ development process that focuses on children exploring , analysing and documenting their own neighbourhoods</li> <li>• Investigate ways to work with local schools to increase the level of walking to school by students</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Link event planning to themes that are relevant to children including literacy, health, sense of community and social inclusion</li> <li>• Continue to provide small scale neighbourhood events that focus on building children and broader community connections</li> <li>• Develop a cross departmental approach to play planning and risk management that balances liability protection with the need for children's adventurous play</li> </ul> |

A close-up photograph of a child's hands and arms as they row a boat. The child is wearing a pink and white striped shirt and a pink life vest. They are holding a blue oar with both hands, and their legs are visible in the foreground, secured by a black strap. The background is blurred, showing other people and greenery.

The Strategic Framework overview shows:

- The structure of the Strategic Framework which is based on the five key strategic plan themes: leading, opportunities, green, liveable and vibrant
- Two key outcomes for children (what does it mean for children?) have been identified for each of the five strategic plan themes
- Examples from both within Penrith City Council and elsewhere are used to demonstrate the type of initiatives that are taking place in Penrith, or could be, to produce the desired outcomes for children
- A relatively short list of targeted initiatives (what we are going to do) are identified to help to deliver the desired outcomes and support the key themes of the strategic plan. The preference was for this framework to identify targeted and strategic initiatives rather than a long list of detailed actions.

The following sections look at each of the key theme areas and their respective outcomes, examples and proposed actions in more detail.



# PENRITH AS A LEADING CHILD FRIENDLY CITY

According to the *Community Strategic Plan 2031* being a leading city for Penrith is about:

- A city that provides our jobs, education, services, and entertainment
- Plans responsibly for a sustainable future
- Manages its finances, services and assets effectively
- Behaves responsibly and ethically
- Engages communities in processes that are structured, consistent, clear and inclusive.

Two key outcomes for children that support Penrith being a leading child friendly city are:

- Children in Penrith are respected and valued
- Penrith City Council and other agencies authentically involve children in decision making.

## 5.1 Respecting and valuing children

Children were once viewed as too young, innocent, or immature, to effectively contribute to community life and participate in decisions that affect them. That view has changed. Now children are increasingly recognised for their competence and valued for the contributions they can make to the broader community. Children have shown their ability<sup>7</sup>:

- To understand the world and their place in it
- To provide an alternative, not inferior view to adults
- To provide insights that can help adults gain greater and broader understanding.

How children are treated and supported has been shown to have a significant impact on their long term development and has a great influence on the type of adults, citizens and community members they become. Respecting and valuing children, and recognising them explicitly as valued citizens and community members, not only acknowledges children's worth in their own right but is an investment in creating a more informed and engaged community. Children who are engaged, respected and valued develop the skills, awareness and willingness to participate in community life. This enables them to grow into young people and adults who recognise that their views are worthwhile and respected. Through being respected and valued and being recognised as having something to contribute, children continually learn about the value of participating in their community and being part of democratic life.

The importance of children's early experiences to their future abilities, attitudes and identities is a critical assumption that underlies much of what being a child friendly community is about. Whether it is the developmental benefits derived from early childhood education, breastfeeding or the way children are treated and respected, the long term benefits of children's early experiences are now well recognised.

<sup>7</sup> Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood (2003), *Hearing Young Children's Voices: Consulting with children birth to eight years of age*, ACT Children's Strategy, Children's Services Branch, ACT Department of Education, Youth and Family Services



## 5.2 Authentic involvement in decision making

Involvement in decision making and respecting and valuing children are outcomes that are closely linked. A foundation principle of a democratic society is that everyone (regardless of age) should be able to participate in community life. Children have the right to participate in their communities and have demonstrated that they can make valuable contributions in a variety of ways.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to participate in decision making and to express their views about the things that concern them. Article 12 of the Convention states that children have the right to ‘express an opinion and to have that opinion taken into account in any matter or procedure affecting the child’.

Current knowledge about young children’s competence, and about the impact of their early experiences on their future wellbeing strongly supports giving young children a voice in policy making. Further, giving young children a voice in policy making can enhance children’s sense of community and it can strengthen their communities by acknowledging them as people with rights – including the right to be heard.

*Hearing Young Children’s Voices,  
ACT Children’s Strategy*

## 5.3 What do children in Penrith say?

Survey results of 115 primary school aged children in Penrith show that children are concerned about their place in the community and the degree to which they are respected and valued. Many children reported feeling unwelcome in public places including shopping centres and their own neighbourhoods. The spaces and places that children also valued most (including park space and playgrounds) were often reported as being poorly treated by others (particularly with broken glass in play areas) reinforcing to children that neither their play areas, nor themselves, were treated respectfully and appropriately valued.

Children’s survey responses demonstrate that children have worthwhile contributions to make to projects that affect them. Children have a wide range of ideas on play spaces, parks, and their neighbourhood environments. Survey responses indicate they also have much to contribute regarding safety, sporting and community facilities, natural areas and the environment more broadly.

## 5.4 Examples

### 5.4.1 Penrith City Council's Child Friendly City Strategy

This section provides examples of where children are valued and respected for their contributions to the city or neighbourhoods. Penrith City Council has committed significant resources in the development of a consultative process to support a strategic way forward in becoming a Child Friendly City. The development of the strategy included a number of consultations with children between the ages of 3-12 years with a variety of media including photographic documentation, online surveys completed as part of a school computer class and focus groups with children in vacation care. The resulting strategy will provide a guide for Council staff and stakeholders in how to include child friendly consultation strategies as part of project development, particularly in areas that affect children such as parks and public spaces. It will also support education in planning for environments that incorporate child friendly principles.



Participants in the story exchange project learning new media skills

### 5.4.2 The Story Exchange 2009 – Penrith Council

Throughout March and April 2009, 60 students from selected local Public Schools participated in a series of photography and digital arts workshops with a professional photographer and a film maker as part of a partnership between the Information and Cultural Exchange (ICE), Schools and Penrith City Council.

In addition to this young people took part in digital story telling workshops to produce short digital stories about their aspirations for their neighbourhoods as well as their passions, families, friends, the environment, recreation and music.

The Story Exchange culminated in a collection of photographic and digital stories told by children and young people living in the suburbs of Oxley Park, Londonderry, Cranebrook and St Marys. These works explore themes of neighbourhood strength, pride in place, local identity and passion for the environment.

### 5.4.3 Paint Penrith REaD - Mission Australia and Penrith Council

Penrith City Council has partnered with Mission Australia to lead the 'Paint Penrith REaD' initiative across the local government area. This initiative involves working with community agencies, early childhood services, parents groups, services clubs, charities and businesses to promote reading to children from birth. This initiative has come from the realisation that promoting a language rich environment for children from birth has a dramatic impact on the success of children's life long learning. This partnership includes holding an annual reading day and 'thinking smarter' in community events to promote reading, talking and singing to children from pregnancy.



Excerpt from 'Around the Brim'

### 5.4.4 Around the Brim-A child friendly guide to Brimbank - City of Brimbank

As part of preparing their Child Friendly Brimbank Action Plan, the City of Brimbank prepared 'Around the Brim' a child friendly guide to the city. The guide documents, in a child friendly format, the results of consultation with over 300 children in the City of Brimbank. The guide uses local children's own words and photographs to document:

- Places to play sport and be active
- Places with animals
- Places with people
- Places with nature
- Places to be creative
- Places to eat and shop
- Colourful and beautiful places
- Places to play and relax indoors.

The guide includes a map of the Top 50 Child Friendly Places in the City of Brimbank which includes the parks, playgrounds, restaurants, shops, community facilities, schools and centres that were identified through the consultation process as child friendly.

### 5.4.5 Joining Together for Bendigo Children - City of Greater Bendigo

In 2007, the City of Greater Bendigo was the first Australian city to be recognised as a child friendly city by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). Joining Together for Bendigo Children is an umbrella project to help the city become more child friendly. The project is a collaboration between the City of Greater Bendigo, St Luke's Anglicare, Bendigo Community Health, Bendigo and District Aboriginal Health Service and a consortium of local primary schools to promote happy and healthy children and families in the Bendigo community.

Greater Bendigo's vision for a child friendly city is that:

- Children are equal citizens with the same rights as adults
- Children are asked their ideas and opinions
- Children's ideas and opinions are seriously considered by adults
- Children feel safe in their community
- Adults care for the environment for children now and in the future.

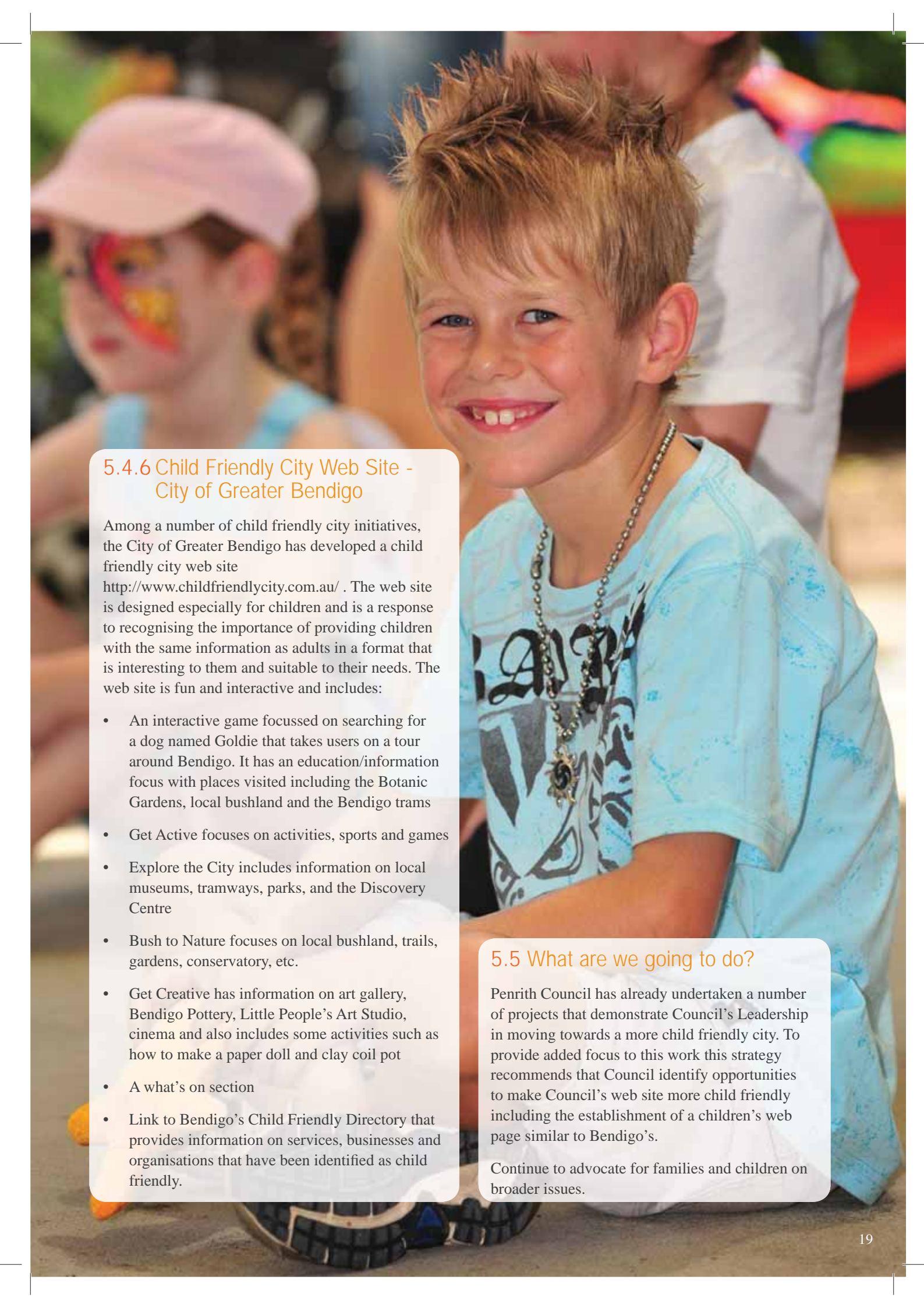
Some of the key activities that form part of Joining Together for Bendigo Children include:

- A community education program
- Child friendly city information brochure
- A recognised children's advocate
- A community working party that provides a greater understanding of the needs of local children
- Extensive children's consultation to enhance understanding of what it is like to be a child in Bendigo

- A facility audit that focuses on services and organisations using council buildings
- A child friendly sticker program that recognises services, businesses and organisations who demonstrate a commitment to supporting children and families
- A health and wellbeing strategy that includes a focus on the needs of children and access to children's and family services
- A Central Business District Plan that focuses on improving pedestrian access, slowing traffic, widening footpaths and reducing crime
- A cycling and walking strategy to improve pathways, signage, accessibility and connectivity
- A walking school bus strategy to improve children's road safety skills, promote exercise, extend social networks and reduce environmental pollution
- Play space strategy which is working towards universal access to play opportunities for all children
- Early years literacy program that encourages parents to read with children
- A leadership group to oversee implementation and resource the program. The group is made up of City of Greater Bendigo councillors, senior bureaucrats, non-government organisation leaders and children's advocates.

Other examples of comprehensive approaches to creating child friendly cities include the:

- City of Port Phillip
- City of Brimbank
- Hobsons Bay City Council.



#### 5.4.6 Child Friendly City Web Site - City of Greater Bendigo

Among a number of child friendly city initiatives, the City of Greater Bendigo has developed a child friendly city web site <http://www.childfriendlycity.com.au/>. The web site is designed especially for children and is a response to recognising the importance of providing children with the same information as adults in a format that is interesting to them and suitable to their needs. The web site is fun and interactive and includes:

- An interactive game focussed on searching for a dog named Goldie that takes users on a tour around Bendigo. It has an education/information focus with places visited including the Botanic Gardens, local bushland and the Bendigo trams
- Get Active focuses on activities, sports and games
- Explore the City includes information on local museums, tramways, parks, and the Discovery Centre
- Bush to Nature focuses on local bushland, trails, gardens, conservatory, etc.
- Get Creative has information on art gallery, Bendigo Pottery, Little People's Art Studio, cinema and also includes some activities such as how to make a paper doll and clay coil pot
- A what's on section
- Link to Bendigo's Child Friendly Directory that provides information on services, businesses and organisations that have been identified as child friendly.

#### 5.5 What are we going to do?

Penrith Council has already undertaken a number of projects that demonstrate Council's Leadership in moving towards a more child friendly city. To provide added focus to this work this strategy recommends that Council identify opportunities to make Council's web site more child friendly including the establishment of a children's web page similar to Bendigo's.

Continue to advocate for families and children on broader issues.

# PENRITH AS A PLACE OF OPPORTUNITY FOR CHILDREN

According to the *Community Strategic Plan 2031* being a city of opportunities for Penrith is about:

- A city with a strong local economy
- Equitable access to services and facilities
- Lifestyle and housing choices in our neighbourhoods
- A council that speaks out for Penrith and our region
- Involves, informs and responds.

Two key outcomes for children that support Penrith being a leading child friendly city are:

- Access to facilities, services, programs and activities
- Children's sense of agency and influence over the future.

## 6.1 Access to facilities, services, programs and activities

Children require access to a range of facilities, services, programs and activities to grow, learn and reach their potential. Many of these facilities and services are the responsibility of Local Government. These include facilities for child care, libraries, Neighbourhood Centres as well as parks and open space. Many of the programs and activities that operate from local facilities are funded by the State Government and delivered by community organisations. These relationships highlight the need for a coordinated approach to the planning and provision of children's and family services in Penrith. Council is well placed to act as a coordinator of collaborative and integrated planning to achieve enhanced outcomes for children.

Key issues in Penrith related to access to facilities, services, programs and activities for children and families are equity and early years access. Geographic distribution of facilities and services and matching local community need is a major focus of Council's social planning agenda. Early years access has also been recognised as a priority with the greatest benefits produced by ensuring children's access to the appropriate services and programs at an early age.

## 6.2 Sense of agency and influence over the future

It is important that children have the power to take action that leads to them having some control over the things that affect their lives. Children enjoy being able to make choices and have some control, within age appropriate boundaries, over their own lives.

A sense of agency helps children to feel powerful and teaches them that their contributions are meaningful and have real and practical effects. A child friendly agency switches the emphasis from children as passive consumers to more active citizens who have the right to participate and have some influence on the things that are important to them. A sense of agency and feeling of some level of control is important to children developing skills in problem solving and in achieving personal goals and feelings of worth. It also can contribute to the health and well being of children well into adulthood, building a sense of pride and place as citizen of the community.



### 6.3 What do children in Penrith say?

Children identified a range of facilities in the community that were important to them. Children liked facilities like libraries and child care centres that provided them with the opportunity to learn, obtain resources, mix socially and play with their friends.



Emu Plains Branch library – *“I like to borrow books and DVDs from here and they make toys there. I like Penrith City library also and like to go there with my friend.”* Elise, Blue Emu Children’s Centre



The Kids Place Children’s Centre – *“I took this photo because I come here and people go too. It is important to children to go to preschool and learn things.”* Isabella, Kids Place Children’s Centre

Sense of agency is an issue that affects many aspects of children’s lives. It is not a concept that children refer to directly but is evident in a number of their responses. Survey results of primary schools students do include a range of responses that indicate that sense of agency and control over their own lives is an issue for children in Penrith. Some children spoke of people drinking and smoking around them, with this (reflecting children’s awareness of some key public health issues) making a number of children feel uncomfortable. Some children also spoke of feeling uncomfortable in their own parks and neighbourhoods primarily associated with behaviour by older children and young adults. Survey results and the field work also demonstrated a high level of concern from children in Penrith about graffiti and broken glass in public areas, particularly in playgrounds and parks. These problems influenced children’s feelings of lack of control and influence over their own environments.

## 6.4 Examples

This section provides examples of leading practice where children are engaged in the planning for their neighbourhoods.

### 6.4.1 Kingswood Park Neighbourhood Action Plan and Neighbourhood Park Engagement Process - Penrith City Council

Kingswood Park, in North Penrith, was identified as the first area to be targeted for the development of a Neighbourhood Action Plan (NAP) as part of Penrith City Council's Neighbourhood Renewal Program. Essentially the NAPs identify specific targeted actions to address key community issues and needs identified through the community engagement process and other research for Kingswood Park.

In developing the NAP public space and parks emerged as a key local issue. The importance of quality play equipment for children and families was emphasised as a priority for Kingswood Park. Council organised a 'Dreaming Up Our Park' event with artist David Capra, giving local residents direct input into the design and planning process for a playground in Kingswood Park. This event was attended by approximately 120 people (including 70 children and young people).



Artist David Capra working with the community in Kingswood Park "dreaming up the park" introduces participants to creative ways to express what they would like to see in their park.



Local residents "dream up their park" actively contributing to the development of a playground in their neighbourhood.

Artist David Capra explained the process the community undertook to 'dream up their park': "The models took the form of plasticine, paddle-pops, pipe cleaners, coloured paper and foil among other craft media, where children felt free to play with ideas. The objects included a telescope, microscope, spider webs, ponds, fountains, jumping equipment (made from a large sponge), flowerbeds, bridges and climbing and Parkour equipment. There were also suggestions of sculptures in the form of a dinosaur, clouds, and wind catchers. Throughout, themes that appeared frequently were animals and nature."

The high level of attendance and engagement at this event is attributed to the strength of the relationships built through the Neighbourhood Renewal Program engagement process. The process generated energy, enthusiasm and an interest in the program on the part of local residents. It allowed Council officers to get to know residents, local families, local stories and community strengths. This knowledge supported planning for events and contributed to excellent attendance and participation. Residents have shown a high level of 'buy in' to the project, particularly in relation to the local park enhancement.

<sup>8</sup> Images and descriptions from Local Government Cultural Awards 2009 web site <http://culturalawards2009.lgsa.org.au/projects/67-creative-community-engagement-in-kingswood-park>



Families from Oxley Park engaging in playground design

### 6.4.2 Oxley Park Playgroup Consultation - Penrith City Council

As part of the development of a Neighbourhood Action Plan (NAP) for Oxley Park, a focus group was held with a playgroup coordinated by Mission Australia at Oxley Park Public School. The playgroup consultation was designed to appeal to children under school age as well as capturing the ideas and concerns of local parents as a specific target group.

The focus group utilised creative methods such as building a play dough model of Oxley Park on a map and 'graffiti' sheets to collect information from parents and carers. The graffiti sheets are a facilitated activity which allows for children and adults of various literacy levels to participate in an easy and supportive process. The consultation raised issues regarding public spaces, the need for services such as a post office and local strengths such as the programs provided by the Oxley Park Public School.



Parents and children enjoy playvan activities at Claremont Meadows

### 6.4.3 Mobile Playvan – Penrith City Council

Council is currently undertaking a number of initiatives that contribute to access to facilities, services, programs and activities. Good examples are the mobile play van and the toy library. These are examples of delivering services in a different way and recognising that accessing facilities and services can be difficult for children and families, and that bringing the programs and activities to them enhances access.

The Mobile Playvan is a free early childhood play program that is taken into parks and neighbourhoods across the city providing access to families in outlying areas of Penrith to qualified early childhood staff, a play program and parent information.

### 6.4.4 Penrith Library Children's Activities - Penrith City Council

Penrith City Council operates four library sites, including the main library from the Civic Centre in the Penrith City Centre. The library offers a range of activities particularly aimed at children including holiday shows and interactive activities, four weekly toy library sessions at different branches on both weekdays and weekends, story time for children at the main branch and two other branch libraries, reading competitions, an online homework tutor available between 4-8 pm weeknights, and a quarterly newsletter advertising activities and providing important literacy information for parents.

The high level of usage of many of the above programs indicate they provide enhanced opportunities for children of different ages to access opportunities.

### 6.4.5 Involving Children and Young People - Participation Works and Play England

Participation Works and Play England have developed a checklist for involving children and young people in developing play space. The checklist published in 'How to Involve Children and Young People in Designing and Developing Play Spaces' includes the following principles for engaging with children:

- Be inclusive - To create innovative and attractive playable spaces that are truly inclusive. Disabled children and young people and those from other potentially excluded groups must be as involved as their peers in the complete design process
- Use a multi-method approach - There is no set way of doing things. Using a range of techniques and approaches will ensure there is something that works for everyone
- Be creative - Using arts, crafts, drama, role-play, photography, video work etc. is engaging for us all, but works particularly well with this age range. Creative space gives children and young people a chance to think through ideas. Creative approaches also offer the opportunity to express ideas visually as well as verbally or in written form
- Involve children and young people across all stages of the design cycle. The process is most effective and meaningful if children and young people are engaged across the whole design cycle: Prepare, Design, Construct, Use, Maintain and Review
- Support children and young people to think beyond their lived experiences - Make sure children and young people are supported to stretch their imaginations beyond their existing knowledge. Build in site visits or introduce temporary props and images. Focus on what children and young people would like to do, rather than what they would like to have in their play space.
- Invest time and commitment - Meaningful involvement cannot be a 'tick box' exercise, or a rushed addition to existing work. Genuine involvement across the six stages of the design process will take time and require the commitment of all involved
- Form partnerships and work with others - Designing play spaces requires the skills and experience of a broad range of professionals, the wider community and children and young people. Make sure everyone is involved and working together. Make links with professionals who have the expertise that you need
- Use the resources and networks out there - Ask for advice and support when you need it. There is a growing body of toolkits and resources. Make contact with those who have already tried it out.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.participationworks.org.uk/>

### 6.4.6 Hands on Democracy - Old Parliament House, Canberra

Hands on Democracy is a permanent exhibition at Old Parliament House (now the Museum of Australian Democracy) that encourages children and their families to understand the concept of democracy in very real and practical terms. Democracy can be a very abstract and uninteresting concept for children but it is central to the themes of agency and influence over the future. This exhibition demonstrates how a complex and potentially dry subject like democracy can be made interesting and engaging for children. The exhibition is highly interactive and is designed to encourage questioning, creativity, participation, sharing ideas and listening to others.

The main goals of Hands on Democracy are to:

- Provide an interactive, participatory, family-friendly space for children aged 4-12 in family and school groups
- Offer relevant hands-on experiences
- Look at democracy from the point of view of free expression of ideas, civic engagement and grass-roots movements, rather than the parliamentary process
- Offer open-ended experiences where the process of engagement is more important than any preordained outcome (encouragement of interpersonal interaction, negotiation, debate and exchange of ideas).



Image by Regan Forrest – Exhibit Files

Key features of the exhibit include:

- Introduction: entrance corridor lined with magnetic poetry, plus famous (as well as satirical!) quotations about democracy
- Voices: real-life examples of how children have taken action and made a difference about issues
- Storytelling: an area for children's artworks and stories, including a screen-based exhibit for showing children's performances. The artworks and performances developed for the opening were based on the Australian Aboriginal story of Tiddalik the Frog, and were developed in collaboration with an indigenous storyteller
- Democracy: an area where groups can plan their ideal community, looking at the balance and interplay between urban, industrial and natural spaces
- Democracy sculpture: a space for visitors to leave behind a thought or an idea, as well as a way of showing the cumulative impacts of small individual actions. Visitors take a leaf, write a message to it, and tie it to one of the trees in the space. So the visitors can track the development of the trees over time, a camera overlooking the space periodically takes shots which visitors can scroll through using a spin browser
- Make It Take It: an area separated from the main exhibition, which can be used for drawing and making activities, which can be closed off from the rest
- PlayActBe: spaces for dressing up and role play, related to key historical periods in the development of Australian democracy.



Image by Exhibition Studios

### 6.4.7 Blue Mountains Stronger Families Planning Group

The Stronger Families Planning Group is a collaboration that brings together the government agencies and community organisations that support children and families in the Blue Mountains. The purpose of the planning group is to work collaboratively to:

- Identify a shared vision and outcomes for the support of children and families
- Address the identified outcomes in a way that is proactive, evidenced based and collaborative.

The group was established in response to the recognition that no one organisation or agency can respond effectively to the complex needs of children and families. Historically, funding arrangements have fostered working in isolation and even competitively. However, there has been increasing evidence to show that the most effective way to make a positive change in the lives of children and families is through the development of comprehensive and coordinated service systems, each with a local community focus.



Member of the Blue Mountains Stronger Families Planning Group include:

- Aboriginal Cultural Resource Centre
- Blue Mountains Children's Services Forum
- Blue Mountains Child and Adolescent Protection Interest Group
- Blue Mountains City Council
- Blue Mountains Division of General Practice
- Blue Mountains Women's Health Centre
- Centrelink
- Department of Community Services
- Department of Education and Training
- Department of Health
- Families NSW
- Family Support Association
- Katoomba Chamber of Commerce
- Rotary
- University of Western Sydney
- Wimlah Women and Children's Refuge.

The group has been working on improving service coordination and collaboration using the Schools as Community Centres model.

A young girl with blonde hair and blue eyes, smiling and holding a pink glue stick and a tube of paint. The background is a bright, sunny outdoor setting with green foliage and a clear blue sky. The girl is wearing a white sleeveless top. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent white box on the left side of the image.

## 6.5 What are we going to do?

Penrith Council has already undertaken a number of projects that provide opportunities for children to engage in planning for their community and participate in their community. Feedback from the children and family services consulted as part of this project presented the view that Council had a key role to play in coordinating and facilitating a planning partnership that could be based on, but not necessarily a replica of, the Blue Mountains Stronger Families Alliance. Council will facilitate the establishment of a Child Friendly Penrith Reference Group playing a key role in engaging relevant stakeholders in the development of a child friendly community.

Council will investigate the creation of a Children's librarian position and developing a cross library focus on child friendly services and activities.

Council will identify how to improve Council's Customer Service area/foyer and make it more engaging and interesting for children and consider establishing interactive display material that could address key issues for Council like participation, sustainability, planning for the future, etc.

Council will develop an engagement protocol for how we engage children in decision making

Council will continue to develop its internal capacity, and resource bank for engaging with children

Council will identify projects that children could participate in ranging from strategic plan development to park design.

# PENRITH AS A GREEN CITY FOR CHILDREN

According to *The Community Strategic Plan 2031* Penrith being a green city is about:

- Healthy waterways and protected natural areas
- Viable agriculture and rural activities that provide fresh local food
- A Council with a smaller ecological footprint

Two key outcomes for children that support Penrith being a green city are:

- Access to nature and open spaces
- Independent mobility.

## 7.1 Access to nature and open spaces

Natural areas, whether they be creeks, rivers, lakes, bushland or a stand of trees are attractive areas for children. They are exciting and stimulating places to play and to learn. Natural areas stimulate children and being outdoors is a strong predictor of physical activity. Children also have a strong instinctive attachment to nature and it is important to foster this through regular exposure to the natural world.

Positive encounters by children with nature are important for the child but also, perhaps, for the environment itself. A UK report by Thomas and Thompson on why the environment matters to children<sup>10</sup>, found that children have a good understanding of environmental issues and that this understanding is developed primarily through exploration of the natural environment. However, the report highlighted that increasing restrictions on access to outdoor environments has the potential to seriously inhibit the development of environmental awareness in children.

Although the environments experienced by children in the UK are, in many cases, quite different to Penrith, this finding does strongly echo sentiments expressed during the consultation process for this project. Children and other stakeholders identified the importance of the natural environment and many stakeholders observed that a key thing to change was the diminished access to natural areas for play.

This has significant implications in a number of Council functions including urban planning and park design. It presents an opportunity to consider how, for example, planning for new release areas and future design of play areas and recreation space can better integrate natural areas as places for imaginative play and environmental learning.

Children's experience of the natural environment, their environmental awareness and their commitment to sustainability are part of a continuum. The links between children's wellbeing and sustainability are strong.

Tackling children's quality of life issues and environmental sustainability together can improve quality of life for everyone now, as well as in the future. The paradox is that we are fostering a generation that is likely to face the toughest environmental challenges yet, in terms of climate change and the ever-increasing pressure on natural resources. This generation, more than any other before, will need the environmental awareness and citizenship that is instilled through exploration of the natural environment in childhood.

*Thomas and Thompson (2004)*

<sup>10</sup> Thomas, G. and Thompson, G. (2004), *A Child's Place: Why environment matters to children*, Green Alliance/Demos



## 7.2 Independent mobility

Restrictions on mobility can impair children's capacity to be familiar with, and know their way around, their own neighbourhoods. It has impacts both physically and socially as children become less physically active (particularly with restricted incidental exercise like walking to school) and become divorced from their local community and the people in it.

Learning how to negotiate and navigate your way around your local area is important for developing children's independence and competence. It helps children build an understanding of their local area, where they fit into it and developing a sense of 'their' place. However, a safe, friendly environment is required before children (and their parents) will feel comfortable about children travelling independently throughout their own neighbourhoods.

Children's understanding of place is best developed from sensory rich experiences in which children have direct contact with both the natural aspects of their environment and the people in their local community, and ideally have the opportunity to creatively shape their own places. David Engwicht has highlighted the importance of this sense of place for children: 'Freedom to explore the local neighbourhood ... gives children the opportunity to develop a relationship with the placeness of their physical environment. Robbing children of a sense of place robs them of the very essence of life.'

*Paul Tranter, Overcoming Social Traps<sup>11</sup>*

<sup>11</sup> In Gleeson, B. and Sipe, N. (eds.) (2006), *Creating Child Friendly Cities: Reinstating kids in the city*, Routledge

## 7.3 What do children in Penrith say?

Many children identified natural areas around Penrith, especially the Nepean River, as their favourite place to go. Children talked about the river as a special place where they go with their family to play. They talked about the lakes, rivers, birds and the "beautiful trees". Elise from Blue Emu Children's Centre said of her photo of the river, "I like going to the river and play footy and cricket with Daddy and Riley my brother. We have picnics and feed the ducks. I also like the trees and the parks."



Werrington Lakes – "I like feeding the ducks" Harrison, Rainbow Cottage Children's Centre

Children also identified a lack of footpaths and safe ways for them to travel as an obstacle them moving independently around their neighbourhood.



"I do not like the photo taken of the driveway and road because there is no footpath to get to my sister's school." Ellie, Rainbow Cottage Children's Centre

## 7.4 Examples

This section provides examples of leading practice where children are provided with opportunities to contribute to sustainable practices and engage in learning opportunities

### 7.4.1 Catchment Tours - Penrith City Council

Council is currently contributing to environmental awareness and action. The programs raise awareness about sustainability and provide education in school and communities. Examples include catchment tours, storm water activities and the Colyton Learning Community Stormwater activity.

Council has developed a catchment tour to engage Stage 3 students on water quality issues, teaching about the impact we have on our waterways through stormwater pollution, and introducing the concept of a catchment to the students. The tour aims to address specific learning outcomes of the curriculum and includes:

- Educational activities hosted by Sydney Catchment Authority at Warragamba Dam, including going onto the dam itself,
- An inspection of a Gross Pollutant Trap (GPT) in Penrith which visually shows the type of pollution making its way through the stormwater system,
- A visit to Werrington Creek where the students 'get their hands dirty' by planting native trees or participating in bushcare activities.



Children participating in Sydney Catchment Authority Tour

### 7.4.2 Storm water activities and drain stenciling – Penrith City Council

Students get the opportunity to learn about the environment in a fun and interactive way while becoming more aware of water pollution issues. Penrith Council Staff conduct a school stormwater audit as a way to identify the issues a school can address to improve stormwater related problems. At the same time, it provides valuable learning outcomes for the students

Drain stencilling makes the link between the stormwater system and our waterways. This provides the students with an engaging exercise which helps develop an understanding of urban drainage systems and how they link to our waterways and also provides a potent visual message to the passerby. This contributes to sustainable practices in the school and wider community. The session is coupled with interactive games and activities that raise awareness of catchment health and water pollution issues, and gives handy hints on minimising the impacts of stormwater pollution.



Students participating in the Colyton learning community project

### 7.4.3 Colyton Learning Community - Penrith City Council

Seven local schools, which form the Colyton Learning Community, investigated local aquatic systems and stormwater issues as part of an Australian School Innovation in Science, Technology and Mathematics (ASISTM) Project. The project, which was funded by the Australian Government, aims to promote science in local schools. Penrith City Council assisted the Colyton learning community in applying for the grant that funded the ATISTM Project, and supported the project by undertaking stormwater education activities with students. The project ran from early 2008 to June 2009. Highlights of the project included:

- Practical field visits to South Creek, Ropes Creek, Penrith Lakes, Warragamba Dam and gross pollutant traps (GPTs) in Penrith
- A Peer Mentoring Program between secondary and primary students and teachers and teacher trainees.
- Community partnerships with Penrith City Council, Penrith Lakes Education Centre, Warragamba Dam, Greening Australia and Mamre Homestead, which allowed for the sharing of knowledge
- Opportunities for students to study and visit their local waterways
- Increased teacher confidence in allowing learning to be fuelled by experience and discussion
- The teaching of real life science to willing and engaged students
- Development of teacher and partnership networks
- A photo display of the project, showcased at Penrith City Library during June 2009.

As part of the project Council delivered catchment tours to the schools within the Colyton Learning Community to teach the students about the importance of stormwater and water quality issues and introduce them to the concept of a catchment. Several hundred students were involved in the project and experienced science first hand that is real, relevant and local to our area.

The teaching staff involved gained expert knowledge on current best practice and are fully committed to enhancing their teaching practice to expose other staff and students to this method of quality teaching. As for future steps, the Colyton Learning Community is already engaging in activities to ensure the ongoing viability of the project.

The Colyton Learning Community schools include Bennett Road PS, Colyton PS, Oxley Park PS, St Marys PS, St Marys South PS, Colyton High School and St Marys Senior High School.

### 7.4.4 Enviro Adventure – Penrith City Council

Run by Penrith City Council's Environmental Health Department, the Enviro Adventure program offers a 'hands on' interactive event that incorporates key environmental themes, including energy and water conservation, waste, biodiversity and storm water pollution.

The program was developed to address the stage 3 curriculum and activities include a life sized environmental board game 'Eco Pursuit' and the sustainable games 'find-a-word' energy challenge. This program is offered free to primary schools and Council officers run approximately three to four events each term.



Students participating in the 'Eco Pursuit' Game

### 7.4.5 'Car free' neighbourhood - Vauban, Freiburg, Germany



Vauban 'car free' neighbourhood, Freiburg Germany

The Vauban neighbourhood is an 'eco district' on the edge of Freiburg, Germany. Vauban is a brownfield redevelopment of a former NATO military base. It has been designed around the principles of sustainability including a strong focus on children and community.

Vauban's design limits the need for a car. 40% of residents do not own a car. For those that do own a car they are parked in 'solar' garages on the edge of the neighbourhood. There are some internal roads (for when people have to drop off shopping etc.) with a 5 kilometre per hour speed limit. This approach to cars and traffic management means that the majority of the outdoor space is given over to green, child friendly playable space.

Vauban is an example of the realisation that play does not just take place in designated playgrounds, but in the whole environment that children occupy. CABE Space writes that "Future city planning needs to recognise that providing a fenced off play space in the middle of a housing estate is not adequate – the whole estate should be playable"<sup>12</sup>

Because so much of Vauban is car free, green open space is located where roads would usually be found. The design has been informed by the philosophy that children's play can be free, unstructured and undirected by adults. There are no set play areas, play happens everywhere throughout the neighbourhood. Landscape features double as climbing rocks, occasionally a tonne or two of sand will be dropped in an open space area for an impromptu sand pit, swings can be found on trees in sometimes unexpected places. As CABE Space writes "The safe environment created in Vauban enables children to access play spaces freely on their own – and to decide where they want to go and what they want to do".

<sup>12</sup> CABE Space (2008), *Public Space Lessons: Designing and planning for play*, [www.cabe.org.uk](http://www.cabe.org.uk)

### 7.4.6 Natural Play Invaders - Play England

It is hoped that future urban planning for the expansion and redevelopment of Penrith will consider and respond to the multiple benefits of preserving natural areas. However, in some areas of the city, access to natural areas can be difficult. One way to address this is to bring nature to the children. This is the approach of the 'natural play invaders', a group established by Play England.

Natural play invaders provide adventurous and stimulating play equipment made of natural materials to children whose access to natural areas for play is limited. The play equipment utilises fallen trees, rocks and other natural material to provide a range of unstructured and interesting play opportunities.

Natural Play Invaders provides a different 'green city' perspective on the 'mobile play van' that is already operational in Penrith.



Images from [www.londonplay.org.uk](http://www.londonplay.org.uk)

Work by Australian Planner Wendy Sarkissian, cited in Woolcock and Steele (2008), identified the need to maintain urban bushland to encourage ecological learning. Key ways of achieving this within a community setting include prioritising open green space when planning, regenerating and rehabilitating neglected bushland spaces and developing habitat links and wildlife corridors. The Kidscape Manual, also cited in Woolcock and Steele, also highlights the importance of providing space for community gardens, children's farms and nurseries, and of improving local parks to provide both running and still water and other features to create the ingredients of a natural adventure playground.

### 7.5 What are we going to do?

Penrith Council already has a number of provisions of open space and encourages sustainable lifestyles that demonstrate Council's commitment towards a more child-friendly city. Actions for future planning could include the following:

Identify future master planning and redevelopment projects that can be used as demonstration projects to test how child-friendly city principles could be applied to encourage a greener and more child-friendly development outcome in Penrith.

Ensure future land use, open space and recreation plans consider the preservation of natural areas for children's play.



# PENRITH AS A LIVEABLE CITY FOR CHILDREN

According to *The Community Strategic Plan 2031* Penrith being a liveable city is about:

- A city with healthy waterways and protected natural areas
- Viable agriculture and rural activities that provide fresh local food
- A Council with a smaller ecological footprint

The Strategic Plan 2031 talks about:

- Safe neighbourhoods
- Pride in public spaces and local centres
- Safe footpath and cycle networks that encourage active movement
- Neighbourhood, recreation and leisure facilities that meet community needs
- Safe and well maintained parks that encourage healthy activity and community wellbeing.

Two key outcomes for children that support Penrith being a liveable city are:

- Children leading healthy and active lives
- The city centre and neighbourhoods being safe and secure environments for children.

## 8.1 Healthy and active

Local urban environments, which Local Government has key responsibilities for, are recognised as being an important influence on levels of physical activity and therefore on health. Children are, and should be, key users of local environments. Children should be encouraged to walk and cycle through their local areas as much as possible. It is this ‘incidental exercise’ – walking to and from school, riding a bike to the local park to play, running down to the local shops – that has been shown to be essential to good health for children.

While ‘health plans’ are commonplace in Victoria, few councils in NSW prepare health strategies. Penrith City Council is one of the exceptions and produced a Health Strategy in 2009. Penrith’s Health Strategy deals explicitly with the importance of the ‘early years’ and how early childhood health is a strong indicator of health and wellbeing throughout life.

In Penrith, like many other places, once normal activities like walking to school and roaming around your neighbourhood are becoming increasingly rare for children. In the consultation process for this project, the vast majority of children did not walk to school and reported that their experience of their own neighbourhoods was often from the back seat of their parents’ car. As well as numerous social, health and environmental costs, this increasingly sedentary lifestyle, often inadvertently supported by parent’s fear is impacting levels of physical activity undertaken by children and therefore on their health overall.

## 8.2 Safe and secure

One measure of a community’s child friendliness is the degree of independence that children enjoy. Feeling safe and secure enables children to participate fully in their communities and ensures their parents are comfortable allowing them to do so. Pressures on parents to keep their children safe have resulted in restrictions on the freedom of movement for children. While care and responsibility are obviously essential features of good parenting, it seems that an over emphasis on crime, stranger danger and similar concerns, have caused an understandable over reaction.

Safety concerns are restricting play opportunities for many children to regulated play environments in homes or commercial facilities. This may protect children from hazards but also restricts children’s interaction and understanding of their local environment.



Spontaneous unregulated play in neighbourhood spaces ... is increasingly becoming an activity of the past. Many children have lost access to traditional play environments, including streets and wild spaces, partly through parental fears about traffic danger, bullying and 'stranger danger', partly through the loss of natural spaces and partly through perceptions of what is best for children [and] when neighbourhoods aren't supportive of children's needs, children are limited in their capacity to experience and explore their environments and engage in cognitive play and outdoor learning – behaviours that lead to the development of environmental cognition.

Malone, K. and Tranter, P. (2003) <sup>13</sup>

### 8.3 What do children in Penrith say?

Play and play spaces are important to children in Penrith. Survey results of Penrith primary school children show that children thought more parks including better playgrounds would make Penrith a better place for children. Responses showed a strong emphasis on places to play including informal play as well as facilities for sport and more structured outdoor play – all of which are important to children being healthy and active.

In the survey, the children were asked to identify places in their neighbourhood where they did not feel safe. Whilst almost half of the children answered 'no' some of the children identified that they did not feel safe and secure primarily in spaces where they were alone or unable to be seen such as alley ways

and in the park at night. Some identified that they felt threatened by the behaviour of older children and some adults in their neighbourhood. Some of the comments included:

- "I don't feel safe around people that look mean and nasty"
- "Yes when I see teenagers smoking and when cars stop in front of me when I'm riding to my friends house and vans scare me when they stop"
- "Yes the alley ways, on the roads because there's no foot paths so we have to ride on the road and there's too many bends so we cant see if a car is coming and its dangerous for little kids"
- "At the park because broken glass and graffiti. And sometimes teenagers even burn things"
- "not really, only if I am alone in the alley ways".

Suggestions from the children to improve safety included:

- Having nicer people around
- Halting bullying
- More safety houses
- More security and security cameras.



Ryan, Gray Lane Children's Centre, "I like tumbling at the park"

<sup>13</sup> Malone, K. and Tranter, P. (2003), *Schoolgrounds as sites for learning: Making the most of environmental opportunities*, Environmental Education Research, 9(4), 283-303

## 8.4 Examples

This section provides examples of leading practice examples where children are engaged in open spaces and are active participants in their neighbourhood.



Glenmore Park Child and Family Centre playground

### 8.4.1 Glenmore Park Child and Family Centre - Penrith City Council

The Glenmore Park Child and Family Centre offers a new style of community service delivery for Penrith City Council with a multipurpose approach to housing community and social activities. The building contains a 50 place long day care centre, two community meeting rooms, and two community service suites for agencies to hire on a sessional basis. The site also contains a coffee shop, an all abilities adventure playground and open space to create a place where families can meet, socialise, informally gather, access early childhood education services, attend a parenting or family activity or use a community service operating out of the centre.

Within six months of opening the Glenmore park Child and Family Centre is well utilised and the long day care centre already has a waiting list

### 8.4.2 Child Care Links Program Family Meal Project - Penrith Council

This project was initiated in one Out of School Hours Centre and is progressively being rolled out to other

centres. The concept involves children in out of school hours care learning to cook and preparing a healthy two course meal for their family. The condition of participation was that the family agree to eat the meal in a TV free environment encouraging families to discuss the day's activities and eat a healthy meal around a table.

### 8.4.3 500 Steps to School - Fairfield City Council

Fairfield City Council in February 2010 launched the 500 Steps to School demonstration project that focuses on working with children and parents to increase the number of children who walk to school. The program aims to improve health, community safety and build on local community links.

The program is a response to unsustainable levels of car usage for the journey to school. At the demonstration school site research showed that of around the 420 children at the school, 400 were driven; yet 75% of those children lived within one kilometre of the school.

The program commenced with children stepping out 500 steps from their school and marking that distance with flags. Families who live within that distance are encouraged to walk to school; while those outside are encouraged to park around the 500 step boundary and walk the remaining distance. The program is actively engaging students and will utilise children to encourage their parents to participate.

Currently, the project is in its initial stages. Council plans to expand it and is interested in working with other councils to investigate the possibility of more widespread introduction of the program.



Photo courtesy of Fairfield City Council

#### 8.4.4 Child Friendly By Design - Shellharbour Council

Shellharbour's Child Friendly by Design project is a collaboration between Healthy Cities Illawarra and Griffith University. It is one of the Communities for Children strategies funded by the Federal Government's Stronger Families and Communities Strategy initiative.

Child Friendly by Design seeks to involve children, young people and their families in the design and redesign of spaces and places in Shellharbour. The project is also developing a set of child friendly indicators to assist planners, designers and developers to create more child and friendly spaces. It is intended that these indicators will be used within the planning department of Shellharbour Council and also by developers and urban designers.

#### 8.4.5 Healthy Choices for Children - Hobsons Bay City Council

In recognition of increasing concerns about childhood obesity, Hobsons Bay City Council developed an incentive based program to encourage healthier eating in their area. The Healthy Choices for Children Program offers incentives to food businesses to offer health menu choices for children that have reduced fat, sugar and salt levels as well as increased fibre.

Participating businesses are promoted within the community as a leader in healthy food provision. As well as the recognition and promotion, participating businesses receive a collection of recipes that they can use in their own businesses.

#### 8.5 What are we going to do?

Penrith Council has already undertaken a number of projects that demonstrate Councils commitment to a healthy and active city. Examples that can be considered for future actions include:

Incorporate child friendly city planning principles into the review of major planning documents such as the Sustainability Blueprint for Urban Release Areas

Promote child friendly principles with stakeholders as a key aspect of creating liveable communities

Develop child friendly city audits and maps to identify places to play, safe routes to school, activity centres. Utilise a community engagement/ development process that focuses on children exploring, analysing and documenting their own neighbourhoods

Investigate ways to work with local schools to increase the level of walking to school by students.



# PENRITH AS A VIBRANT CITY FOR CHILDREN

According to *The Community Strategic Plan 2031* Penrith being a vibrant city is about:

- A city with people and places that are inclusive, foster creativity, and celebrate diversity
- Design excellence that respects our local identity
- Opportunities to engage, participate and connect
- A council that promotes health and wellbeing.

Two key outcomes for children that support Penrith being a vibrant city are:

- Sense of belonging and connection to community
- Exploratory and imaginative play.

## 9.1 Sense of belonging and connection to community

Community is an important part of children's lives. The communities and neighbourhoods where children live, and the people that make them up, are important influences on children's sense of belonging. A feeling of belonging and sense of community is related to cognitive development, educational achievement, psychological wellbeing and physical health.

Physical qualities like access to facilities, services and play spaces are recognised as important. Opportunities for children's play in public space perform an important role in bringing people together (both children and adults). It has been described as part of the 'glue' that brings communities and families together (National Play Association et al, 2000:13). That 'glue' is often referred to as social cohesion or social capital and it is these kinds of community bonds that reinforce feelings of connection and sense of belonging.

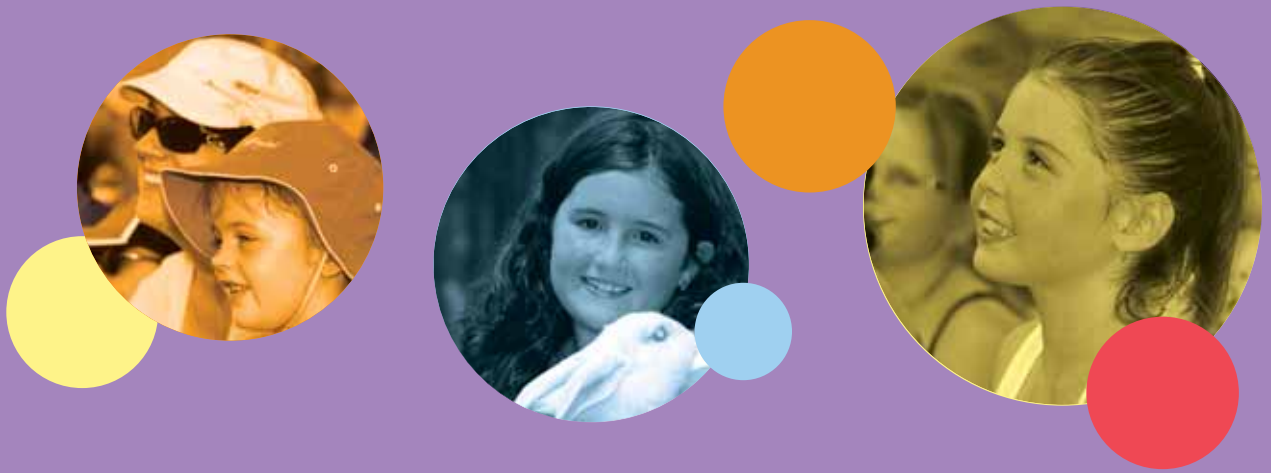
## 9.2 Exploratory and imaginative play

Play is widely recognised as essential to children's healthy cognitive, physical, social and emotional development. It is recognised by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights as a fundamental right of every child.

Play is essential to learning and understanding about the world. Play provides an opportunity for children to be creative and develop their imaginations. It helps to develop the skills and confidence that are the foundation of the resilience which will enable children to deal with future challenges.

Play enables children to interact with, and understand, the physical and social worlds in which they live. It helps them to learn about the natural environment and also how to interact with others, work in groups, to share, negotiate, resolve conflicts and to stick up for yourself.

As well as these important benefits, we should not forget that the primary purpose from a child's perspective is that play is fun. It is one of life's simple joys that should be cherished and encouraged and that every child should have the opportunity to pursue.



### 9.3 What do children in Penrith say?

Responses to the survey from primary school aged children show the importance that people, and the social aspects of local communities, have on children in Penrith. When asked about what they liked best about the neighbourhood where they live, children's responses frequently referred to people – friends, family and neighbours – highlighting the importance of sense of belonging and connection to community to children. Responses also highlight the relationship for children between people they know and feeling safe. Typical responses include:

- “The thing I like about my neighbourhood is that there are nice people that help me when I have a problem”
- “It is a safe and friendly place”
- “I like the feeling that I am safe because everybody knows me in my neighbourhood”
- “The people are nice and I know a lot of people”
- “People are friendly and look out for you”
- “There are lots of people you know. Lots of safe parks. I can walk around without being scared”.

Play was also a key feature of children's survey responses. The most popular thing that respondents thought would make Penrith a great place for kids was more parks including better playgrounds and cleaner parks. There was a strong emphasis on places to play, including informal play as well as facilities for sport and structured outdoor play.



Harrison, Rainbow Cottage Children's Centre, with a photograph of his favourite place “I was happy with the black things (stones)”



## 9.4 Examples

This section provides examples of leading practice examples where children are engaged in cultural and community festive occasions and are provided with opportunities to experience cultural and performing arts events.

### 9.4.1 Food Family Culture - Penrith City Council

Food Family Culture was a series of small community events initiated in Oxley Park by Council's Neighbourhood Renewal Program in 2009 and then repeated in Kingswood and St Marys in 2009 and 2010. The events were specifically designed to engage with residents from diverse cultural backgrounds and particularly local children.

Each event included free healthy food and drink, jumping castle and creative activities designed to engage children in the event. Maps and craft supplies were used to identify sites which were significant for children and places the children had hopes for, for example fixing up a local park or the shopping strip.

Information gathered from children and their parents or carers was used in each area to inform the development of a Neighbourhood Action Plan (NAP) for that neighbourhood. NAPs are a formal planning document developed by Council to effectively direct resources into addressing resident identified issues and build on the identified community strengths in each of the selected older established neighbourhoods.



Kingswood residents- children and families


### 9.4.2 Performing Arts Program for Children - The Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre, Q Theatre Company and The Penrith Conservatorium of Music (Penrith Performing and Visual Arts Ltd)

Penrith Council's Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre has a program of activities for children aged 0-12 aimed at engaging and exposing them to high quality performing arts productions, and enabling them to participate in the making of performing arts work under the guidance of industry specialists. The Centre provides a venue for both school based and out of school and school holiday activities including age appropriate performances, drama and music education programs and workshops.

Collaboration with groups such as the Australian Ballet and Carriage Works to provide workshops and activities including contemporary and indigenous dance, story telling and visual arts enable children to be exposed to a variety of professional performing arts experiences.



The Australian Ballet children's workshop- Joan Sutherland Performing Art Centre



#### 9.4.3 Penrith Regional Gallery and the Lewers Bequest - Penrith City Council (Penrith Performing and Visual Arts Ltd)

The Gallery's Early Childhood and Family Education Program offer opportunities for young audiences to engage with the exhibition program. Children and their carers are shown how to create artworks together and art objects are introduced through tutor-led, child-centred interactive games and activities. Child-centred activity sheets for visitors with young children include a printed version of a Detective Trail activity picked up at reception on arrival.

The Gallery provides school holiday art making workshops, and art box workshops during school terms and a Sunday Kids Club for 5-12 year olds including hands on art making workshops such as little monsters sculpture workshop, Fantasy creatures drawing workshop. Children can also design and weave a colourful wall hanging, make a fantasy 2D puppet, and use drawing and collage to bring a ballet costume to life, create a costume design for the beautiful heroine or the dastardly villain.

The Gallery also offers playgroup mornings designed for children and their carers to enjoy a creative morning together. Sessions include art-making in the studios and activities in the garden. The Gallery has a modest coffee shop facility and playgroups are welcome to bring morning tea and stay and enjoy the gardens and Gallery spaces after the workshop.

#### 9.4.5 Streets Ahead - City of Brimbank

The City of Brimbank in Victoria is introducing a range of neighbourhood level events including ‘street time’ events to show children they are valued and belong in their local neighbourhoods. These events and programs are intended to strengthen community wellbeing and safety by assisting children and their families to be more confident walking in, cycling and generally using their neighbourhood streets. Like in Penrith, local children reported that they did not feel welcome or respected in their own neighbourhoods. These neighbourhood level events are designed to encourage people to get out on their streets, meet their neighbours and celebrate children.

#### 9.4.6 Southbank - Brisbane

Southbank Brisbane is focussed around free and safe play and includes both large scale and more intimate structured and unstructured play spaces. A number of playgrounds, a beach with swimming ‘pool’, waterways and large open space encourage a range of activities. The variety of shops, restaurants, cafes, cultural institutions, modes of transport and other amenities attract high levels of activity throughout the day and evening.

This example is a major public space that may not have immediately obvious relationship to Penrith. However, consideration of how public space is used in significant town centres in Penrith, including Penrith City Centre, could find useful lessons that could be adapted from this example. Generally speaking, the principles around diversity of users attracted by a range of activities could be applied in a number of different public space settings.



Southbank, Brisbane. Photo from [www.southbankcorporation.com.au](http://www.southbankcorporation.com.au)

#### 9.4.7 Design for Play - Play England

Design for Play<sup>14</sup> includes the following ten design principles that can be used as a guide to the creation of successful play spaces. According to the principles, successful play spaces:


- Are ‘bespoke’ i.e. tailored to specific sites and communities
- Are well located
- Make use of natural elements
- Provide a wide range of play experiences
- Are accessible to both disabled and non-disabled children
- Meet community needs
- Allow children of different ages to play together
- Build in opportunities to experience risk and challenge
- Are sustainable and appropriately maintained
- Allow for change and evolution.

Consultation in Penrith for the development of this strategy has highlighted the widespread dilemma of balancing the importance of providing stimulating and interesting play environments with the strong contemporary focus on safety and risk management. Much of the literature on play emphasises the importance of acceptable risk in children’s development. Play is seen as a key element of children learning to assess calculated risks which is considered to be fundamental to developing confidence and abilities. Children actively seek out risk taking opportunities and play provision should consider how to provide these opportunities through exciting and stimulating environments that balance risk appropriately<sup>15</sup>.

Research by CABE Space<sup>16</sup> in the UK has found an “over sensitivity to risk” that has “stifled the design of rich and stimulating environments.” In what may also provide some guidance to Penrith City Council, Play England has developed a Position Statement on ‘Managing Risk in Play Provision’.

<sup>14</sup> Play England (2009), *Design for Play: A guide to creating successful play spaces*, [www.playengland.org.uk](http://www.playengland.org.uk)

<sup>15</sup> National Play Association, UK

A photograph of two young girls sitting in a colorful, multi-colored plastic toy car. The girl on the left has brown hair and is wearing a red top, waving her right hand. The girl on the right has red hair and is wearing a red polka-dot top, smiling. They are outdoors on a sunny day with trees in the background.

Children need and want to take risks when they play. Play provision aims to respond to these needs and wishes by offering children stimulating, challenging environments for exploring and developing their abilities. In doing this, play provision aims to manage the level of risk so that children are not exposed to unacceptable risks of deaths or serious injury.

*Play England, Managing Risk in Play Provision*

### 9.5 What are we going to do?

Penrith Council has already undertaken a number of projects that demonstrate Council's commitment to a vibrant and inclusive community. Examples that can be considered for future action include:

Link event planning to themes that are relevant to children including literacy, health, sense of community, social inclusion

Continue to provide small scale neighbourhood events that focus on building children and broader community connections

Develop a cross departmental approach to play planning and risk management in the play setting with a view to maximising opportunities for children's safe and adventurous play.

<sup>16</sup> CAGE Space (2008), *Public Space Lessons: Designing and planning for play*, [www.cage.org.uk](http://www.cage.org.uk)

# PUTTING THE FRAMEWORK INTO ACTION

## THE OUTCOME FOR PENRITH

Penrith City Council will work with the community to achieve the following outcome – children are safe, happy, confident, and in education.

## THE STORY BEHIND THE PROPOSED ACTIONS

Our research has demonstrated that many children don't walk to school because of parental concerns about the general public behaviour and children's safety. Not enough children ride or actively walk around the city because there aren't enough safe connected bike paths. Children feel unhappy in their neighbourhood when parks have broken glass and vandalised equipment and identify that they feel unsafe when there is graffiti in their neighbourhood and feel threatened by the behaviours of older children. We are aware that poverty and family issues prevent children from participating in education causing poor outcomes in learning, workforce participation, health and community engagement.

## PARTNERS

State and Federal Government, community agencies, family support services, families with children, Council departments as identified.

## WHAT WORKS TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES

Involve children in redevelopment of parks and public spaces

Target the areas for community development activities that have been identified as have greater proportions of children that are developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains by the Australian Early Development Index report

Provide community information about the importance of reading talking and playing with children (Paint Penrith REaD)

Provide affordable children's services or activities across the city

Work with partners to provide low cost/ no cost children's activities across the city for children to attend with their parents.

## THE ACTIONS

To become a leading **child friendly city**, Penrith City Council will:

Identify opportunities to make Council's Website more child friendly including the establishment of a children's web page similar to Bendigo's.

**Responsible Officer: Corporate Communications and Marketing Manager**

Continue to advocate for families and children on broader issues **Responsible Officer: Community and Cultural Development Manager**

### What this will look like

Children access Council's website through specific activities (measure % and number of hits from children in the 0-12 age group)

Children have access to, and participate in learning opportunities from birth (measure % and number of children engaged in early childhood programs and primary school-AEDI results/NAPLAN Results)

To become a **green city for children**, Penrith City Council will:

Identify future master planning and redevelopment projects that could be used as demonstration projects to test how child friendly city principles could be applied to encourage greener and more child friendly development outcomes in Penrith. **Responsible Officer: Sustainability and Planning Manager**

Ensure future land use, open space and recreation plans consider the preservation of natural area for children's play. **Responsible Officer: Parks Manager**

### What this will look like

Children have access to natural spaces (measure by asking question in targeted survey)

Children in Penrith have opportunities to participate in decisions made about spaces for children (number of opportunities provided and attended)

To become a **place of opportunity for children**, Penrith City Council will:

Coordinate a **child friendly Reference Group** with relevant stakeholders.  
**Responsible Officer: Community and Cultural Development Manager**

Investigate the creation of a Children's Librarian position and developing a cross library focus on children's services and activities. **Responsible Officer: Library Services Manager**

Identify how to improve Council's Customer Services Area/ foyer and make it more engaging and interesting for children. Consider establishing interactive display material that could address key issues for Council like participation, sustainability, planning for the future. **Responsible Officer: Corporate Communications and Marketing Manager**

Develop and engagement protocol for how we engage with children. **Responsible Officer: Sustainability and Planning Manager**

Continue to develop Council's resource bank for engaging with children.  
**Responsible Officer: Community and Cultural Development Manager**

Provide support for relevant projects across Council that children can participate in.  
**Responsible Officer: Community and Cultural Development Manager**

#### **What this will look like**

Children in Penrith have opportunities to participate in decisions made about spaces for children (number of opportunities provided and attended)

Children participate in planning in the development of local parks in their neighbourhood (measure % and number of opportunities provided and attended)

Children have places to feel welcomed and have fun in Penrith (child developed assessment checklist distributed and completed)

More children are assessed as 'on track' in Australian Early Development Index 5 domains (%)

To become a **liveable city for children**, Penrith City Council will:

Integrate child friendly principles into major planning documents such as the Penrith Development Control Plan. **Responsible Officer: Sustainability and Planning Manager**

Promote Child friendly Principles with key stakeholders as a key aspect of creating liveable communities. **Responsible Officer: Sustainability and Planning Manager**

Develop child friendly audits and maps to identify places to play, safe routes to school and activity centres through utilising community engagement /development processes that focus on children exploring, analysing and documenting their own neighbourhoods. **Responsible Officer: Community and Cultural Development Manager**

Investigate ways to work with local schools to increase the level of walking to school by students. **Responsible Officer: Community and Cultural Development Manager**

#### **What this will look like**

Children actively use the streets and parks in their neighbourhood (measure by asking a question in targeted surveys)

Children walk to school (survey children in schools as part of community engagement process)

Children feel safe in their neighbourhood (measure by asking questions in a targeted survey)

To become a **vibrant city for children**, Penrith City Council will:

Link event planning themes that are relevant to children including literacy, health, sense of community, social inclusion. **Responsible Officer: Community and Cultural Development Manager**

Continue to provide small scale neighbourhood events that focus on building children and broader community connections. **Responsible Officer: Community and Cultural Development Manager**

Develop a cross departmental approach to play planning and risk management in the play setting with a view to maximising opportunities for children's safe and adventurous play. **Responsible Officer: Recreation Manager**

#### **What this will look like**

Children have places to feel welcomed and have fun in Penrith (Child developed assessment checklist distributed and completed)

Events in the city have child friendly activities (measure % of activities in the city, including child friendly activities as part of the program)

# APPENDIX 1: CONSULTATION METHODOLOGY

Consultation undertaken for this project focussed on children, service providers and agencies who work with children in Penrith and with Penrith City Council internal staff.

## 11.1 Consultation with Children

Three streams of consultation with children were utilised:

- Pre-school engagement with children 3-5 years old
- Vacation care engagement focussing on children aged 6-9 years
- Schools engagement focussing on children aged 10-11 years.

### Pre-school engagement

Pre-school engagement involved working with children in three child care centres across Penrith (one pre-school and two long day care centres). The focus of the engagement was on working with pre-school children to understand how they perceive their local neighbourhoods with an emphasis on way finding and affordances and to work with children to tell their stories about their local community.

The engagement involved:

- Interviews and storytelling
- Photography
- Drawing.

Key features of the methodology included:

- Invite children to draw a picture of your local neighbourhood/where you live and include all your favourite places as well as the places you don't like
- Ask children to explain their drawings through storytelling
- Document the sort of places children identify as their favourite places and the places they don't like

- Facilitate a discussion on where children go and what they do in their neighbourhood.

### Vacation care engagement

Vacation care engagement involved working with two Council operating Vacation Care centres during the July school holidays. Key features of the methodology were:

- Working with small groups of children to conduct a tour of the local area. As part of the tour children were asked to complete a field survey identifying good and bad features of the area, places where they felt safe or unsafe, how easy or hard it is to get around, ideas for improvements etc
- The tours were followed up with a reporting and discussion session on the results of the field surveys and discussion about good and bad features, safe places, getting around etc.
- Utilising the knowledge gained from the tour and the following discussion, children were invited to draw a picture of their ideal or dream area including all the things that would make it a great place for children. Children were asked to write a short explanation of their drawing.

### Schools engagement

Engagement with local primary schools focused on 10-11 year olds or grades 5-6. The key features of engagement with schools include development of a web based survey that asked children to identify:

- What they liked about the neighbourhood where they lived
- What they don't like
- Places where they don't feel safe and why
- Three things that they think would make Penrith a great place for kids.

116 local school children responded to this survey.

## 11.2 Consultation with agencies and service providers

A range of organisations who work with children and families in the Penrith area participated in a workshop that was based around the following focus questions:

- What is a project, program, or initiative that has worked well? Why did it work well? What are the key lessons?
- How can agencies, organisations and Council work better together?
- What are important things that Council could do?
- What are important things that your organisation/ agency could do?
- What are the key opportunities and challenges?
- General group wrap up question: What is a small change that could make a big difference?

A clear message from this workshop was that participating agencies saw a need for greater coordination and collaboration among the attending agencies and thought that Council, who they identified as being objective as they were not a direct service provider in most cases, would be ideally placed to facilitate greater partnerships and collaborative planning.

## 11.3 Internal (Penrith City Council) consultation

Major purposes of the internal consultation were to raise awareness of this project occurring and also identifying some of the key projects and initiatives that are already happening in Council that support a child friendly city. Each major Group of Council was consulted. Questions asked in interviews included:

- To what extent are the needs of children considered in the work that you do?
- Can you give an example of a project your group has undertaken which has involved children or specifically addressed the needs of children?

- What worked and why?
- How important do you think the following things are to a child friendly city:
  - Being able to move safely and freely in neighbourhoods
  - Access to a park or playground within walking distance to their home
  - Opportunity to express their feelings and be heard
  - Opportunity to participate in the cultural and social life of the community
  - Places to meet and socialise with other children in the community
  - Access to caring adults who can provide support and services
  - Being an equal citizen able to influence decisions about their city
  - Being protected from exploitation, violence and abuse
  - Living in an unpolluted environment
  - Access to good health and support services
- What can your work group/department do to support children and families in Penrith?
- Do you have any suggestions for what your group and/or Council in general could do to better address the needs of children in Penrith?

In addition to these interviews with senior staff, this project was also informed by an internal reference group that included representatives across a range of Council departments including libraries, cultural planning, urban planning, community development, environmental health, and sport and recreation.

# APPENDIX 2: CHILDREN IN PENRITH

## 1. Headline Characteristics

Penrith LGA has 23,893 couple families with children (42.0% of all households) compared to 36.8% in the Sydney Statistical Division (SD) (an ABS statistical geography which covers the greater metropolitan region and hinterland). Families make up 76.3% of all households in Penrith LGA compared to 68.1% for the Sydney SD.

2,133 of children aged 0-4yrs (16.6% of all children in this age group) live in a one parent household and 1,380 (10.7%) are in a one parent household where the parent does not work. These figures are 35-40% higher than the Sydney SD (11.8% and 7.9% respectively).

One of the critical trends over the last ten years in Penrith has been the increase in one parent families, (+2.4% point increase) to 18.5% of all families and 14.5% of all households. This change is slightly higher than the WSROC Region (+1.1% points higher) and somewhat higher than the Sydney SD (+2.9% points higher). While this increase has occurred principally in families with children over 15 years, those with children under 15yrs still make up a larger proportion of all one parent families in Penrith (10.6% of all families compared to 7.8%).

1,070 (14.5%) of one parent families do not have a car.

There has been an overall decrease of around 10% (-3,300 persons) in the number of children (aged 0-11yrs) to 31,364 in that time, with the sharpest decrease occurring in the last 5 years. Despite this, Penrith remains an area with a higher proportion of children and young people. Twelve years ago this difference was quite substantial, with a population of children and young people around 2-3% higher than the Sydney SD. At this time, the proportions of persons in these age groups in Penrith were also higher than the WSROC region. Since then, however, proportions of the population across all these age groups have since come closer to that of the WSROC

region as a whole. However proportions of children and young persons still remain around 1%-1.5% higher than the Sydney SD.

26.2% of residents living in the Penrith Local Government Area (LGA) are from a culturally and linguistically diverse background.

Within the Penrith LGA, 1.2% of children aged 0-4 have a disability, while 2.3% in the 5-14 age group have a disability.

Penrith LGA also has a high proportion of families and children in new release areas.

## 2. Priority areas

There are areas of Penrith which have salient characteristics in relation to children, such as higher proportions and/or numbers of children and those where the most change has occurred and is forecast to occur. In this section both percentages and numbers of children and families in different age groups have been provided in the areas with the highest numbers and percentages. These provide a basis for comparison between areas (%) and the overall population and potentially associated need (numbers).

## 2.1 Age breakdown

### 0-4 years:

Current Glenmore Park and Claremont Meadows both have proportions of young children around a third higher (~+2.5 % points) than the LGA. These proportions generally reflect relatively new release areas and younger families. Glenmore Park also has the highest number of children in this age bracket (1877) along with St Clair (1451) and Cranebrook (1219), South Penrith (816), Penrith (668) and Kingswood (666). While small in overall number, the proportional increase in some areas has been high between 2001-2006, e.g. Leonay (+2.4% points) and Castlereagh-Agnes Banks (+2.2% points). By contrast, Llandilo-Berkshire Park and Orchard Hills have proportions of children in this age group around a third lower than the LGA (~-2.5 % points). Orchard Hills also has a low overall number of children (97), along with other rural residential areas such as Castlereagh-Agnes Banks (115), and Kemps Creek-Badgerys Creek-Luddenham-Mount Vernon (116). Suburbs which have experienced a high decrease in the proportion of children in this age group between 2001 and 2006 are Erskine Park (-2.4% points), Orchard Hills (-2.2% points) and Claremont Meadows (-2.4% points). The changes in Erskine Park and Claremont Meadows may be a function of settlement period, household formation and cohort factors associated with release areas.

Forecast The forecast indicates that by 2021, the St Marys Release Area (11.3%) and the Caddens Release Area (10.8%) will have a high percentage of persons in this age group. The growth in the St Marys Release Area is significant because it represents an 11.3% change in the number of children in this age bracket between 2011-2021. By 2021, Glenmore Park will have the highest number of children in this age bracket (2055), along with St Clair (1472) and Cranebrook (1289) and St Marys Release Area (868). By 2021, Leonay (114), Llandilo - Berkshire Park (125) and Regentville - Mulgoa - Wallacia

(196) will have a low overall number of children. St Clair (-0.9%) and Regentville - Mulgoa - Wallacia (- 0.7%) are expected to have the most significant decrease in the number of children in this age bracket between 2011-2021.

### **5-11 years:**

Current Claremont Meadows has the highest proportion of children in this age group, over 40% (+4.3% points) higher than the LGA. Erskine Park (+3.1%) and Glenmore Park (+2.8%) also have higher proportions of persons in this age group. Glenmore Park also has the highest number of children in this age bracket (2596) along with St Clair (2176) and Cranebrook (1825). South Penrith (1011), Erskine Park (957) and St Marys (927). No areas have experienced any real increase in this age bracket. By contrast, Jamistown, has more than a 25% lower (-3.2% points) proportion of children in this age bracket. Penrith, Llandilo-Berkshire Park and Kingswood have somewhat lower proportions of children (-2.8 to -2.4% points) than the LGA. Suburbs which have experienced a significant decrease in the

proportion of children in this age group between 2001 and 2006 are Erskine Park (-2.8% points), Castlereagh-Agnes Banks (-2.6% points) and St Clair (-2.1% points).

This is a potential issue as places with better accessibility (Jamisontown, Penrith, Kingswood) have lower proportions of children.

Forecast The forecast indicates that by 2021 there will be a high percentage of persons in the 5-11 years age group in Glenmore Park (13.4%), the Cadden's Release Area (13.4%), Claremont Meadows (13.1%), Erskine Park (13.0%) and Penrith Lakes (13.0%). The greatest change will occur in the St Marys Release Area, which will experience a 12.8% change in the number of children in this age bracket between 2011-2021. By 2021, Glenmore Park will have the highest number of children in this age bracket (3311) along with St Clair (2267) and Cranebrook (1827). By 2021, Oxley Park (161), Leonay (184) and Llandilo - Berkshire Park (220) will have a low overall number of children. Glenmore

Park (-1.5%), Emu Heights (-0.8%) and South Penrith (-0.8%) are expected to have the most significant decrease in the number of children in this age bracket between 2011-2021.

### **2.2 Children with a Disability**

0-4 years: North St Marys has a somewhat higher proportion (+0.27% points) than the LGA of children who need assistance, yet still accounts for a comparatively small number (8). Cranebrook has a comparatively higher proportion (+0.17%) and the highest number (25) of children who need assistance. Many locations have no children reported in need of assistance. Glenmore Park has a number of these children (18), however this is not substantial relative to the overall population.

5-11 years: Londonderry has the highest proportion (0.6%) of children in this age bracket who need assistance and is in the mid range of overall numbers. Glenmore Park (79) Cranebrook (74) St Clair (53) and Penrith (53).

## 2.3 Family Types

### *Current*

Areas with a high proportion of couple families with children ( $\leq 15$  yrs) correspond to those areas with high numbers of children generally. The three suburbs of Erskine Park (48.5%), Glenmore Park (47.85) and Claremont Meadows (46.8%) have a significantly higher proportion of this family type, around 10% points higher than the next highest location (Llandilo-Berkshire Park). Areas with high proportions of single parent families are North St Marys (17.6%), Werrington (17.3%), Oxley Park (16.2%), Kingswood (15.3%) and St Marys (15.1%). Rural residential areas have substantially higher proportion of two or more family households: Kemps Creek - Badgerys Creek - Luddenham - Mount Vernon (5.9%), Castlereagh - Agnes Banks (5.1%) and Londonderry (5.0%)

## 3. AEDI (Australian Early Development Index) statistics 2009

In 2009 the Australian Early Development Index, a measure of how young children are developing as they enter school. The assessment is based on a teacher-completed checklist and measures five domains of early childhood development and was completed nationwide.

In Penrith 2,653 children were included from 123 schools. Of this 114 were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and 87 were born outside of Australia. On the five domains assessed 76.1 % children were on track, and 23.9% of children were developmentally vulnerable on one or more of the domains. 87.0% of children identified as having spent time in non parental care, and 70.8% spent time in an early childhood education program such as a preschool, long day care or family day care service.

