

Healthy and Engaged Communities

Early Years Infrastructure

South Gippsland welcomes the extended three-year-old kinder and pre-prep programs, but would like to ensure the roll-out is supported by appropriate infrastructure, workforce investment and ongoing maintenance support.

Due to the popularity of the programs, and regional population increases, Early Years Centres in South Gippsland are struggling to meet the demand for their services. Additionally, many of our Early Years Centres are located in old buildings that are no longer fit for purpose. Additional infrastructure support and investment is required to ensure country kids are provided with education opportunities that are equal to those who live in metropolitan areas.

Council's recently drafted Children and Families Plan states that parts of South Gippsland are effectively a 'desert' for childcare and early years services. The townships of Tarwin Lower, Venus Bay, Fish Creek, Toora, Welshpool and Nyora are all geographically isolated from early years services with travel distances to kindergarten or childcare often exceeding 30km (one-way).

Because of low population figures in some of our towns, it is not viable to attract investment from private enterprise, and also difficult to generate government funding. However, Council and our community are passionate that our children deserve the same standard as centres in larger communities.

Last year, Council was pleased to see Early Years investment in our communities. In particular, we were pleased to welcome new infrastructure in Leongatha and in Korumburra, where a new facility was installed co-located on the existing primary school site.

We support this concept and are thankful for the investment. However, additional support is required.

Our Request

South Gippsland Shire Council is calling on the Victorian Government to:

- Provide funding for the maintenance of buildings on Victorian Department of Education land.
- Establish state-owned and operated Early Years Learning Centres in the townships of Tarwin Lower/ Venus Bay and Toora/Welshpool. The selection of these locations would help to ensure equitable access for children in these geographically isolated communities.
- Provide funding to replace infrastructure that has reached its end of life and is no longer fit for purpose. Council currently maintains many Early Years buildings that are old and require extensive maintenance. Financial support is required to progressively replace this infrastructure to ensure Early Years services can continue to be provided.

South Gippsland Shire Council is calling on the Australian Government to:

Fund long day care infrastructure in rural areas where the demand for service is high, but not high enough to be profitable for private child care providers. The provision of long day care in these communities is essential in ensuring rural communities can continue to attract new residents and remain economically viable.