

# NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSES & COMMUNITY CENTRES: DELIVERING IN THE CITY OF MARIBYRNONG



Maribyrnong  
CITY COUNCIL



“There’s no other place  
that facilitates active  
citizenry and participation  
in community life like  
Neighbourhood Houses”

Neighbourhood House participant

## INTRODUCTION

This document gives a brief overview of the work, history, challenges and opportunities for Neighbourhood Houses and Community Centres in the City of Maribyrnong and is not intended to be a full review. It was commissioned by the City of Maribyrnong in order to increase knowledge about Neighbourhood Houses and Community Centres, both internally and externally. It also aims to look at future strengthening of the partnership and engagement with Neighbourhood Houses and Community Centres to benefit the broader Maribyrnong community.

There are currently eight Neighbourhood Houses and Community Centres supported by the City of Maribyrnong. These consist of three Council-managed Community Centres and five community-managed Community Centres/Neighbourhood Houses.

Consultations took place with representatives from all Neighbourhood Houses and Community Centres as well as Network West and key Council Staff. Thank you to all who gave of their time and expertise. Thanks also to the Footscray Historical Association for provision of historical information.

This document provides a foundation for opportunities to strengthen the work and engagement of Neighbourhood Houses and Community Centres in the City of Maribyrnong moving forward.

**Tania Phillips**

Consultant (August 2018)



# NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSES AN OVERVIEW

The Neighbourhood House sector is global - the first Neighbourhood House was established over 150 years ago in East London in 1884 with a mission to connect the rich and the poor in the community. While there is still a focus on marginalised communities for many Neighbourhood Houses today, they are varied and individual in their scope. There are now Neighbourhood Houses in Australia, US, Canada, UK and parts of Europe.

## KEY ORGANISATIONAL BODIES FOR THE SECTOR ARE:

### International Body:

International Federation of Settlement  
and Neighbourhood Houses (IFS)\*

### Australian National Body:

Australian Neighbourhood Houses &  
Centres Association (ANHCA)

### Victorian State Peak Body:

Neighbourhood Houses Victoria (NHVic)

### Victorian Local Networker's Network:

Network West (Western Metropolitan Region)

Neighbourhood Houses in Australia are known by many different names, these include: Community Centre, Neighbourhood House, Community House, Learning Centre, Living and Learning Centre and Neighbourhood Centre.

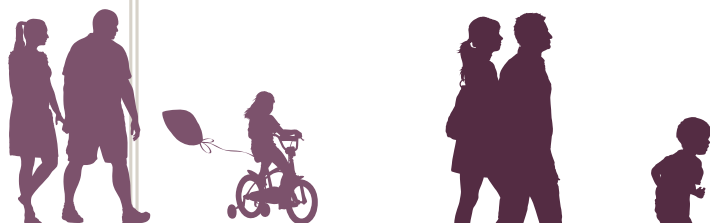
While a few isolated centres were in operation in the 1960's - the 1970's saw many more Neighbourhood Houses established as a direct result of campaigning, particularly by women working to address issues such as social isolation and safety. Today, there are more than 1000 Neighbourhood Houses Australia-wide, and nearly 400 of these are located in Victoria.

The Victorian State Government contributes funding to approx. 400 Houses under the Neighbourhood House Coordination Program which is currently managed by Department of Health and Human Services. Funding varies from House to House. Due to a community Statewide Campaign the Victorian State Government recently increased funding to the Neighbourhood House sector by approx. \$22M per annum. The campaign led to a higher profile and greater recognition of Neighbourhood Houses and the important work they do.

There are Neighbourhood Houses in all 79 Local Government areas of Victoria. Most community-managed Neighbourhood Houses also receive some support from their local government council or shire.

**In 2017 over 190,000 people  
visited a Neighbourhood  
House in Victoria and  
more than 6,600 people  
volunteered their time.**

NHVic 2017 Neighbourhood House Survey Report





## SOUL HOUSE

*An example of the Neighbourhood House Community Development Practice and Principles Model is evidenced in the current "Soul House" Project coordinated by West Footscray Neighbourhood House which is supported by the City of Maribyrnong.*

Soul House was developed in 2012 as a response to identified local need, and provides a means to connect with older, more vulnerable community members. Importantly, participants are viewed simply as 'neighbours' rather than as service recipients/clients or through the lens of the complex issues they face (homelessness, poverty, disability). The program:

- = facilitates a safe, welcoming space offering conversation, coffee, company
- = provides ongoing support and advocacy
- = offers access to fresh food, healthy meals
- = builds links to other relevant services, programs and information
- = instils a genuine sense of place, value & belonging
- = fosters opportunities for social inclusion & civic participation

Soul House consciously instils a legitimate sense of place to the City's most vulnerable, and has become an integral part of the fabric of the House and the community.

## WHAT DO NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSES DO?

With a few exceptions, Neighbourhood Houses are generally managed "by the community for the community" and are uniquely placed to respond rapidly to local needs. They are often at the frontline of direct community engagement and community building.

Most Neighbourhood Houses are independent organisations. They provide spaces, opportunities and programs responding to community needs which may include (but are not limited to) social isolation, mental health concerns, disengaged youth, food security, homelessness, sustainability, family violence, refugee support, vocational training, employment pathways, disability support, positive ageing, life-long learning, social justice, community advocacy, volunteering, childcare and family support.

Neighbourhood Houses are not just rooms for hire, hobby or education facilities, they are hubs of active community engagement and places of welcome and safety. They play an important role strengthening and building social capital, improving health and well-being, resilience, cohesion, connectedness, empowerment and belonging in local communities.

*Right: Graphic based on ANHLC Neighbourhood House and Learning Sector Framework 2003 & DHHS Neighbourhood House Coordination Program 2016-19 Guidelines and Information.*

## HOW DO NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSES WORK?

All Neighbourhood Houses in Victoria that are funded by State Government and are members of the peak body, Neighbourhood Houses Victoria, are guided by the following Community Development Principles and Practice Model.

Community Development principles underpin all Neighbourhood Houses.



“Neighbourhood Houses are about people, not buildings.”

Neighbourhood Houses Victoria 2018 Budget Campaign



# NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSES AND COMMUNITY CENTRES IN THE CITY OF MARIBYRNONG

## OVERVIEW AND EARLY BEGINNINGS

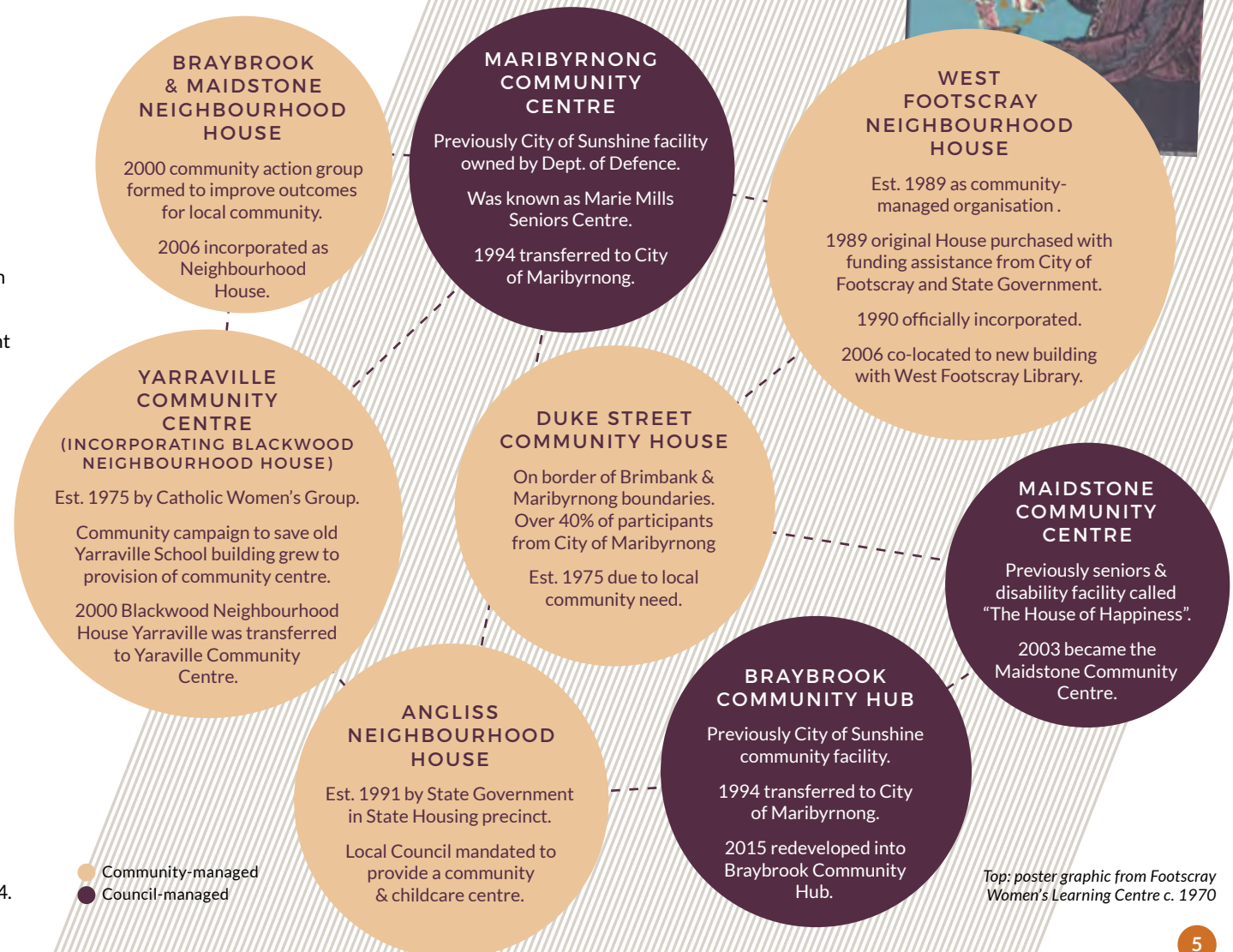
Neighbourhood Houses have a long history in the City of Maribyrnong region.

The Footscray Women's Learning Centre opened its doors in Bunbury Street in the late 1960's/ early 1970's. The Centre was at the forefront of the Neighbourhood House movement in Victoria. Some of the first programs offered included Theory of Driving, Math's for Fun, and Water Safety and Confidence for Mature Women.

There are currently eight Neighbourhood Houses and Community Centres supported by the City of Maribyrnong. All are unique and have diverse histories.

All Neighbourhood Houses and Community Centres in Maribyrnong are members of the Victorian peak body Neighbourhood Houses Victoria, and are also members of the western regional network of Neighbourhood Houses, Network West.

Nearly all Neighbourhood Houses and Community Centres in City of Maribyrnong were established by community action. Two of the three Council-managed centres were inherited from the City of Sunshine due to boundary changes and Council amalgamations in Local Government Reforms of 1994.



Top: poster graphic from Footscray Women's Learning Centre c. 1970



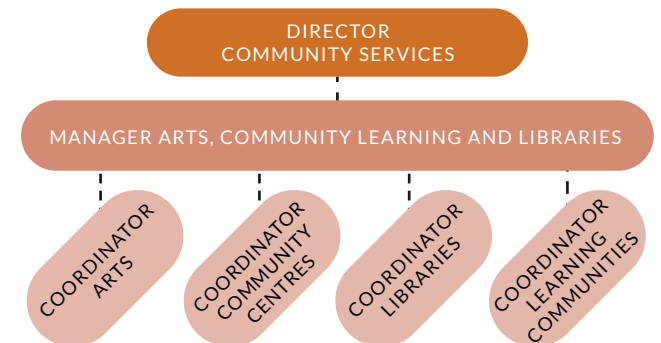
# Shortfall a harsh blow for houses

Community hubs plea for extra cash



## GOVERNANCE & RESOURCING

Neighbourhood Houses/Community Centres in the City of Maribyrnong are currently situated in the Arts, Community Learning and Libraries Department, within Community Services. The City of Maribyrnong, Coordinator Community Centres, oversees all Council-managed Centres but also liaises with and supports all organisations. See organisational graph below.



The relationship between community-managed Houses and Council has varied over the years, ranging from productive partnerships to dissatisfaction and a lack of trust at times for some independent Houses/Centres.

More recently City of Maribyrnong Council, via the 2018 Neighbourhood House Victoria Campaign, adopted a formal motion of support for Neighbourhood Houses and many Councillors' were actively supportive. This created positive engagement between Houses/Centres and Council and bodes well for future capacity and relationship building.

*Left: Maribyrnong Mayor Cuc Lam, supporting the 2018 Neighbourhood House State-wide funding Campaign with members of West Footscray Neighbourhood House. Maribyrnong Leader, 6 March 2018. Photo: Hamish Blair*

## COMMUNITY-MANAGED

While community-managed Houses/Centres are unique and vary in size, all have Committees/Boards comprising local community members. There are also various community sub-committees and advisory groups that provide input. As well, there are processes in place for consultation with the community on programming and strategic directions for the organisation. Community volunteers are an integral part of all organisations providing much needed support as well as pathways for skill development, participation, mentoring and community leadership.

Three Houses/Centres are Registered Training Organisations providing community-based vocational training.

All community-managed Houses/Centres have a Memorandum of Understanding with City of Maribyrnong. A strategic plan with City of Maribyrnong is due to be developed.

Community-managed Houses/Centres often have to juggle various project grants and funding from a wide range of bodies to operate. Depending on the House/Centre, sources of funding vary, but may include: State Government Neighbourhood House Coordination Program, Adult Education & Further Education (ACFE), Higher Education and Skills Group (HEGS), City of Maribyrnong, philanthropic trusts, project grants, Government childcare funding, community fundraising and sponsorship.

## RESOURCING FROM CITY OF MARIBYRNONG

Up until June 2018, the City of Maribyrnong contributed \$15,000 recurrent funding per annum, per organisation to support community-managed Houses/Centres within City of Maribyrnong boundaries. The Council also provided \$5,000 per annum to Duke St Community House located on the border of City of Maribyrnong and City of Brimbank.

Some community-managed Houses/Centres have also been successful in obtaining Council community grants for specific projects from time to time.

Due to recent lobbying by community-managed Houses, the City of Maribyrnong has increased the annual contribution per organisation within the City of Maribyrnong boundaries from July 2018. It has also increased the contribution to Duke Street Community House. While there is still some way to go to ensure equity with other Councils, this is a positive step in the right direction.

Council also provides maintenance and building support for some (not all) Houses/Centres. For example, West Footscray Neighbourhood House is co-located with West Footscray Library which the City of Maribyrnong maintains. At Yarraville Community Centre, Council is the Committee of Management of the building.

## COUNCIL MANAGED CENTRES

Council-managed Centres also vary in size and resourcing. Currently they are directly managed as part of the Arts, Community Learning and Libraries Department of Community Services. Directions and planning for Centres is undertaken as part of the broader Community Learning and Libraries Operational Plan. Staff are Council employees.

Local community engagement and participation at the formal operational or program level is more limited. Some Centres are beginning to seek more active participation from the community and have set up initial community advisory groups such as the Maribyrnong Community Centre's Twilight Market Advisory Group. There is generally less volunteer participation in day-to-day running of the Centres although specific events may attract many volunteers such as Maidstone Community Centre's Harmony Feast.

## RESOURCING FROM CITY OF MARIBYRNONG

Council-managed Centres are fully-funded by the City of Maribyrnong and do not receive funding from any other external source. All venues are owned and maintained by City of Maribyrnong.

In 2018/19 the total amount allocated to the three Council-managed Centres was \$1,035,079.





**“Maribyrnong residents have less contact & receive less social support from others than the average Melbournean.”**

City of Maribyrnong Health & Wellbeing Profile 2016



# HOW DO COMMUNITY CENTRES AND NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSES ALIGN WITH CITY OF MARIBYRNONG POLICY & STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS?

**The population within the city of Maribyrnong will grow from currently approx. 87,000 people to over 150,000 in 2041.**

This rapid growth places stresses on already over-stretched local government services and infrastructure. While there will be some increase in Council income due to rates there will also be an increased need for strong community infrastructure and services.

City of Maribyrnong Health and Wellbeing Profile 2016 highlighted the following features of the Maribyrnong community.



Major disparities in income. Only set to widen with the gentrification of many parts of the municipality.



Higher than average unemployment rates particularly in Braybrook and Maidstone.



Disadvantaged pockets in Braybrook, Maidstone & Footscray that correlate strongly with public housing locations.



Increase in mortgage & rental stress especially amongst residents living in Braybrook, Maidstone, Footscray & West-Footscray and residents aged 65 plus.



High numbers of people experiencing homelessness (Maribyrnong has twice as many homeless persons compared to the metropolitan area).



Maribyrnong residents have less contact & receive less social support from others than the average Melbournian.



Increase in health risks due to poor air quality, pollution, traffic noise & limited open & green spaces for the community.



Relatively low levels of health literacy amongst CALD communities, refugees, new arrivals, Aboriginal people & older adults.



Nutrition: significantly lower rates of consumption of fruit & vegetables.



Lower life expectancy than average.



Lower than average physical activity & higher than average alcohol & drug consumption.



Gambling on electronic gaming machines is the 3rd highest in Victoria.

# CITY OF MARIBYRNONG COUNCIL PLAN 2017- 2021 & NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSES / COMMUNITY CENTRES

The current Council Plan 2017-2021 sets out how Council will address community and infrastructure needs for residents in a challenging, changing environment. The plan incorporates community health and well-being outcomes into the strategic directions.

There are six Key Strategic Action Areas that Council has identified in the Plan. These are listed on the right.

Neighbourhood Houses and Community Centres have a key role to play in partnering with Council to deliver this strategic vision, and support residents to improve health and wellbeing outcomes in the municipality. They are already delivering many programs and services aligned with key Council strategic areas and health and well-being needs as can be demonstrated by the following snapshot of programs and activities.



**STRONG LEADERSHIP**



**HEALTHY AND INCLUSIVE**



**CLEAN AND GREEN**



**QUALITY PLACES AND SPACES**



**MOBILE AND CONNECTED CITY**

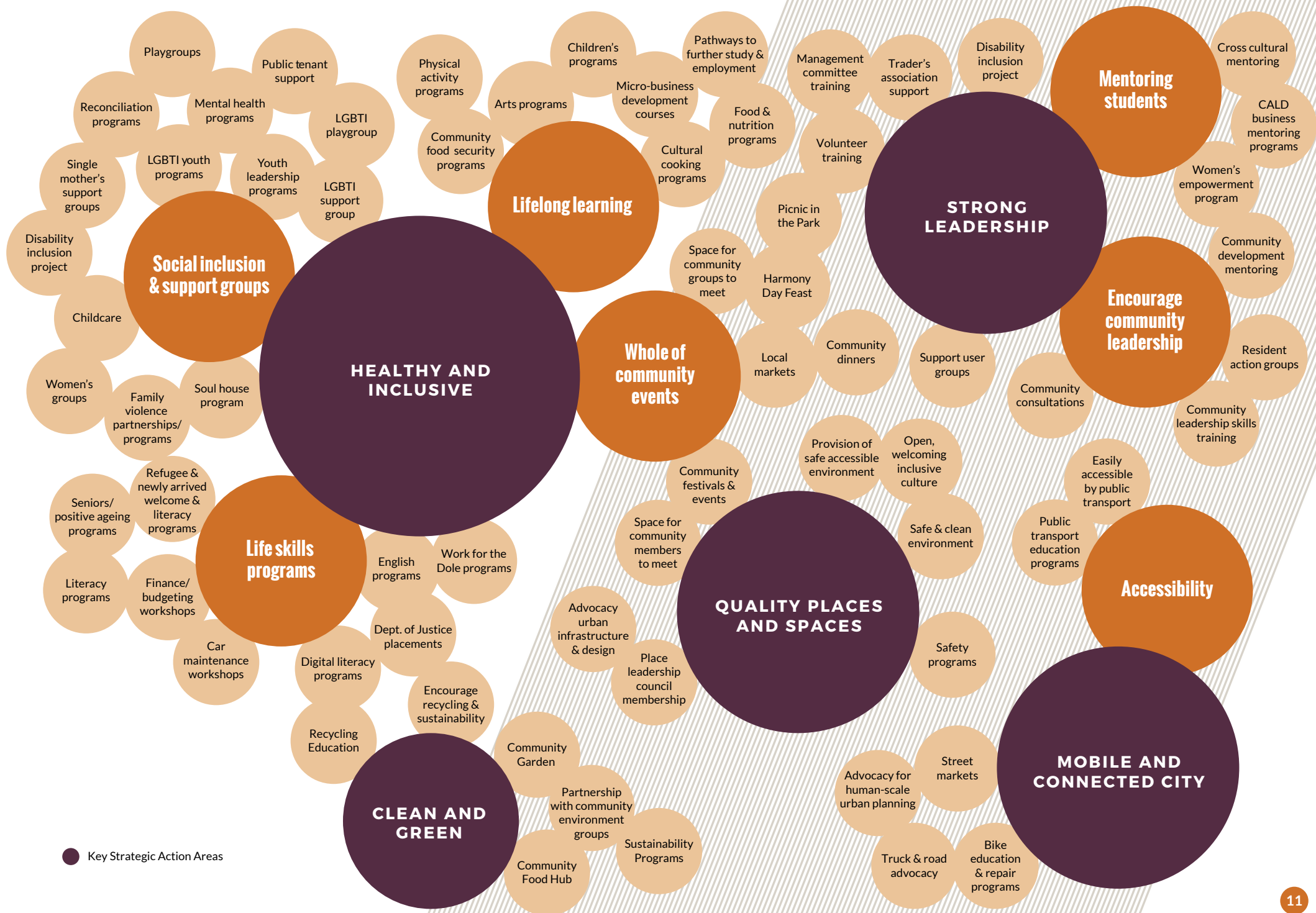


**GROWTH AND PROSPERITY**

**“A vibrant, diverse  
and progressive  
city striving for a  
sustainable future”**

COUNCIL'S VISION 2017-2021





# PARTICIPATION AND PROGRAM DELIVERY IN CITY OF MARIBYRNONG NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSES

The 2017, NHVic Neighbourhood House Survey demonstrates clearly the value that Neighbourhood Houses and Community Centres add to City of Maribyrnong community infrastructure and support, particularly addressing needs in the areas of social isolation, active engagement, volunteering, lifelong learning, citizenship and community connectedness.

In 2017, Neighbourhood Houses/Community Centres in the City of Maribyrnong facilitated:



**12,507 program sessions delivered**



**3,121 program participants per week**



**37 significant community events...**



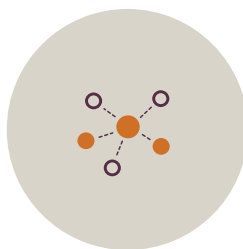
**...that 10,639 local community members attended**



**9,516 visits by community members per week**



**81 Volunteers per week to contribute over 10,658 volunteer hours per year**



**50 local community groups directly supported or auspiced**



**71 Partnerships with businesses, government, organisations**

## — LINH'S JOURNEY —

*Angliss Neighbourhood House shares Linh's story, demonstrating how Neighbourhood Houses/Community centres provide important community outcomes including welcome, safety, participation, family violence support, lifelong-learning, volunteering, leadership and connectedness. Linh's story is one of many occurring daily in Neighbourhood Houses/Community Centres across the City of Maribyrnong.*

Linh first came to us as a potential student brought to us by her husband to learn English as she was newly-arrived from Vietnam and had very low level English language skills. She was eventually removed from the class as her husband said she was pregnant and was not learning anything. We had heard from several of our other Vietnamese speaking students that she had miscarried and was very unhappy at home. We invited Linh to our Biggest Morning Tea where she told us (with much translating and hand gestures) that she was indeed unhappy as her husband hit her. We referred her to the appropriate domestic violence support systems, helped to draft her restraining order and liaised with both the Immigration Department and Centrelink on her behalf. After she was successfully removed from her husband's residence and relocated she was re-enrolled in our English as an Alternative Language Program. She now has an apprenticeship as a Hairdresser (part-time) and is still studying in our language program. To demonstrate her appreciation of all the support she feels that she has received from the Neighbourhood House and it's participants she provides haircuts on a fortnightly basis to our students and community members at no charge. These are conducted at the house after and during class and provide much amusement and satisfaction to us all.

*\*All personal identifying information has been changed.*



## POLICY AND PLANNING ALIGNMENT

Due to their broad remit of programs and the capacity to respond to multiple community needs, Neighbourhood Houses and Community Centres in the City of Maribyrnong align with, and are impacted by, an extraordinary range of Council policies and strategic directions. These include (but are not limited to) those listed on the right.

Council is committed to improving consultation and inclusion of Neighbourhood Houses and Community Centres in relevant policies, strategies and plans in many key policy areas.

NEIGHBOURHOOD  
HOUSE AND COMMUNITY  
CENTRE STRATEGY

ARTS AND CULTURE STRATEGY

FAMILY STRENGTHENING STRATEGY

STRATEGY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

LEARNING PRECINCT STRATEGY

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

COMMUNITY LEARNING AND LIBRARIES INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY PLAN

COMMUNITY LEARNING AND LIBRARIES

STRATEGIC PLAN AND BUILDING STRATEGY

COMMUNITY LEARNING AND LIBRARIES LIFELONG LEARNING AND LITERACY STRATEGY

STRATEGY FOR CHILDREN



# INTO THE FUTURE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

**As demonstrated, Neighbourhood Houses and Community Centres in the City of Maribyrnong are important community assets, addressing community need and Council's strategic vision.**

Consultations for this document revealed both challenges and opportunities to strengthen Houses/Centre's important work and partnership with City of Maribyrnong. Six main themes arose.

## VALUING & RECOGNITION 1

- = Nearly all Neighbourhood Houses /Community Centres consulted felt their work, role and value was not really acknowledged and recognised by Council as a whole.
- = Many felt that they were hubs of responsive frontline community strengthening and engagement, addressing multiple community needs, and that the relationship with other areas of council could be strengthened through strategic partnerships.
- = Recognition of expertise: Given their expertise in community development and community education, community-managed Houses/Centres would like the opportunity to contribute to Council across a broad range of areas including providing professional development for Council staff and contributing to relevant policy and strategic consultations.





## STRATEGY, PARTNERSHIP AND POLICY 2

- = All Community-managed Houses/Centres have a Memorandum of Understanding with City of Maribyrnong and a collective Partnership Strategic Plan for both community and council-run Centres is being developed.
- = A specific Community Development Framework for Council-managed centres to work within is currently being developed.
- = Neighbourhood Houses and Community Centres would like to have the opportunity to contribute to specific policy/strategy areas they intersect with.
- = There is opportunity to build partnering capacity for Council-managed Centres.
- = There are opportunities to partner and work more collaboratively with neighbouring Councils such as City of Brimbank and City of Hobson's Bay.

## BUILDINGS & INFRASTRUCTURE 5

- = Some buildings such as Maidstone Community Centre are in need of upgrading.
- = Possibly review current maintenance requirements for all Houses/Centres

## RESOURCING: FUNDING & STAFFING 3

- = Equity of funding and benchmarking of resourcing is an area identified as a priority especially due to the large population growth forecast.
- = Some Council-managed centres noted that using a community development approach is particularly resource and time intensive.
- = All staff in Council-managed Centres need to have skills and an informed and shared understanding of community development principles and practice. Staffing needs to be appropriately skilled and professional development in this area resourced.



## PROGRAMS 4

- = There is an opportunity for Council to provide greater promotional support for Neighbourhood Houses/Centres programs and work.
- = There is an opportunity to develop joint partnerships, collaboration and program planning between Houses/Centres to provide support and prevent overlap and doubling up.
- = There is an opportunity for Council-managed Centres to run programs during school holidays and to develop short and one off courses and workshops.

## EVALUATION 6

- = There is an opportunity for Council to support "impact" evaluation of Neighbourhood Houses and Community Centres in the City of Maribyrnong. This could provide a greater evidence base for understanding and support, provided it did not add to the current reporting burden on Houses/Centres.



# WAYS FORWARD

## RECOMMENDATIONS

There are many opportunities for City of Maribyrnong to capitalize on the work that Neighbourhood Houses/Community Centres do. There is a renewed sense of cautious optimism about reestablishing working partnerships and real inclusion to achieve better outcomes for the broader Maribyrnong community. The following recommendations are based on these attributes.



**1** Develop a Strategic Plan and Partnership Agreement as a matter of urgency.



**2** Review current MoU's with community-managed Houses/Centres to ensure they are relevant.



**3** Develop a Community Development Framework and Strategy for Council-managed Centres. To include a community participation and engagement strategy.

**4** Consider conducting a bi-annual Neighbourhood House/Community Centre Round Table with all areas of Council. This could include visits by Council staff to different Houses/Centres.

**5** Investigate the development of Council-wide Professional Development Training Program to be delivered by Neighbourhood Houses/Community Centres in areas of expertise such as Community Development.



**7** Improve the system for inclusion of Neighbourhood Houses/Community Centres in relevant policy consultation and feedback loops. This could include a way of communicating current community “hot issues” to Council.

**6** Include information about Neighbourhood Houses/Community Centres in all Council staff inductions.



**8** Resourcing: Ensure that City of Maribyrnong is benchmarked against adjacent local government areas and providing parity of funding and support to Houses/Centres.

**9** A promotional and marketing plan for Maribyrnong Houses/Centres across all platforms, including social media, website and hard copy formats is being developed. This is to include reviewing current branding for Council-managed centres.

**10** Conduct a staff review, including workload analysis and position descriptions upgrade for current council-managed staff. To ensure community development expertise for community-managed Centres.

**11** Investigate development and resourcing of an impact evaluation framework in collaboration with Houses/Centres.



**12** Investigate community-ownership of current Council-managed Centres in the longer term

MARIBYRNONG COMMUNITY

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