

## Engagement project- Recipe for a Good Life 2020

Between August and September 2020, primary school aged students in Banyule, via schools, were invited to contribute to developing a recipe for living a good life. The concept was premised on the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth's Nest Agenda, which outlined conditions all children and young people need to experience a good life.

The engagement approach supported primary school aged students to share what they believe children need to thrive for the purpose of developing the next iteration of Banyule's Child Youth and Family Plan. The engagement activities were designed over a period of three months with support from the Banyule Child Youth and Family Committee, Social and Community Planning and Communications teams.

During the development process, the team identified and mitigated a range of issues.

Issue	Mitigation
COVID-19 pandemic	Because the engagement activity took place during the COVID-19 pandemic and a citywide lockdown, the engagement occurred online using the Shaping Banyule platform.
Language used with children needed to be accessible	Road-tested with children/ students prior to implementation
Triggering concepts in engagement for vulnerable children	Replaced words such as 'secret ingredient' with 'special ingredient' Asked schools to support children to complete as a classroom activity with teacher support
Online engagement with children- collecting personal information	All children could contribute anonymously. Children directed to seek permission from parent/teacher prior to posting name and contributions on platform. No data kept which could identify individual children.

The engagement activity was segmented into three parts.

Activity 1- Children were invited to brainstorm ideas and contributions were billboarded on the site. Participants were able to respond to the comments they appreciated with a thumbs up.

Activity 2- Eight common ingredients referenced in the Nest and research were listed. Children were invited to vote on the ingredients they felt were important to them and respond to contextual question/s related to each ingredient. This activity concluded with asking children to identify a special ingredient that makes life great.

Activity 3- The engagement concluded with children being invited to draw a picture and write their own recipe, then post contribution on the platform.

### The results

Over this two-month period 122 contributions were received across the three activities on the Shaping Banyule platform. Demographics were not collected to protect children's privacy. For the purpose of

analysis, the consultation feedback was collated under the headings of the eight key ingredients and aggregated into key messages.

#### *Ingredient 1: Loved and Safe*

In sum, brainstorming, voting (27 votes) and responses to the contextual questions identified that children rely on their immediate family, including parents, siblings and pets to help them feel loved and safe. Other adults with a direct relationship to children including friends, grandparents, other relatives, teachers, coaches, baby sitters and therapists also help children feel loved and safe. Police were mentioned in only one response. One participant commented “Everyone should make kids free loved and safe”. When asked to identify one thing that makes children feel safe, participants offered suggestions including being together with people, love, caring families/ parents, being happy, hugs/cuddles, playing, pets, and a home.

#### *Ingredient 2: Material basics (Needs like a house, food and water)*

Brainstorming revealed participants understood the importance of the basics which ranged from electricity, houses, money, hospitals, sleep and water to elements children consider as material basics like toys, birthdays, holidays and lolly shops. 26 participants indicated this was an important ingredient and made suggestions on how we can help those without access to necessities. Ideas ranged from donating money food, and clothing, making homes and food for people, to raising community awareness and sharing. One participant said, “Offer for them to come over to our house”.

#### *Ingredient 3: Opportunities to learn*

24 participants indicated opportunities to learn was an important ingredient for children. Children acknowledged learning can occur in a range of settings from schools, libraries, at home, in groups, in a tree, in nature, on the iPad or watching television, to on the farm, in the park and “in my room”. Comments via brainstorming indicate that children value safe, supportive, fun and inspiring opportunities to learn. When asked to reflect on what they feel will be most useful when older, children identified the ability to communicate, read, write, math and times tables, cook and use technology were going to be important. However, there were a range of responses that indicated soft skills are of equal value; respect, confidence, responsibility, persistence, kindness and how to keep the environment clean.

#### *Ingredient 4: Parks and places to play*

In addition to receiving 26 votes, many brainstorming ideas related to parks and places to play. Participants commented on the value of outside time in playgrounds, their yards, using sporting fields, skateboarding, climbing trees and swimming. The contextual questions revealed that children enjoy opportunities to play with family and friends and participate in activities that make them happy including drawing, sports, rock and tree climbing, reading, bike riding and playing with Lego. Characteristics of great places to play were identified and responses featured key words including; safe, warm, cozy, space, clean, well lit, shade, fresh air, trees and nature.

#### *Ingredient 5: Healthy food and physical exercise*

This ingredient elicited fewer contextual responses and 24 votes. Children hold the view that it is important to pursue a healthy lifestyle that includes exercise, eating what is good for you (even if you don't like it), clean fresh air and water, having medicines on time and moving more, watching less. However, children cautioned that enjoying treats and unhealthy snacks like chocolate and pizza are also important.

### *Ingredient 6: Connections to culture*

This ingredient also elicited fewer contextual responses and 23 votes. Through brainstorming, respect, indigenous activities, nice neighbours, kind people and looking after people were listed as possible ingredients for a good life. When asked what things from their culture are important, children identified religion, storytelling and dance, language, celebrations, understanding family history and stories, indigenous people and animals, family and interacting with love and respect.

### *Ingredient 7: A healthy natural environment*

With 26 votes and a range of brainstorming ideas directly related to the environment, this ingredient was considered a valuable element to children. When asked what they enjoy about nature, children commented on the animals and birds, parks, trees, flowers, the creeks, sunsets and the fresh air. They spoke about the “wind in my face” and exploring nature and the plants and “learning special things about them”. The second contextual question asked participants to consider what the environment would say to people. Many comments reflected on the need to look after and protect natural elements from litter, hunting and cutting down trees, and global warming. A few had a different take; “Go for lots of walks- I like seeing humans”, “thanks for looking after us” and “keep the bees happy”.

### *Ingredient 8: Opportunity to participate*

Brainstorming responses indicate that children view participation as being involved in activities such as festivals, clubs and recreation and sporting activities. However, the contextual question challenged children to consider civic participation by asking children to identify the best way for adults to ask children what they think. Great advice was shared including; play and ask questions, do a survey, ask us while we’re having fun, give examples and let me provide feedback, get me to draw a picture, ask questions nicely or politely and importantly, “let them talk and don’t interrupt them”.

The final question asked children to consider what the extra special ingredient the Banyule recipe for a good life could be. Here is a sample of the responses: Smiling, chocolate, family, love, have dreams, water and healthy food, hugging, being happy, love, lots of fun, friends, think about others, help each other, happy mind, enjoy the little things, stay positive, do what’s right, watching tv, art.

### **Application of children’s views and wisdom**

The purpose of the consultation was to include the views of children in the new iteration of the Child Youth and Family Plan. In the context of strengthening assets that lead to children experiencing these conditions for a good life, we can draw the following conclusions:

#### *Physical assets*

- Children believe Council should to invest in safe, well-lit, engaging places to play that have adequate space and shade for groups of people (family and friends) to enjoy together.
- Children urge Council to protect the natural environment so they can continue to enjoy fresh air, the indigenous flora and fauna and to experience the freedom to explore the benefits of being in natural environments.
- Council can support access to material basics for those children/families in need including affordable housing, adequate clothing, food security and school supplies. Children have signalled the willingness and capacity to support these efforts.

#### *Social assets*

- Children have strong connections and value trusted adults in their lives who support them to lead a good life. There is already a great network of people supporting children, therefore Council could consider how to better support people in children's networks, such as parents.
- Life is better when doing things together, be it with family, friends or community. Find new ways to invite children to experience community life with the people that make it fun!
- As children can learn anywhere and everywhere, consider providing more diversity in the range of activities that support children to learn, and be cognisant of the varied interests and passions of children.

#### *Psychosocial assets*

- Children are willing to contribute to civic life but advise Council staff to upskill with improved engagement techniques that children respond to.
- Children understand what it means to live a good life and have ideas on how to make Banyule a better place for all. Help children find their voice and develop sustainable, accessible opportunities to be heard.
- Council should keep front of mind the impact that love, family, friendship, kindness, fun, positivity, play, helping others, storytelling and culture has on children as they grow and develop. Amplifying opportunities to experience these elements can turn a good life into a great one!

#### **Next steps**

The engagement results will be woven into the next iteration of the Child Youth and Family Plan, with specific reference to how children have influenced the direction within the plan.