



**Media Release 1/06/20**

# **State of Greater Shepparton's Children Report 2019**

The State of Greater Shepparton Children's Report 2019 is now available, after some delays. It brings together the most recently available public data about children and young people from conception through to career in Greater Shepparton.

It also builds on a similar 2014 report to show trends for all children across Greater Shepparton.

The 2019 State of Greater Shepparton's Children report was developed in a partnership between Best Start, Communities for Children and Greater Shepparton Lighthouse.

You may not be surprised to learn the data remains fairly poor, with our region continuing to sit below the State averages across many areas measured. Most concerning is the decline in the readiness of children to begin school. This should ring alarm bells for all, as these figures point to a lifetime of poor outcomes without major interventions. Getting it right the first time is always better than trying to tackle an issue down the track. Families are also reporting more stress this time around.

The number of children in our community on child protection orders and under the watch of Department of Health and Human Services also remains far too high and unchanged at 8.5 per 1000 compared to the State average of 5.2 kids in every 1,000.

There are some bright spots however, for example the number of Indigenous children having their maternal and child health visits has leapt.

Unfortunately much of the data that is made publicly available by the State Government is already old, with a lot of the data from 2015, 2016 and 2017, far too long ago to be truly useful to our community as it tries to make timely and inspired decisions to support our families and young people. And there are many data gaps with government departments either unable or unwilling to share their data in a timely manner. In fact, access to data has declined since the last report despite senior government figures actively promoting more open sharing of data. And some data is captured differently which means you can't

compare apples with apples. Unless we know how children are faring, how can we as a community own the figures and act to address their most pressing needs? There is growing will and pockets of best practice to build on, but it is evident new ways of working must be adopted – more genuine listening and responding creatively to local issues and dynamics, more community voice built into decision-making and truly valuing the input of all equally need to be at the heart of the change.

We also need bureaucrats and leaders at all levels to tackle some of the broader issues impacting on families in our community –a massive shortfall in affordable housing, inadequate public transport; and the issue of insufficient public space all need to be addressed as a matter of priority.

The 2014 report provided the foundation for prioritising action for Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project. This time around we will again be using the figures to draw attention to issues, stir our community to action and help create an environment where our kids can thrive. There were some promising improvements in this report. Let's see how we fare in another five years.

For the full report visit our website [www.gslp.com.au/resources/](http://www.gslp.com.au/resources/)

\*Interested in joining our Lighthouse army of volunteers? Call Fiona Smolenaars on 0407 517 998.

**Release ends**

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