

# Maroondah Disability Policy and Action Plan 2019-2021

## Completion of plan report

Working towards an accessible and connected community







## Working towards an accessible and connected community

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### Acknowledgment of Country

We, in the spirit of Reconciliation, acknowledge the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation as Traditional Custodians of the land now known as the City of Maroondah, where Indigenous Australians have performed age old ceremonies. We acknowledge and respect their unique ability to care for Country and their deep spiritual connection to it. We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging.



# Introduction

Council is pleased to present the *Disability Policy and Action Plan 2019-2021* completion-of-plan implementation report to the Maroondah community\*.

Over the life of this plan, Council aims to achieve meaningful progress towards providing inclusive and accessible services, infrastructure, facilities and amenities for people with a disability and those that care for them.

Disability Action Plans are required (*Victorian Disability Act 2006*) to be developed for the purpose of:

1. Reducing barriers for persons with disabilities accessing information, goods, services and facilities
2. Reducing barriers to persons with disabilities obtaining or maintaining employment
3. Promoting inclusion and participation in the community
4. Achieving tangible changes in attitudes and practices that discriminate against persons with disabilities.

(Section 38, *Victorian Disability Act 2006*)

Throughout this report, reference to disability includes physical, cognitive, psychosocial, sensory, and/or forms of neurodiversity. Council recognises that disability may be episodic or consistent, acquired or congenital, single or plural.

The actions contained within the *Disability Policy and Action Plan 2019-2021* were captured under four key directions:

- Social and Economic Inclusion
- Services and Information
- Design, Infrastructure and Transport
- Advocacy and Leadership

The plan was developed through the examination of local data, consideration of government legislation and consultation with our local community. This resulted in 53 priority actions which are to be completed or remain an ongoing priority over the term of the Plan. Annual implementation reporting enabled Council to monitor and refine its approach while responding to changes in its environment and adjusting its processes and partnerships to meet those goals.

\*Please note the report is documenting the achievements of the plan to 30 June 2022 due to some initiatives being impacted by COVID-19.

# State of Emergency

Like all Councils and levels of government, Maroondah City Council was significantly impacted by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

On 16 March 2020, a State of Emergency was declared in Victoria to combat coronavirus (COVID-19). This provided the Chief Health Officer with additional powers to contain the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) and reduce its risk to the health of Victorians.

As an impact of these containment protocols, Council offices and facilities were ordered to close for most of 2020, and after reopening, again for much of 2021. Service delivery adapted to meet social distancing and hygiene recommendations. Many services and programs shifted to a virtual offering, including video meetings, hotlines, social and live chat channels and information videos. Phone outreach calls and weekly care/activity packages were also coordinated from a range of Council and community centres.

Council developed the Maroondah COVID-19 Recovery Plan to provide a strategic overview of the intended community recovery outcomes within Maroondah in response to coronavirus (COVID-19). Despite the many challenges, most Council services were able to demonstrate progress.





## Tracking our progress

Council monitored the implementation of the Maroondah Disability Policy and Action Plan 2019-2021 and reported on the progress of the Plan through Council's Annual Report, as required by the Victorian Disability Amendment Act 2012.

Selected activities in the Plan were evaluated in relation to outcomes and impacts on the lives of people with disabilities.

## Looking ahead

Council acknowledges the valuable contribution of the previous Maroondah Disability Advisory Committee (MDAC) to the implementation of the Maroondah Disability Policy and Action Plan 2019-2021 and the development of the new Maroondah Disability Action Plan 2022-2026, adopted by Council on 18 July 2022.

## Other related policy frameworks

- *Maroondah 2040 – Our Future Together*
- *Council Plan 2021-2025*
- *Maroondah COVID-19 Recovery Plan and Recovery Action Plan (Dec 2020)*
- *Maroondah Liveability, Wellbeing and Resilience Strategy 2021- 2031* (incorporating the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan and the Active Healthy Aging Initiative)



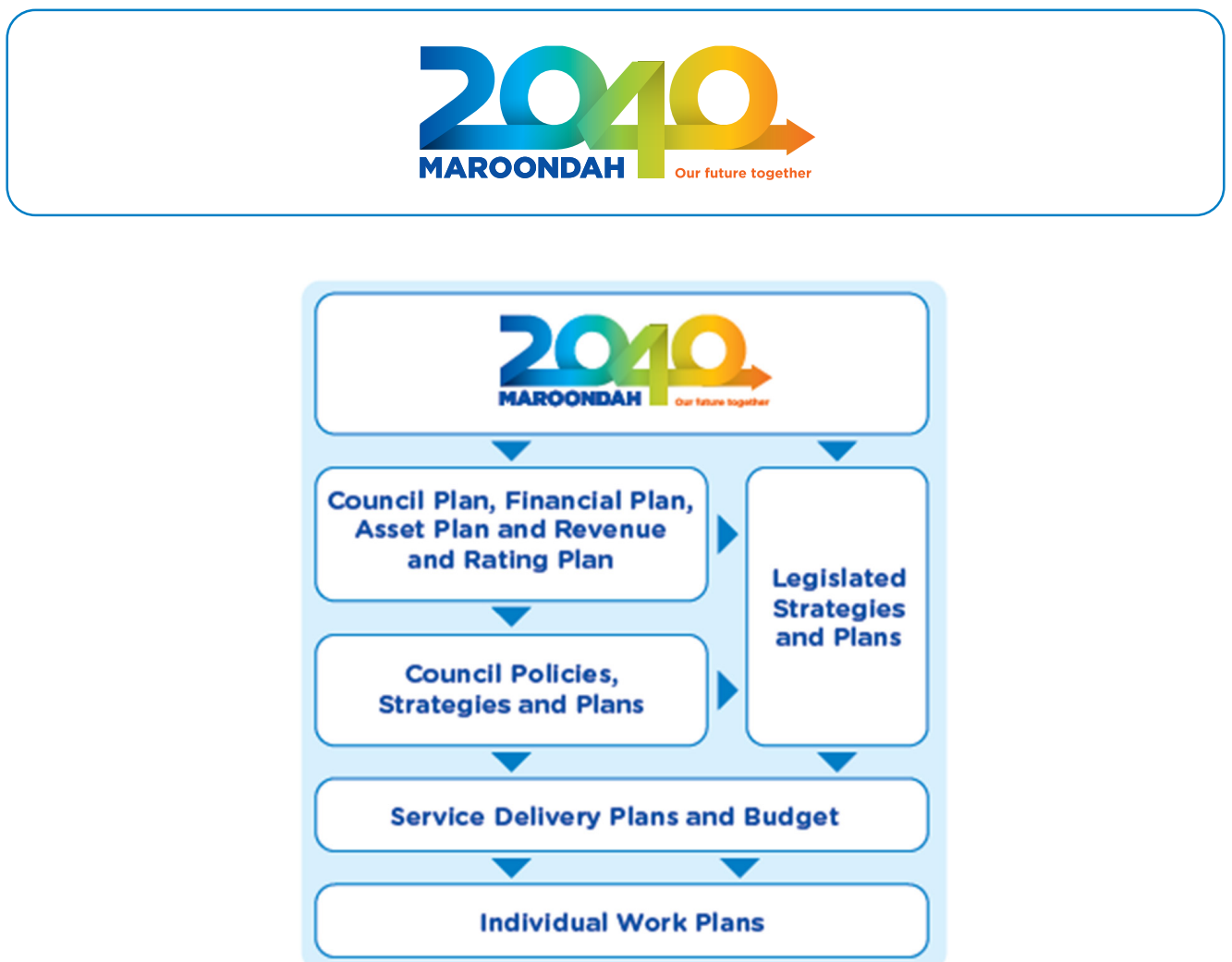


# Maroondah Disability Policy and Action Plan 2019-2021

The Maroondah Disability Policy and Action Plan 2019-2021 is a strategic document that sits within Council’s Integrated Planning Framework.

Disability is a key focus for Council across its service delivery, advocacy, partnerships, facilitation and development activities.

Figure 1. Integrated Planning Framework





The actions contained within the Plan are designed to work towards achieving the Maroondah 2040 Community Vision and have been captured across four focus areas and 16 key directions as follows:

Focus areas	Key Directions
Social and economic inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1 Create a safe, social and recreational environment that is engaging and inclusive.</li> <li>1.2 Increase levels of employment and education for people with disabilities in partnership with local business and community organisations.</li> <li>1.3 Ensure arts and cultural activities in Maroondah are inclusive and accessible.</li> <li>1.4 Support new and existing Council employees with disabilities.</li> </ul>
Services and information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.1 Continue to develop inclusive communication methods in providing customer service to the community.</li> <li>2.2 Ensure Council's online channels are accessible and compliant.</li> <li>2.3 Support people with disabilities and their families navigating disability support services.</li> <li>2.4 Provide and promote wellbeing and educational opportunities inclusive of disability.</li> <li>2.5 Provide appropriate and relevant information and support to people with disabilities, their families and carers.</li> </ul>
Design, infrastructure and transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.1 Ensure inclusive design of all major Maroondah projects.</li> <li>3.2 Implement Council's ongoing capital works program to improve accessibility of Council's infrastructure in response to community needs.</li> <li>3.3 Support environments that are accessible for people with disabilities.</li> </ul>
Advocacy and leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4.1 Advocate for people with disabilities, their families and carers.</li> <li>4.2 Advocate and promote an increase in affordable housing in Maroondah.</li> <li>4.3 Promote a positive awareness of people with disabilities in our community.</li> <li>4.4 Develop capacity building skills within the Maroondah community.</li> </ul>



# Outcome area 1 – Social and economic inclusion

## Key Directions

Create a safe, social and recreational environment that is engaging and inclusive.

Social connection and active and healthy ageing activities were enhanced by a grant from Australian Multicultural Community Services. Council's Leisure, Arts and Culture and Aged and Disability Services team collaborated on the 'Moving for Life the Way I Like It' program. The program tailored physical activities to our Burmese community elders and was later adapted to online delivery

Council launched Walking Sports with a 'Come and try Walking Sports' event. Maroondah offers a variety of walking sports such as Walking Football, Walking Cricket, Walking Netball and Pickleball. Participation in regular physical activity improves mental health, maintains muscle mass and flexibility (reducing the risk of falls), helps retain independence and is great way to meet new friends. Our walking sports program has been developed to match our changing abilities as we get older, in a friendly non-competitive environment, where the emphasis is on participation and fun.

Virtual Engagement Recreation Activity (VERA) is a new program offered through our Social Support Group team at Kerrabee. VERA is series of interactive fun, social and wellbeing group programs conducted online via Microsoft Teams (similar to Zoom and Skype). The program has been designed to include everyone. Programs run through VERA include:

- exercise, meditation, mindfulness, health and wellbeing
- craft (supplies provided)
- guest speakers
- entertainers
- word games, puzzles, bingo and brain teasers
- cooking together online
- tours of local places of interest (eg art exhibitions)
- conversations and friendship, and
- learning skills to open up a world of new possibilities.

In 2020, a new Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Layer was completed, improving Council's emergency management processes. This layer shows all the facilities and buildings that are listed as 'vulnerable' i.e. can include schools, supported residential services, kindergartens and aged care facilities, making it is easier to plan and determine the localised impact of an emergency event. A review of emergency practices in line with the Vulnerable People in Emergencies Policy was also undertaken, incorporating feedback provided by Disability Advisory Committee in the previous year. This feedback informed changes to the Emergency Relief Centres' guidelines and Council's coronavirus (COVID-19) recovery procedures.

### **Increase levels of employment and education for people with disabilities in partnership with local business and community organisations.**

Local businesses continue to be encouraged to connect with initiatives like the Small Business Wellbeing hotline, that promotes awareness and support for mental health; and BizWeek partners like Matchworks, who connect employers and employees helping people from all backgrounds, ages and abilities. Working with stakeholder groups including Eastland Centre Management, and the Croydon Main Street and Ringwood East Trader Associations, Council's Business and Activity Centre Development team has ensured that events acknowledge the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act and the establishment and implementation of event plans, with the requirement for risk mitigation effecting public liability insurances.

The Eastland partnership program and further consultation with the Croydon Main Street Traders Association on a pilot 'Disability skills development and Work placement' program was regrettably deferred in 2020 as result of the economic impacts of coronavirus (COVID-19).

Pop-up outdoor dining spaces were installed at four local shopping centres in December 2021 that catered specifically for people with disabilities, with DDA-compliant seating and access for people using wheelchairs.

Participants in a Job Skills program for adults with a disability at Glen Park Community Centre in Bayswater North received hands-on experience in constructing the pop-up park at the Centre in late February 2022. The group also committed to ongoing maintenance of the space including rubbish removal and plant watering.

### **Ensure arts and cultural activities in Maroondah are inclusive and accessible.**

Council continued to provide public artworks and art activations in public spaces that are inclusive of people with disabilities, utilising a range of locations and formats. Participation outdoors in urban walking art tours, such as the Ringwood arts precinct and showcasing the work of Elroy Hendrick (a key artist in the Nadrasca Community) and public artworks by artists Kate Reeves-Smith and Melissa Kent (from disability service Araluen) in the San Carlos Way Lightbox program, are some positive examples.

The Arts & Culture team continued to advise, support and collaborate with local artists with disabilities and local disability organisations to develop and promote art and exhibition programs, public art and grant projects in Maroondah, with several planned for the upcoming year.

### **Support new and existing Council employees with disabilities**

In 2020, the move to working safely from home was supported by a register of transferred Council-owned ergonomic equipment (chairs and screens) to individuals. Pre-employment medical assessment and adjustments occurred accordingly, and individual online appointments were proactively offered to staff to support this adjustment. Support was provided for mental health and wellbeing through the Be Kind Maroondah campaign as well as Council's Employee Assistance programs.

In 2022, Council was in the early stages of establishing an internal network to provide opportunities to collaborate with existing employees with disabilities on workplace access and inclusion matters.





## Outcome area 2 - Services and information

### Key Directions

Continue to develop inclusive communication methods in providing customer service to the community.

Council prioritises continuous updating, improvement and access to its online resources including alternative formats. Between March to October 2020, Council undertook extensive community engagement within the constraints of the staged restrictions applied to Melbourne throughout much of this time. The Maroondah COVID-19 community survey on Council's online engagement hub, Your Say, received 2,814 responses. More than 700 surveys were distributed in paper form to people receiving support from Eastern Volunteers or mailed on request. Respondents to Council's survey identified that support for priority populations in Maroondah was important, including people who are older, have disabilities, are vulnerable including those experiencing family violence, are financially disadvantaged, and those living alone.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Ensure Council's online channels are accessible and compliant.**

Council's website shared COVID-19 information produced by several external organisations in Easy English, Plain English and with links to Auslan interpretation. Council's online channels are compliant with the Web Content Accessibility Guide (WCAG) 2.0AA. All new software and applications are assessed for WCAG 2.0AA accessibility with our information technology business case template.

Communication is shared in a number of alternative formats to ensure accessibility such as word, larger print, audio or video formats or by using plain language. Microsoft's Office 365 Suite provides a range of features that supports the development of accessible documents and is compatible with screen-reading programs.

<sup>1</sup>Maroondah COVID Recovery Plan

### **Support people with disabilities and their families navigating disability support services.**

A Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Community Activation Support Initiative grant enabled Council to quickly establish a helpline and service provision to support those in the community impacted by coronavirus (COVID-19). This new system navigation model was originally proposed to replace the Regional Assessment Service. Promoted as MaroondahConnect, the helpline provides information, navigation and advocacy services has been extended.

Maroondah's National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Coordinator provides individualised and general support to anyone who lives, plays or works in Maroondah, as well as to professionals who provide NDIS support or referrals for our Maroondah community members. Information and support provided to individuals and families includes assistance:

- to understand NDIS technical questions, terms and jargon
- to understand the application process, such as how to answer NDIS application questions in NDIS terms, to give a clearer and more accurate picture of what support is needed
- with advocacy
- attending pre-planning and review meetings; the NDIS Coordinator has attended around 700 planning meetings over the last five years.

The provided service is individualised, as intended by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) principles, ensuring each person's story is heard and supported. An estimated \$3 million of NDIS approved plans for Maroondah residents has been facilitated by the NDIS Coordinator role.

Maroondah's NDIS Coordinator also provides information to groups and providers on understanding the NDIS. Groups receiving presentations have included: family groups, carer groups, General Practitioners, Primary Health Networks, Social Workers, hospitals, mental health groups, groups for young children, older persons groups and Indigenous groups.

### **Provide and promote wellbeing and educational opportunities inclusive of disability.**

Partnerships are key to delivering inclusive wellbeing and educational opportunities in Maroondah. Council has been working with key stakeholders to respond to mental health needs within our community. Council's submission to the Royal Commission into Mental Health in Victoria was acknowledged, and the expansion of the Maroondah Positive Education Network (MPEN) to other areas was noted as a recommendation to the Government.

Our partnerships with community agencies also enabled appropriate referral pathways for vulnerable groups and offered services within the community, including outreach and the enhanced Maternal and Child Health (MCH) service. In 2020, MCH commenced new inclusive programs for families with additional vulnerabilities. This included a sleep and settling outreach program and family violence assessment consultations. Council works with: EACH, Kindergartens, Immigrant Health Clinic, Eastern Health Child Youth Mental Health Service, GPs, Royal Children's Hospital and Orange Door.

### **Provide appropriate and relevant information and support to people with disabilities, their families and carers.**

Council continued to support the Pathway for Carers program which provides support and information to carers of people with disabilities or mental health concerns. An online information session for carers in Maroondah was organised in September 2020 with the Department of Health and Human Services. Guest speakers at the event included Hon Luke Donnellan Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers; and Anthony Carbines, Parliamentary Secretary for Carers and Volunteers and Parliamentary Secretary for Health. In March 2022, the Pathways for Carers walk hosted a Member of Parliament who was attending on behalf of the Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers. Carers had the opportunity to raise questions directly with the MP. These sessions enabled carers to share concerns, ask questions and receive information from Victorian Government representatives.

Council's online resources are reviewed each quarter with new resources added to the website as appropriate, including mental health and disability resources.



McAlpin Reserve Play Space



## Outcome area 3 - Design, infrastructure and transport

### Key Directions

Ensure inclusive design of all major projects in Maroondah.

Council considers and applies universal design elements in all major projects within Maroondah. Examples include:

- Improved accessibility is a feature of all sporting pavilion redevelopments
- Design has commenced for the staged Karralyka redevelopment, which will include improved accessibility
- The transformation of the existing Croydon Civic Precinct into the Croydon Community Wellbeing Precinct (CCWP), which will include accessibility features
- The McAlpin Reserve Play Space redevelopment included many accessible design features. McAlpin Reserve is one of Maroondah's hidden gems - tucked away off Wonga Road in Ringwood North. The redevelopment included all-inclusive equipment and play features such as a ground level jumper, accessible water pump and an accessible carousel, as well as accessible car spaces, a new ramp and wide pathways allowing accessible access from Wonga Road, accessible toilets, accessible picnic tables and an accessible drinking fountain.

### Implement Council's ongoing capital works program to improve accessibility of Council's infrastructure in response to community needs.

Forced closures to Council facilities enabled maintenance programs to be brought forward, such as the retiling of the Aquahub warm water pool. Several pavilions and building redesign and/or refurbishment projects incorporated improved accessibility, such as: HE Parker Pavilion, Silcock Reserve Pavilion, Quambee Reserve Pavilion, Bensons Sporting Pavilion, Springfield Pavilion, Proclamation Park Pavilion, Griff Hunt Pavilion, Tarralla Kindergarten and MCH, the RO Spencer Pavilion at Jubilee Park and the Cheong Pavilion redevelopment. Two scout halls have had accessible ramps and toilets installed. The redevelopment of the Dorset Recreation Pavilion funded by Council and the Victorian Government will include upgrades to accessibility within the precinct.

Inclusive play opportunities and safety are considered as part of playspace renewal projects, including the installation of fencing or natural barriers as required.

**Support environments that are accessible for people with disabilities.**

Council delivered \$310,000 worth of DDA projects in both the 2019/20 and 2020/21 financial years and \$260,000 in 2021/22 (total \$880,000) to help traffic and pedestrian related infrastructure across Maroondah become compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).

A total of 31 projects were delivered over the three-year period, encompassing kerb ramp reconstruction, new footpaths, footpath connections, pedestrian ramps, kerb outstands, raised crossings and disabled car spaces. Highlights include a reconfiguration of the Hewish Road car park to incorporate an off-road footpath, a DDA compliant ramp at The Mall shopping centre, kerb outstands at Mines Road/Wilson Street and a DDA compliant ramp at McAlpin Reserve and tactile ground surface indicators and kerb ramp upgrades and realignments to improve accessibility in the Croydon Activity Centre.

In 2019/20 Council's website was updated to include full mapping of footpaths in Maroondah and a list of footpaths to be constructed.

The ongoing footpath construction program ensures improvements that respond to access and safety issues. On average around 3km of critical links identified on Council's Principal Pedestrian Network are filled each year.

The program to improve accessibility and DDA compliance is ongoing and users with accessibility needs are encouraged to contact Council about specific accessibility issues they experience in Maroondah





## Outcome area 4 - Advocacy and leadership

### Key Directions

Advocate for people with disabilities, their families and carers.

Maroondah’s Disability Advisory Committee continues to be an integral part of Council planning, development and implementation of Council policies, programs, and events. The committee provides people with disabilities, carers of someone with a disability, and representatives from local disability organisations with the opportunity to provide feedback to Council on a range of strategies, programs and policies from a disability perspective.

Over the three years of the Plan the Disability Advisory Committee was consulted and provided invaluable advice on a wide range of topics such as: many Council Plans and Strategies including Maroondah 2040 revision, Children and Families Strategy, Disability Action Plan and the Croydon Structure Plan; Council facilities and infrastructure including the Karralyka Theatre upgrade; Council service provision such as Customer Service and on consultation methods, such as for young children with disabilities and their families to name a few.

Council continues to be a strong advocate for people with disabilities, their families and carers. Working in partnership several organisations, Council supported a consortium submission to scale up and increase the reach of the ‘Porn Is Not the Norm’ project. The program aims to prevent pornography’s harms to autistic young people by

equipping them and their parents, carers and teachers to understand pornography’s prevalence and impacts, and how they can safely navigate healthy and respectful relationships. In 2020 the project was awarded \$900,000 over a three-year period through Westpac’s 2020 *Impact Grant: Safer Children, Safer Communities* program. After playing a key role in the initiation of the project, Council’s contribution evolved to providing support and advice through the project steering group.

Council consulted with the Queensland Investment Corporation (QIC) to establish a sensory room at Eastland. The quiet room opened during 2021 and involved training for Eastland employees.

#### **Advocate and promote an increase in affordable housing in Maroondah**

People with disabilities on low incomes often need social housing. Generally speaking, the demand for social housing outstrips supply. Council has been advocating to State and Federal Government for more social and affordable housing in Melbourne’s east through its membership of the Eastern Affordable Housing Alliance. Council has also been providing advice to not-for-profit organisations who have been pursuing applications for funding under the State Government’s Big Housing Build to construct new social and affordable housing in Maroondah. The State Government’s 6 billion Big



Housing Build announcement in 2020 was consistent with the advocacy efforts of the Eastern Affordable Housing Alliance. The program is anticipated to result in new social and affordable housing being constructed in Maroondah.

Council continues to work with the Eastern Affordable Housing Alliance (EAHA) to identify opportunities to achieve more social, affordable, and special needs housing. Work has also commenced on the preparation of a register of strategic redevelopment sites. Affordable housing could be specifically encouraged on some of these sites by agreement with the land owners.

Council also progressed a planning scheme amendment for the Greening the Greyfields initiative during 2020 within two precincts – Ringwood and Croydon South. This project has involved extensive stakeholder and resident engagement and is aligned with objectives in the metropolitan Plan Melbourne Refresh strategy.

### **Promote a positive awareness of people with disabilities in our community**

Council actively promotes a positive awareness of people with disabilities in our Maroondah community through promoting accessibility features of Council's new developments, open spaces, sporting and leisure facilities, main events and major projects and using positive images and stories of people with disabilities in Council's communications to demonstrate the valuable contribution they make in the community. For example, the Be Kind Initiative encouraged positive stories and images during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and people with disabilities were included in the promotion of All Abilities and Aquabuddies programs.





### **Develop capacity building skills within the Maroondah community**

Council worked in partnership to establish an Opening Doors program in the Outer East. Run across Maroondah, Yarra Ranges and Knox. The program worked with nearly 40 emerging community leaders and provide them with training and support them in mentoring initiatives around inclusive leadership. A number of the participants are living with a disability.

Council has worked in partnership with the community to encourage, develop, support and promote a wide range of local recreational, cultural, and social initiatives, including those with a disability focus. Each financial year, Council provides financial assistance to community groups and not-for-profit organisations, to support the provision of programs and services which respond to identified community need, and contribute to the building of stronger communities. Disability groups who received funding through Council's Community grants programs include: the Victorian Electric Wheelchair Sports Association, Ringwood Spiders All-Abilities Sports Club, Croydon Stroke Support Group, Eastern All-abilities Netball, Stroke a Chord Choir and iDareU.

### **Advocate for people with disabilities, their families and carers**

While Pathways for Carers walks and activities were regrettably paused during COVID-19, they recommenced in February 2022 after COVID-19 restrictions had lifted and 10 walks/activities were held in the first half of 2022. This valued program continues.

As a member of the Eastern Transport Coalition (ETC), Council continues to advocate for accessible and safe public transport infrastructure and services to deliver inclusion and equity outcomes.

Advocacy efforts have focused on the following activities:

- Safer access to bus stops with mid-block pedestrian crossings.
- Bus stop upgrades with refuge areas, lighting and linking footpaths
- New pedestrian and bike crossings and bridges for arterial roads at trail intersections
- Supported upgrades to Box Hill, Croydon, Glen Waverley and Oakleigh Railway Stations and Bus Interchanges to improve disability access and customer amenities

ETC continues to advocate for accessibility improvements as part of the Box Hill and Croydon Bus Interchange upgrades.



**To contact Council**






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- SMS 0480 020 200
- visit our website at [www.maroondah.vic.gov.au](http://www.maroondah.vic.gov.au)
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