Child Friendly Gawler
In 2011, a group of proactive Gawler citizens gathered to harness a growing interest in the local community to bring children and communities together.

They had a vision to re-think the agenda and be more inclusive and respectful of children, including them as active citizens. A strategic plan was developed and the Child and Youth Friendly Greater Gawler Action Group was formed.

Thanks to fortuitous timing, the action group joined forces with Child Friendly South Australia and the Town of Gawler became one of three South Australian councils to take part in a large scale pilot to be recognised as child friendly. Child Friendly South Australia is implemented by South Australia’s Department for Education and Child Development (DECD), and was developed in partnership with UNICEF Australia.

UNICEF defines a child friendly city as a place where the rights of children are reflected in policies, laws, programs, budgets and influence decision making.

The action group, assisted by Council, hosted a child friendly community forum, bringing together around 70 stakeholders from a diverse range of services, organisations and community groups, including the Town of Gawler, represented by the Mayor Karen Redman, CEO Henry Inat and other relevant Council staff.

At that meeting, a vision was decided upon: “We believe children and young people, aged birth to 25 years, are capable and competent; they belong, connect and flourish in a safe, supportive and inclusive community.”

Child Friendly SA identified six priority goals to improve outcomes for children and young people. These goals are: active participation; safety; education; health; belonging; and play and leisure.

For the Child and Youth Friendly Greater Gawler Action Group, the goal of play and leisure became the highest focus.

Margaret Sankey, Executive Officer of the Group explains: “Play and leisure was a natural fit for Gawler.” At the time of the Group forming, Council was in the design phase for a new skate park and youth precinct located at Clonlea Park.

“A group of primary school students attended an onsite consultation, with Council staff receiving direct feedback,” says Ebony Steadman, Town of Gawler Youth Development Officer. “This resulted in amendments to the plans and the inclusion of a scooter track, witchetty woods nature play area and additional play equipment targeted at children of varied ages.” The students also wanted to have hands on involvement in the project. More than 100 students from Gawler and District College and Hewett Primary School planted trees as part of the precinct development.

“Children in Gawler have played an important role in shaping a number of important planning documents for Gawler, such as the Gawler Town Centre Design Framework, and in contemporary issues such as traffic management and safety,” said Ebony.

During the pilot, more than 200 young people across Gawler schools were engaged in a broader open space consultation.

By championing change through child friendly cities, the action group has been able to raise awareness of the importance of consulting with children and young people. The impact has been felt in council, local organisations and the community at large.

Ebony says: “A children’s lens is more regularly applied to Council services or programs. At the 2016 Gawler Fringe event a special area was created for children. This made families feel welcome to attend the event with their children.”

A group member commented that “… previously Council would get tied up on risk management considerations in developing play spaces. Now Council certainly consider risk management, however, it is now equally focused on incorporating what children and young people want and the implications for their development”.

Listening to the voices of children is making changes that will benefit the community for generations to come.

Margaret Sankey explains, “The biggest impact is that children in the community are now having a say about the town that is being built right now, and planned for their future.”

With special thanks to the Child and Youth Friendly Greater Gawler Action Group members: Aboriginal Family Support Services, Anglicare SA, Child and Family Health Service, community members, Department for Education & Child Development (DECD), Disability Services, Early Childhood Australia, Early Childhood Matters, Elsie Ey Children’s Centre, Gawler & District College B-12 , Gawler Youth Advisory Committee, Hewett Church of Christ, Inner North Community Health Service, Inclusive Directions, Light Electoral Office, Light Regional Council, Northern Carers Network, Northern Domestic Violence Service, Save the Children and St Brigids Primary School and the Town of Gawler.

For more information:

