

41st Annual Report 2022

Manning Valley Neighbourhood Services Inc.



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Our Vision

Our vision is a joyous, diverse
and inclusive community
that celebrates its
uniqueness and strengths.

Our Mission

MVNS is a community development
organisation
that resources and empowers
individuals, groups and the
community in the Manning Valley
and surrounding LGAs, to address
issues that affect them.

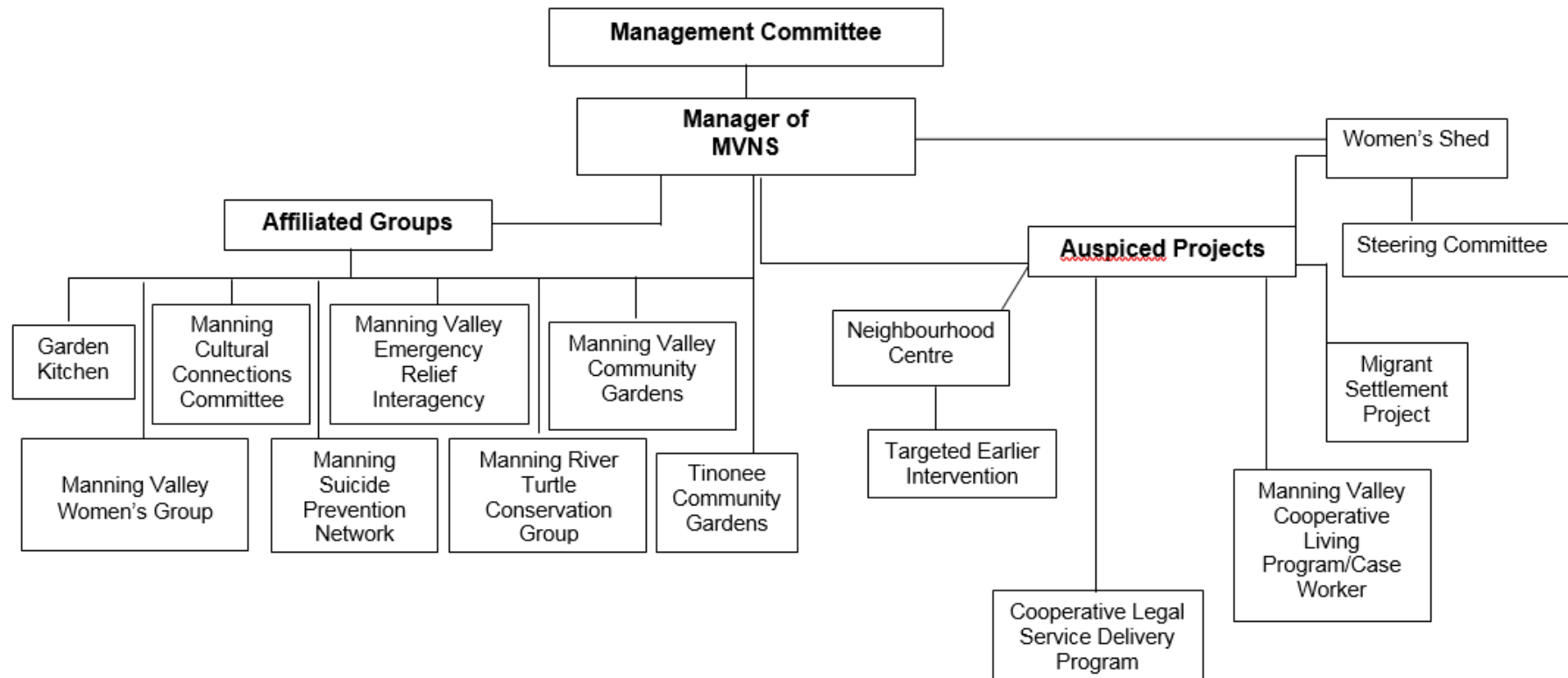


MVNS Activities Umbrella

Neighbourhood Centre <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information & Referral Advocacy Community Development Resume writing. Cheap use of phone, fax & computer. Support for community members who need to talk Promotion and assistance for community groups Tax Help - July to Oct - free assistance with tax returns for low-income earners Groups and courses Contact the staff & volunteers 6553 5121	Women's Shed Develop a space where rural women impacted by the bushfires can come together in ways to access support, share stories, share skills, develop new skills, access resources, and ultimately reduce women's sense of isolation through tested recovery and resilience programs 6553 5121	Garden Kitchen A kitchen resource that provides support toward self-reliance to disadvantaged clients in a purposeful approach which provides a meal, advocacy, education and opportunities to commune. Contact Caron 6553 5121	Manning Valley Cooperative Living Program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial assistance and case work for individuals & families in crisis. Available to all people living in the Manning Valley who are experiencing financial crisis and/or other misfortune or suffering which is contributing to poverty or helplessness. Contact 6553 5121	The Validation Project The objective is to validate women's experience of the fires. In doing so we can aim to reduce isolation, increase health, resilience and quality of life and social cohesion by instigating regular get togethers. We would expect that these women will develop stronger networks and offer support to other women. Contact Lisa 0429 838254	Manning Valley Community Gardens Development and maintenance of a sustainable garden for the community by the community Contact 6553 5121
	Manning Valley Women's Group Aims to promote, support and empower women in the community Contact Mary 6592 9315	Cooperative Legal Service Delivery Building Building cooperative & strategic networks of key legal services and community organisations Contact Jane Project Officer 6592 9315	Manning Suicide Prevention Network Aims to: Provide information in respect to mental health support services in our community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raise awareness of the incidence of suicide in our community Provided education to the community on how they can help within their own family and friendship groups Advocate to improve services and improve ease of access to services Coordinate local events to promote suicide awareness and share relevant information Contact Gemma 0477 213 611	Migrant Settlement Project Worker Information & referral for migrants and NESB residents of the Mid North Coast. Contact Jane 6553 5121	Tinonee Community Gardens A community driven group formed with the aim to share food and knowledge about gardening Contact Debbie
					Manning River Turtle Conservation Group Aims to promote awareness of the Manning River Turtle as well as preserve their habitat for their ongoing survival. Contact Clare 0427 655 051



MVNS Organisational Chart and Overview



Chairperson's Report

MVNS Management Committee acknowledges that over the last few years the Manning Valley community has had drought, bushfires, COVID and Floods impacting individuals and families that has placed increased pressure on our community.

MVNS has developed a range of strategies that have allowed us to remain focused and adaptable to the changes. We have developed resilience and continue to work towards sustainability as an organisation.

Many programs and projects have been delivered, and due to disasters, not always in the way we first planned. Some have been deferred to a different timeframe. We have met most of the milestones set by the DCJ (Dept. of Communities and Justice).

One exciting development for MVNS was the winning of a grant of \$280,000 to establish a Women's Shed over a 2-year period. The grant is from bushfire funding. The Women's Shed has been renamed Women Kind Collective and opened its doors in Isabella Street (Old NAB building) officially 17th September.

Please read the Staff and Affiliated Committees reports contained within this document for a fuller picture.

MVNS is presently reviewing its operations to ensure we are able to continue into the future as an organisation that is sustainable and can address the changing issues that may confront us and our community. Government funding through SEFA is enabling this review.

Thank you to the Management Committee, staff and volunteers who continue to make all of this happen. We are able to provide SAFE, STABLE and TRUSTED service and environs due to their hard work and commitment.

Susan Ballard

Chairperson, Management Committee



Treasurer's Report

I am pleased to be able to present the Treasurer's report for the financial year 2021-2022.

Essential Assurance Services Pty Ltd audited the financial accounts. Rhonda Futterleib and her staff are professional and thorough in the audit process. We thank Rhonda for her comprehensive, well explained report to the Management committee for the MVNS.

MVNS is in surplus (\$26,350) a slight increase compared to 2021. MVNS has positive current assets to current liabilities increased cash flow of the business for 2021/2022 and confirmation of funding for the 2023 year.

The auditor concluded that MVNS is a going concern.

MVNS has had significant changes in the balance sheet in the following areas compared to 2021:

- MVNS had \$107,609 increase in funds for operations
- Cash flow increased in operations, investing activities and remained stable in financing activities
- Plant and Equipment increased in value by \$40k
- Deferred income has been transferred to 2023
- Expenditure has had an overall increase of 12.03%

MVNS financial administration and account record keeping are professionally managed and administered by our Manager - Caron Watkins and Office Administrator, Kerrie McTaggart.

I would like to thank them and the management committee for their on-going excellent financial administration.

We are able to run our programs and pay our debts when due and payable

Susan Ballard

Treasurer, Management Committee



Manager's Report

Manning Valley Neighbourhood Services Inc.

MVNS has continued to fulfil its' mission this year; empowering individuals and communities through community development and direct service delivery.

This was our year of IT! New IT thanks to a government grant, and new frustrations with implementation partly due to the length of time we have been using outdated technology and making it last due to affordability issues.

If COVID and disasters had left us a bit weathered and beaten last year (especially dealing with the bureaucratic issues), and unable to meet our targets, this year we came out fighting. We are looking at our business continuity in the light of technology and COVID, but also received government support to engage SEFA to carry out consultative processes with the community sector and to assist us in the process of developing a Theory of Change at an organisational level, and what that means for MVNS into the future.

In my first Management Committee report in July 2021, I spoke about the first couple of women's gatherings through the Validation Project indicating their desire for the development of a 'women's shed' in the area. In July 2022 we officially started to get this underway thanks to bushfire funding through the Federal Government. This project is funded for 20 months, with the view to establishing it as a sustainable social enterprise. The overwhelming support to date seems to indicate that this may become a reality. Stacey Northam is our new Coordinator of this space and has turned two days into seven.

Thanks to Lisa the Validation Project was topped up with some Council funding and we were able to provide activities right up until the end of the financial year. This project also allowed us to reach out further than we normally can to outlying locations such as Elands who have been dealing with not only the disasters, but long-term issues of access to their community.

At a governance level, with the support of Judy Peach, we have managed to keep on top of the never-ending requirements brought about by COVID, Child Protection, WHS, data collection. We have been able to take time out for staff training around Mental Health First Aid, and Trauma Informed Practice as well as many other options provided in the new world of Webinars and online training.

We agreed to take on a new auspice of Tinonee Community Gardens and continue to auspice the Manning River Turtle Group and Manning Suicide Prevention Group.

The challenges of the changes in our funding targets and continuing to meet the needs of the broader community has very much become a reality. Currently, we are self-funding workers to meet the needs of people falling outside our target groups. However, the expectation remains that the Neighbourhood Centre is here for the broader community and we will continue to look at those needs and securing funding where appropriate. An opportunity was provided for myself and Lisa to attend some incredible training in creative recovery and the place the arts has in this. As a community we are seeing more and more take up of this.



Targeted Earlier intervention

The Manning Valley Neighbourhood Centre receives funding through the NSW Department of Communities and Justice – Targeted Earlier Intervention Program (TEI).

TEI aims to 'improve the wellbeing of children, young people and families at a population level and requires flexible and responsive systems that are equipped to respond effectively and early to emerging issues and challenges¹.

Target groups are:

- 0-5 year olds
- Young parents
- Young people
- Aboriginal communities

This year, particularly the end of 2021, continued to provide many challenges for program delivery with COVID lockdowns and guidelines constantly changing. A second lot of flooding following 12 months after the 2021 floods also required us to step up again in supporting affected residents. However, we got a lot more impetus as the year went on.

Outputs

Community Connections - In spite of COVID we managed to partner in some youth week events with Midcoast Council last year at Taree, Wingham and Chatham high schools. We received excellent feedback on the activities students were able to undertake as a result with approx. participation of 1000 students.

Community Centres - As usual our information, referral and advice component of our contract was more than met with approx. 2000 clients assisted. This is approx. double what we are contracted to do. This doesn't include the approx. 2000 attending for Second Bite and/or other assistance. We had approx. 350 instances of provision of access to infrastructure by other services e.g. AA, Dept Education, Art Gallery, Chess Connect, Mission Australia, Financial Counselling, Craft Groups etc.

Community Support – This year we continued to facilitate our cooking program with a few stops and starts. We ran a 4-week course in August 21 with an enrolment of 10. This year we partnered with Catholic Care to run another workshop. Earlier this year we partnered with 2 BOB radio to apply for funding to facilitate training for young people in radio presenting



with currently involved young people training other young people over a 6-week period. Three 6-week sessions will be held before June 2023. Five young people were involved in writing the application and the first round of training was not held until August 22.

We were successful in obtaining funding to run Easter holiday programs and purchase equipment to show movies at halls and outdoors. In April we focused on some of the outlying areas around the Midcoast to show movies for young people. This will be able to be an ongoing activity now that we have the resources needed to do this. These movie nights attracted approx. 36 people over 5 locations/sessions.

We also partnered with the Manning River Turtle group this year who were successful in obtaining funds for a Science Week project for young people (see separate report).

We only got to facilitate one social playgroup in July/Aug 2021 attracting 12 toddlers, before COVID came down on us again basically taking u out of action until we could engage a new worker.

We also facilitated some targeted activities for pre-schoolers e.g. two sessions of Crafty Science, an art class, a virtual garden activity for stressed out parents during COVID and a 'Scarecrow making' morning for when everyone was allowed out again. These activities attracted approx. 70 pre-schoolers.

While we lost almost all of our regular volunteers during COVID, we have attracted new ones who are undertaking a range of activities.

Challenges

Challenges for a small organisation are many, however, this year the Government stepped up and recognised that there was a need for smaller organisations who do a lot of heavy lifting to be resourced to increase efficiencies and scope.

Data collection is still providing some challenges but we get closer all the time to resolving them.

Future Plans

This year we will begin to implement our new Theory of Change with a view to increased confidence and sustainability of Manning Valley Neighbourhood Services.

Finally

There never seems to be enough time in the year to fit in everything that we aspire to. I still believe we lift well above our weight. A lot of this is thanks to the volunteers who support us every day.

Thanks to Kerrie and the front office volunteers, who take the time to ascertain the needs of our clients, collect the data and cope with never ending changes in the delivery of this program!

Thank you to Jane, Arwen, Lisa and now Stacey and Hanna who do their jobs so thoroughly and passionately and under often trying circumstances. This year has thrown just about everything at us and we have survived!

Caron Watkins

Manager



Migrant Settlement Service

The Migrant Settlement Service (MSS) aims to equip and empower humanitarian entrants, other eligible permanent migrants and their communities to address their settlement needs, in order to improve social participation, economic well-being, independence, personal well-being and community connectedness to all eligible clients in the Mid North Coast regions, including Kempsey, Port Macquarie, Taree, Forster and Gloucester. This is achieved through casework, referrals, information and advocacy and by supporting other services to do the same.

Key Objectives

SETS - Settlement Engagement and Transition Support

DHA – Department of Home Affairs

NSP – NSW Settlement Partnership

Key Objectives

The objectives of the project over the last year include:

1. Provision of casework, information, advocacy and referral to address settlement needs.
2. Conduct group information sessions to multicultural residents.
3. Promotion and provision of service to local and outreach areas.
4. Provide community advocacy and developing and maintaining networks with agencies.

Outputs

Group information sessions have been limited due to COVID. Fortunately, two sessions were able to be in the second half of the year through TAFE ESL classes. In March at Taree TAFE held a session on planning ahead – Wills, Power of Attorney and Enduring Guardianship with Mid Coast Community Legal Centre. In April at Port Macquarie TAFE held a session on employment opportunities with recruitment officer from Wyndham Destinations. On the day 3 students applied for positions and the worker offered to return for mock job interviews.

The Volunteer Conversational English Program Saturday group sessions ran until December 2021 after the majority Congolese community members relocated out of the area. The program is still running in a reduced capacity to support people one on one. I would like to acknowledge the huge commitment the volunteers made to the program which wouldn't have existed without them.

Attended training in areas of Mental Health First Aid, Welfare Rights Centre, Trauma Informed Service Delivery for the non-clinician and several online trainings on domestic and family violence including immigration law, coercive control and the settlement context.



Key Achievements

- Water Safety program ran from February until April 2022 over 7 weeks for 6 participants. Of note, 2 of the participants did not swim well and 4 had no swimming experience and welcomed this opportunity.
- Following several postponements and uncertainty of holding an in-person event the Regional Settlement Conference was held online on 12th April 2022. The forums' main purpose was to launch the 'Insights into Regional Settlement in Practice' paper which showcased key settlement insights from the experience of on the ground workers in a regional context. The forum highlights included panel discussion with settlement workers including myself, two client voices and guest speakers including David Wilden, First Assistant Secretary of the Refugee, Humanitarian and Settlement Division within the Department of Home Affairs. The forum was well attended and received well with much positive feedback from participants. While the forum was a lot of work, particularly the paper, debrief discussions agreed that further promotion of regional settlement work is important and should be continued in some form. The conference recording and paper can be found at Regional Settlement Conference - NSW Settlement Partnership (ssi.org.au)

Challenges

As always worker capacity in a part-time role continues to be the biggest challenge covering such a large geographical area. It goes without saying COVID is an ongoing challenge. Information sessions difficult – limited access TAFE first half year.

Reduced capacity due to Covid to get out in the community impacts service profile and referrals.

Future Plans

The year of 2022-23 will see a slight funding reduction. With a new government, SSI have been advocating strongly for a funding increase for the NSP with the new Minister for Immigration, Andrew Giles.

Plans for community activities are in the pipeline now the pandemic has settled so to speak, these include Cultural Youth Exchange Trip in partnership with Mosaic Multicultural Connections (previously Northern Settlement Services) and Newcastle Multicultural Neighbourhood Centre.

I would like to thank the many partners who continue to be supportive, collaborative and reliable year after year, NSP colleagues, our fabulous volunteers in the centre, committee members and Caron, Kerrie, Arwen and Lisa who continue to provide much needed laughs and support. This year also sees a fond farewell to Ruben.

Jane O'Dwyer

Migrant Settlement Project Worker



Cooperative Legal Service Delivery (CLSD) - Taree/Forster



The Cooperative Legal Service Delivery (CLSD) program partnership is one of 12 regional justice partnerships in NSW that aim to improve legal outcomes for socially and economically disadvantaged people. The partnership is guided by an action plan that provides a framework for priorities based on local unmet and emerging legal needs.

Taree Forster region priorities:

1. Improved engagement with Aboriginal communities.
2. Improved access to legal information and legal services for Aboriginal people, people with a disability and socially and economically disadvantaged people.
3. Assisting people in financial hardship.
4. Keep community workers up to date with changes to the law.

Outputs

In August 2021 a new Action Plan was developed via surveys and consultation with partners at the planning day. The 2021-22 the CLSD partnership has delivered projects in line with the new Action Plan (2021-23) and identified ongoing, unmet and emerging legal needs of the Taree and Forster communities.

The priorities of the current Action Plan are:

- Working together effectively to help priority client groups
- Tackling fine debt in the region
- Supporting people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
- CLE and outreach events
- Ongoing project areas (community days, birth certificate days etc.)

The beginning of 2022 saw the return of projects out in the community which has greatly increased the scope for the delivery of projects.

The CLSD program continues to have strong involvement from partners enabling the delivery of a range of projects and activities across the region including:

- Distribution and promotion of voting fine materials (Legal Aid NSW) to partners and interagency prior to Council elections in December. (November/December 2021)
- Mini CLE on tenant's rights by MCTAAS as part of quarterly meeting. (December 2021)
- Guide to Free Legal Help in Taree, Forster and Gloucester was finalised and distributed to CLSD partners and through other interagency avenues. (December 2022)
- Welfare Rights Centre training in Taree covering 5 topics. (March 2022)



- Legal outreach clinics alongside Orange Sky Laundry with MNCLC and MCTAAS at MUC (fortnightly) and Coopernook Op Shop monthly. Volunteers gained improved awareness and information on available legal services in the area. (March – August 2022)
- Law Week Birth Certificate Day at Manning Uniting Church with MNCLC and Legal Aid (Port Macquarie), 65 applications taken and a number of advices given. (May 2022)

Other activities included:

- Discussion of fines and promotion of WDO's is ongoing. Fines is a standard agenda item at quarterly meetings.
- Homelessness and housing are a standard item at quarterly meetings and worker attends the Homelessness Interagency regularly.
- Distribution of Legal Topics for Older People Diaries in Taree and Forster.
- Ongoing promotion of all legal and financial outreach advice clinics.
- Ongoing attendance at network and interagency meetings to build and maintain networks in the legal and non-legal sector.
- Regular email distribution to CLSD partners and wider community services sector to share information on upcoming events, changes in the legal sector, service information and to raise the CLSD profile.

Taree/Forster area continues to be well resourced with non-legal and legal advice services available to the community to address their legal needs. Outreach services are delivered through a mix of phone and in-person clinics.

Ongoing, Unmet and Emerging Legal Needs

There are several ongoing, unmet and/or emerging legal issues that have regularly been identified during the year. These issues will continue to be discussed at regional meetings and where appropriate and possible projects will be developed to address them.

These include:

- Fines and debt are ongoing issues coupled with low awareness and participation in the WDO program.
- Housing affordability and vulnerability, particularly those in short-term and temporary accommodation who cannot access a tenancy lease and the protections this provides.
- Power imbalance between landlords and tenants. With no-grounds evictions, low vacancy rates and significant cost increases in private rentals tenants are at a significant disadvantage and fearful to request repairs and makes complaints.
- Buy Not Pay Later companies are unregulated and placing users into debt they cannot afford.

Challenges Encountered

The June quarterly meeting saw a return to in-person meetings. While online meetings were essential to building and maintaining relationships with partners, in-person meetings have been welcomed. Discussion and participation by partners are greatly enhanced by face-to-face conversations along with the benefits of networking during and after meetings.



Future Plans

With the Action Plan still relatively new, current actions will continue to be addressed along with additional actions in response to identified needs throughout the year.

I would like to thank Kate and Winnie for their ongoing support and the CLSD partners for their input and hard work that allow for our projects to happen. Partner involvement and collaboration is at the heart of the CLSD program.

Jayne O'Dwyer

Taree/Forster Regional Coordinator



Manning Valley Cooperative Living Program (MVCLP)

(Incorporates Food from the Heart and Manning Valley Community Gardens)

The MVCL Program provides financial assistance, information and referrals to community members in the Manning Valley LGA who are experiencing financial crisis. The MVCLP provides a holistic service incorporating three programs run by MVNS: Emergency Relief, Manning Valley Community Gardens and the Food from the Heart Kitchen Project. The MVCLP attempts to ensure reasonable access to emergency relief for all people within the local area, upholding clients' rights and dignity in a way that maintains and encourages self-reliance within the individual.

Facilitation of the MVCLP includes advocacy, referrals, networking, Work for the Dole and Centrelink hosting, Work and Development Orders, and orientation and training of volunteers involved with ER service, community garden and kitchen programs.

It's hard to believe that it's been nearly 3 years since the life and community changing events of the Black Summer fires and the ongoing disasters since. From MVNS perspective this has carried a huge context in terms of resources, service delivery and expectations of a small organisation. While extra funding was provided by the government for financial assistance after the fires, there was nothing of significance offered in support of flood affected community members. COVID started to skew our understanding of the demand, and now we are definitely seeing the realities and significance of the 'increased cost of living' and the impacts on our communities. We are also facing our own reality of returning to pre disaster funding levels and deliberating over how we are going to meet the increased need.

Sadly, we are seeing homelessness become a new normal with possibly 2 or 3 new presentations each week. Accordingly, the majority of our referrals are to Samaritans Homelessness service and Compass Housing. The majority of our assistance is for food, followed by fuel. The number of repeat clients we see has reduced with more new clients presenting.

Anne Else has been our incredibly reliable and consistent volunteer delivering this service and being the rock for so many fragile people. Kerrie provides the amazing thorough back up for assessment and client support. Between Anne and Kerrie, they have assessed and delivered assistance to at least 2000 people this financial year. This doesn't count the many, many clients who are just seeking a listening ear. Front office volunteers also provide much needed listening and face to face support in a new world where many services are providing more and more phone support.

We are consistently addressing the issues that arise out of service delivery. For example, the assessment process of existing financial crisis is extremely hard to measure/determine. However, if we're not consistent with our processes then it poses other problems. While it is an essential service, justifying the demands from clients as well as the funding body and the time involved is often difficult given that this is a volunteer-based service.

As you will see from the table below, with decreased funding we assisted double the number of clients. This would have been partly to do with the 20/21 year having larger



dollar amounts to target at bushfire affected clients. However, it does also mean that there has been a lot of extra effort going in to delivering this service. These figures also include extra funds we received from the Samaritans and the Upper Hunter Neighbourhood Centre as they were unable to expend them in time.

Out of the 700 odd clients that are assessed and assisted, there are another approximately 1300 who are either assessed and don't turn up, or assessed and don't meet the assessment criteria. This requires hours of worker time to facilitate these enquiries. It also creates a lot of frustration for both workers and clients given that the criteria for assistance can be so tentative.

Just as a point of comparison, this financial year (2022 – 2023) we have dropped back to funding of \$33,000. The following table provides a summary of numbers of clients accessing MVCLP service over the last twelve months (2022/2022):

Total funding Provided 2021/2022	ER Assistance 2021/2022	Total client numbers 2021/2022	Total funding provided 2020/2021	Total client numbers 2020/2021
Department of Social Services Fuel \$14,800 Food \$37,500 Food parcels \$2,970 Medicine \$590 Telephone \$400 Other \$16,849 TOTAL = \$73,109	ER Assistance provided (no. of clients) Instances of assistance Aboriginal/ATSI clients Women 26-45 year old No. of ER clients Unable to Assist	620 1138 20% 66% 44%	Department of Social Services Fuel \$26,250 Food \$33,700 Food parcels \$4,620 Medicine \$934 Telephone \$120 Other \$23,769 TOTAL = \$89,431	318 954 32% 67% 41% 1350 (approx.)
Second Bite		Stopped counting!	Second Bite	Approx. 3000
Electricity Vouchers = \$29,520	Assistance provided Instances	89 clients 99	Electricity Vouchers = \$25,300	68 clients 74 instances
TOTAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDED \$102,629			TOTAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDED \$114,731	An increase of approx. 51% in value compared to 2019/2020

GIVIT and Foodbank continue to top up our capacity to stretch our funds further. As do other local (and sometimes non-local) philanthropic people and organisations. Once again, we were also able to provide Target vouchers from FRRR to provide support for resources/clothing etc. for children returning to school.

We also top up our emergency support with garden produce; and RSPCA donations for the furry side of emergency relief.





Food from the Heart

Secondbite Food-rescue Program

The relatively new set up of our second bite access point is mostly working well. However, it does mean we don't get an accurate measurement of numbers of people accessing it. A conservative estimate is around 2000. It continues to grow as many people use it to reduce their weekly shopping costs.

Tim is still our very hardworking volunteer who continues to pick up from both ALDI and Coles in Wingham. There is never any certainty as to how much produce will be available.

We have also been offered other options of pallets of pantry items but our storage is limited so we can only accept small amounts.

Monday Lunches

With the decline of COVID (which resulted in us losing our core volunteers for the Monday lunches) we have resurrected this service by providing frozen meals. Wendy is our new volunteer cooking up wonderfully mouth-watering stuff every Wednesday.

Manning Valley Community Gardens

The Manning Valley Community Gardens Garden continues to provide an avenue for engagement for community members, clients and other volunteers who wish to contribute something to their community. We are in the process of changing the name of the gardens to Old Courthouse Community Gardens, Wingham to distinguish the location from other gardens that have now evolved in the Manning Valley.



Community members are most welcome to come and utilize the space, the pizza oven and make the most of what is available.

Donations for plants continue to be our main source of fund raising.

Thank you to Gary who has been driven insane by the watering system again this year. Thanks to a monitoring device from Council we think we may have resolved the core issue. But other things keep arising 😊. We have been able to use some of the rain water for watering the gardens recently.



Caron Watkins

Manager



Validation Project

The Validation Project aimed to validate the role women played during the 19/20 Black Summer Bushfires within the MidCoast LGA, NSW. The project's purpose was to provide linkages between the women and health & wellbeing programming as well as appropriate support and professional services, with the ultimate objective of women supporting women.

Purpose of Validation Project over the course of 12 months

To deliver alternating weekly activities over 12 months in various communities affected by the bushfires with the aim of building and strengthening connections, increasing health and wellbeing, reducing isolation. Along with supporting and building capacity in individuals and community, encourage social cohesion and quality of life. Through these regular gathering, the women will have the opportunity to learn new skills, connect with professional support services, build stronger community connections and networks. Importantly the women can work towards changing the narrative of seeing themselves as victims to survivors.

Consultation Gatherings

In June 2021, the first of two women's gathering, and consultation sessions were organised for two different locations. One gathering taking place at the Wingham CWA Rooms followed by the next gathering being held at Blackhead SLSC. At both of these events, we asked the women questions around the word '**Validation**' and what it means to them?

The information collated from these initial consultation sessions went on to shape the direction of the Validation Project.

What kind of questions did we ask?

- What activities do you feel would strengthen community connections with other women? Women supporting women, how would this look in your community?
- What does community mean to you?
- What activities would you like to participate in?
- What does validation mean to you?

Responses to these Questions

- | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------|
| • Story Sharing | • Being listened to |
| • Art Therapy | • Acknowledgement |
| • Regular Social Gathering | • Yoga |
| • Cooking Classes | • Garden tours |
| • Women Supporting Women | • Textile workshops |
| • Mental health Support | • A Women's Shed |





Validation Project Workshops and Gatherings

From the initial women's gatherings, the plans for face-to-face program delivery changed quickly with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Programming deliverables needed to be reconsidered and pivoted to a digital platform.

From August to September the following programs were delivered online:

- Come Join Us, Virtual Catch up
- Virtual Basic Yoga with Mia from Forster Yoga studio
- Art Therapy
- Wholesome Food Co & Southlake Youth Morisset invited the women to attend a 6-week Online Nutrition & Cooking Series.

By October 2021, restrictions had been lifted for some and we were able to resume face to face programming and over a period of the next 12 to 13 months, we successfully delivered and facilitated over 20 workshops and events.

The Validation Project offered a diverse array of workshops from creative hands-on workshop to educational nature walks, training workshops as well as a daylong health and wellbeing day.

The following list is an example of the programming enjoyed by the women:

- Resin Cheese Board Making Workshop
- Bushwalk with Manning Landcare at Blackhead Reserve
- Lifeline Accidental Counsellor Training



From February and May 2022, we held sessions of Storytelling at local community halls and at the Manning Regional Art Gallery. These workshops offered the women the opportunity to share and tell their stories through different creative mediums, including:

- Storytelling Workshop | Story Sharing
- Storytelling Workshop | Incidental Object
- Storytelling Workshop | Story through movement
- Storytelling Workshop | Eco Dyeing and Slow Stitching
- Storytelling Workshop | Through Paint and Collage
- Women's Gathering at Elands| Yoga |Health Nurse| Eco Dyeing

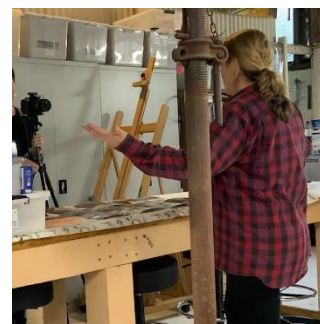




At the Story Sharing workshops, the women shared their lived experiences of the bushfires, and they came to realise, as a group, that they wanted to share their experiences with the broader community. From this came the suggestion of recording the women's stories and sharing them to the wider community came to fruition.

With an injection of funding from the Disaster Recovery Grant, the Validation Project was able to be extended until June - July 2022. We were able to run additional workshops and events for the women along with engaging a videographer to film and create a session of short films of the women's stories, two years in from 19/20 Black Summer Bushfires. These stories are now available on the Manning Valley Neighbourhood Service's YouTube channel and publicly accessible.

The women were also given a UBS memory stick with a copy of all their short films and have been encouraged to share their stories. MVNS has been sharing stories on their Facebook page and Cameron Marshall from ABC radio did an interview on the women's stories and shared the audio version of the stories on his morning radio show.



To celebrate the film's completion and the finale of the Validation Project, we held a Women's Celebration, afternoon tea and film screening at the Wingham CWA room with 25 women in attendance.



Outcomes

In May and June 2022, The Validation Project engaged the services of three women involved in the Validation Project. Each of these women are also artists in their own right with extensive experience in program delivery. With the additional funding the project received, we paid these artists to facilitate creative workshops for the other Validation Project women. All three workshop were well attended and offered the facilitator a safe space to rebuild their skills and confidences in program delivery.

Over the past 13 months of the Validation Project, we have successfully delivered and facilitated over 20 workshops and events for the women, with an estimate of over 100 women and their families positively benefiting.

Personally, I have seen the women's confidence grow, smiles and joy return to their faces, new friendships formed, invitations given and accepted, wider community connections grow, the sharing of personal experiences, talk about preparing for the future disasters, and real demonstrations of a new normal, with signs of true resilience. Future plans: from the initial consultation the women indicated a strong need for a Women's Shed. In 2022 MVNS was successful in a grant application to make the Women's Shed happen. The funding covers a worker to manage the project over a 27 months period.

Testimonials

Oh Lisa, these stories are absolutely beautiful and so powerful. What an amazing job you all did and the courage of these women to share their experience of these horrendous fires is amazing. This is storytelling at its best! Thank you for making this happen...is it ok if we share these videos on our Mid Coast 4 Kids Facebook page/socials?

Thanks for supporting our communities in such a practical way Lisa.

Thank you for your passion and dedication supporting our community. Your hard work will make a difference in weeks, months and years to come. I wish the very best for the next chapter in your working adventure.

Thanks, you ran an amazing program, sorry it is over 🌸

Dear Lisa,

Thank you for all your care of us Lisa. I appreciate your input & the effort you made on our behalf. It helped alleviate anxiety & made me for one feel that what happened to me was of concern to others. I wish you well in all your future endeavours & will look forward to any future encounters,

Hi Lisa,

The workshop more than met my needs. It was humbling being with likeminded woman seeking to not only help our own traumatic experiences but to support each other, allowing us to be seen, heard and graciously guided by Debbie.

Lisa Hort

Community Development Worker, Validation Project



Women Kind Collective Project

Women Kind Collective

The Women Kind Collective (aka. The Women's Shed) was established after receiving funding from the Commonwealth Governments Black Summer Bushfire Recovery and Resilience Funding, to provide opportunities for women of the Manning Valley bushfire effected communities to come together and find space in healing and recovery through connectedness and empowerment within community with other women.

The project aims to empower local women through a means of connection and capacity building through programs, workshops, classes and upskilling, and through the sharing of these skills; it invites local women to share their skills and knowledge with others and learn new ones along the way whilst establishing meaningful new relationships in a safe and supported space. The project also aims to provide a space for healing and recovery through connection with other women, as in line with the latest trauma recovery research.



The project is funded until March 2024, with sustainability also being an ongoing focus point of coordination of the project. The project will offer barista training for women and young people, to support skill building, along with local employment opportunities. In the new year, the project will also see the implementation of further social enterprise; offering the consignment sales of local women makers wares within the space.

This aims to further support local women in establishing and building their businesses, minimising overheads for them, promoting their skills and wares and providing a small percentage back to the ongoing costs of the project to further support future workshops and resources not otherwise covered within the funding scope. Further to this, the new year also looks to see 2 other social enterprise activities established; Lady Tradies – handy women providing handy work service to locals and a domestic and commercial cleaning service. The space is also available for hire and includes a back office for co-location, with women specific support services to commence outreach from the space in the coming months.

Current programs running regularly include: Love, Peace and Harmony Meditation, Art with Irene, Craft and Connect, The Book was Better Book Club, the "I'm off to Book Club" Social Book Club and Women's Circles. Currently, additional workshops and activities are booked each month, including belly dancing, water colour painting, repurposing clothing and op-shop tour, Indigenous art, SafeTalk program, Halloween decorating and pumpkin carving, to name a few.





The space has already seen a successful Makers and Creators Market, wherein local women makers and creators held stalls and sold their creations in a market format with a local live musician setting the tone and festive ambiance. This has been incredibly well received within community, with a Christmas themed market already in the works as a follow on.

The positive feedback and excitement from women in our local communities indicates that this project is meeting a need that has been quite significant and otherwise unmet. Since the Women Kind Collective doors gently opened on 16th August 2022, women have actively attended workshops and programs, with the support of community and attendance growing each day.

Stacey Northam

Coordinator of the Women Kind Collective



Manning River Turtle Conservation Group (MRTC)

The Group remains focused on promoting awareness of the turtle and facilitating research and on-ground action to conserve and recover the species in the wild. It is incredibly special that we have an animal that lives nowhere else in the world but the Manning catchment. But it does need special protection and action.



We have continued to work to conserve the Manning River turtle and its habitat over this rainy past year. In November 2021 we assisted with a nest detection workshop, which was held on the Nowendoc River and Mt George community hall. Brad Nesbitt, ecologist from Canines for Wildlife, presented his knowledge of freshwater turtle nest detection, including common signs of nests raided by foxes, updates on using dogs for scent detection, and methods of protecting nest sites. We worked with Hunter Local Lands Services and MidCoast Council, and an information booklet and short video were compiled, as an ongoing community resource.

No confirmed nests were detected last breeding season, though we remain hopeful for this year.

In February 2022 we were notified that we were successful in gaining a \$14,000 grant under the Federal Government for National Science Week. The grant funds were kindly administered by MVNS. It involved a workshop in early May, for 36 people including primary school, Scouts, TIDE, OzFish, Gloucester Environment Group, Land for Wildlife, Sustainable Farmers, Landcare and U3A. Researchers Dr Elise Furlan and Dr Jess Tout explained the process of collecting samples for eDNA analysis, and we provided each of the ten groups with 3 kits.



They collected the samples in their waterway of choice, and these were analysed in labs at the University of Canberra in June and July. In August, reports of the results were sent to each group and a live webinar was held during Science Week in August. The range of biodiversity of each site was reported. This project had wonderful results for engaging community in the practical application of science, which contributes directly to the management of habitat. It was a successful program and has already extended to other events.

Work is progressing on development of the primer for the MRT, which will enable eDNA analysis to determine presence of the turtle, distinguishing it from other turtle species. This will enable more accurate data on the location of the MRT in the upper reaches of the catchment.

The MRTG continues to support the RiverWatch program, which is now being delivered in the Dingo Creek and Barnard River catchment areas every 3 months. As part of our involvement in this Environment Trust grant, the group now owns a water sampling kit, and we are still inviting volunteers for ongoing training and sampling. MRTG also presented to the U3A in Taree, about the eDNA project, and an update on our group's work this year.

We are preparing for involvement in EnviroFair, and a guided river walk education event as part of the Gloucester Wild festival, in October 2022.

The MRTG is grateful for the wonderful support given by Kerrie and Caron at MVNS, which enables us to continue the work we do.



Claire Rourke

MRTCG Committee Member



2021/2022 Special Thanks

Volunteers & Supporters

- Our FANTASTIC volunteers - office, Women Kind Collective, garden, Garden Kitchen, Second Bite, Tax Help, fundraising and Management Committee
- Rhonda Futterleib – Essential Accounting Services
- Wingham RSPCA
- Judy Peach – Milliways Consulting
- Hunter New England Area Health Service
- Midcoast Council
- Faith Family Church – Jenny Brewer and Tim Willis
- Northern Settlement Services team
- MNC Community Legal Centre
- SecondBite Food Rescue Program in partnership with Coles Wingham
- St Vincent de Paul Taree
- North Coast Institute TAFE (Kempsey, Port Macquarie, Taree and Tuncurry)
- Manning Regional Art Gallery
- Wingham Rotary
- Correctional Services Taree
- Hogans Plumbing
- Gabby Holt
- SEFA
- Oz Harvest
- Second Bite
- Wingham Rotary
- Give Now – Stephanie Brown
- Give Now – Linda Walters
- Bernie Harris
- Wingham Uniting Church
- Catholic Church Wingham
- GIVIT
- ALDI

Funding Bodies

Special thanks also to our funding bodies:

- **NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ)**
- Legal Aid NSW
- **Department of Social Services**
- **Department of Human Services**
- **Settlement Services International**
- **Energy NSW – EAPS vouchers**

Apologies to anyone who has been forgotten – there are so many!

