

39th Annual Report 2020
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 and volunteers 6553 5121	Catering for the Community at Bushlands – Bushland Tukka Supporting community through a social enterprise cafe and catering. Resources, training and outreach service provision Contact Caron 65535121	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 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		Manning Cultural Connections Committee To promote social inclusion and provide an engaging intercultural platform in the Manning Valley Contact Jane 65535121	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 cooperative & strategic networks of key legal services and community organisations Contact Jane Project Officer 6553 5121	Midcoast Renewal Committee A group formed to lead community based recovery post 2019 bushfires. Drought affected communities will also be included given the integral nature of the affect of the drought prior to the fires Contact Caron 6553 5121	Community Safety Project Worker Develop social and physical infrastructure in the Bushland social housing area to engage young people and the wider community and increase community safety Contact Caron 6553 5121	Migrant Settlement Project Worker Information & referral for migrants and NESB residents of the Mid North Coast. Contact Jane 6553 5121	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 6553 5121

Chairperson's Report

I could say that the last 12 months have been *unprecedented* but we all know that! At the end of last year some of us were told to leave our homes, some to get ready to leave them while others sadly lost their homes in the fires. Then early this year we were told to stay home for weeks to avoid getting or spreading Covid-19.

No matter the state of the wider world the staff and volunteers of the Neighbourhood Centre kept calm and carried on supporting the community. A drop-in space was set up for people affected by the fires. We also provided information on supports offered, (which was a movable feast!) to those who had lost their homes. The Centre remained open (with some safety strategies and a couple of services suspended) during the lock down. The committee acknowledges the effort by the Caron, Jane and Kerrie to keep providing services to the community under very difficult conditions.

In amongst all the upheavals of the year Caron was working with the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) to secure a funding contract and to negotiate the terms of the contract. In the past MVNS received funding under the Community Builders program but the state government has changed the focus of it's funding. We were very pleased to confirm the contract for a three-year term, however the new Targeted Early Intervention program and associated reporting will require a substantial shift in our focus over the next three years.

I would like to acknowledge the tremendous amount of work Caron did to secure the DCJ contract and to make sense of the new requirements and reporting. I would also like to acknowledge the work of Judy Peach in helping Caron and the Management Committee do planning around the new program.

Please read the staff reports as they show all that has been done, challenges faced and many successes. They are also a reminder of the wide range of activities that happen at MVNS. We are pleased to welcome two new organisations that we now auspice, the Midcoast Renewal Committee and the Manning Suicide Prevention Network.

Many, many thanks to all the volunteers who make Monday lunch, work in the garden, answer phones, answer questions, collect bread, assist people with emergency support, run fundraising activities, make bags – All and anything that needs doing!

A special thank you to Betty Swaffield, the volunteer office manager on a Monday, has retired after 27+ years. We are very grateful for all she has done for MVNS. We wish her well. She is greatly missed! Thanks again to the staff Caron, Jane, Kerrie and Marlo for being flexible, working from home, coming into work under difficult conditions and still managing to support clients, complete the reports for funding organisations and continue to work towards the vision and mission of MNVS

Finally, thanks to the volunteer management committee that meet each month (via Zoom several times this year). We welcomed Allan Konemann and Jane McKenzie to the committee this year but said farewell to Suzie Jones and Kerrin O'Grady. We thank them for their time and enthusiasm.
Stay safe!

Angela Pink

Chairperson, Management Committee



Treasurer's Report

I am pleased to be able to present the Treasurer's report for 2019-2020

Essential Tax and Accounting Services Pty Ltd audited the financial accounts. Rhonda Futterleib and her staff are professional and thorough in the audit process. I am happy to report that they have concluded that MVNS is an ongoing concern and they will be issuing an unqualified audit opinion.

The tabled audited financial statements demonstrate last year's financial position. Some things to note:

- MVNS had a surplus of \$19,851
- MVNS received a grant from the ATO as part of Covid-19 initiatives of \$23,790 to offset wages tax.
- We undertook a major IT upgrade of the office phone system.

MVNS Inc's financial administration and account record keeping are professionally managed and administrated by our Manager, Caron Watkins and Office Administrator, Kerrie McTaggart. I would like to thank them for their on-going excellent financial administration.

I would like to thank them for their on-going excellent financial administration.

Angela Pink

Chairperson, Management Committee



Manager's Report - Community Builders/MVNS Inc.

The Manning Valley Neighbourhood Centre receives funding through the Community Services NSW – Community Builders program. Community Builders is a funding program which aims to strengthen communities and particularly the disadvantaged groups within them.

Community strengthening is about building the capacity of and opportunities for people to actively engage in a wide variety of social, economic, cultural, recreational, learning and civic activities. It also includes supporting the relationships and networks that result from these activities.

The transitioning and contracting process from Community Builders to a Targeted Earlier Intervention model (TEI) was finalised at the end of June 2020. This has been a 6 year process. TEI will require a stronger focus on delivering responsive and flexible prevention and interventions that meet the needs of children, young people, families and communities experiencing or at risk of vulnerability.

Outputs

However, this year we continued to meet the needs of our Community Builders target groups, while also spending a significant amount of time finalising significant projects. Many proposed activities identified at the beginning of 2020 had to be put on hold due to COVID. Especially those involving partnerships with other services as they had much more stringent lockdowns than we did.

As social infrastructure, Neighbourhood Centres have engaged with and provided opportunities for local communities to access their services. For MVNS this has largely been through information and referral, and a community development approach. For this reason outcomes have not been easy to measure. However, peak bodies will continue to advocate for strengthening the role of community development whilst also encompassing the responsibilities of child protection.

Bushland Safety Project - this project came to a close in October 2019 with the finalisation of the 18 months funding. The project worker continued to provide support to the community and young people. The challenges of sustainability for ongoing support to young people on the estate were affected by the need for a permanent safe place to gather and engaging other services who were motivated and had the capacity to deliver place based programs.

With remaining funds, the worker was also able to provide some sector training for youth workers around youth engagement with Peter Slattery, a well known educator in the youth sector. Approximately 40 workers attended a 2 day training program.

Bushland Tukka Cafe/Enterprise – Over 5 years ago, MVNS had the vision and took the initiative and the risks to turn an unused space into something that could be a community asset and a vehicle to support a community and attract funding for further projects. After 5 years of operation and a lot of angst we made the decision to close the cafe at the beginning of October 2019 for a number of reasons. While there was definitely a need for such a hub and we had seen the level of engagement increase over time, there needed to be a substantial boost in support from other services and



appropriate funds for it to continue. All attempts to secure this were unsuccessful. We were able to provide a few more community 'fun days' before its closure.

Language cafe – a program for migrants to improve their conversational English and social confidence with skilled volunteers in a relaxed environment. We were also aiming to overcome educational and employment challenges. Despite attempting to attract the appropriate cohort for over 6 months, this project did not properly get off the ground. (We did have many people offer their support as volunteers though).

Walking Group – thank you to Arwen for taking on the challenge of leading a Heart Foundation walking group. The group meets every Monday morning for a healthy walk around Wingham. COVID held this up for quite a few months but they are back in the swing now!

Mid Coast Renewal Committee - a request was made from this committee for an auspicing arrangement so that they could move past the initial disaster response and into recovery with the affected communities in a community led approach. They were at the forefront of advocating for this through the bushfire interagencies which were held regularly prior to COVID. With the two leaders of this group having major life changes, there was hope that Council would continue to lead this charge. A massive thank you to both Lucinda and Taycee for their energy, foresight and persistence. **See separate report.**

See other outputs included in **Food from the Heart and Community Gardens.**

Challenges

This financial year was full of them! Apart from the many tests and dilemmas that delivering services provides, the limited funding and resourcing, the red tape continues to take us away from our main focus – clients and community!

This was brought into a sharper focus this year with the bushfires, floods and then COVID 19. The bushfires started when we were very short staffed, which limited our capacity to do much more than be here. Thank goodness for those community members who rallied around and provided much needed physical support and the donations of necessities.

The delay in support from the Government at all levels has made for a very difficult recovery process. It was not until May that we were provided with financial support for those affected, but privacy laws and lack of a database prevented us from being able to contact them. It has taken months for word to get around and we are still seeing people who have not received assistance (at Oct 20).

COVID certainly threw out some challenges in terms of how to continue to deliver activities without being able to see people face to face. Meetings and communication took on a whole new meaning. One bonus was that there was no need to be travelling to Sydney on a regular basis for meetings which takes a lot of time out of a working week. I believe that Zoom will probably be a way of the future.

There was also the ongoing issue of staff and community safety and keeping abreast of quickly moving situations with COVID.

The amount of networking and interagencies to be attended is a challenge. The requirement to stay across the multiple issues that they address is important, but does take time out from other workloads.



Data Collection – continues to provide frustrations. Trying to meet the needs of Government along with gathering more substantial data for ourselves is tricky. Setting up the data structures for our new TEI service delivery is proving difficult and frustrating. Volunteer coordination – our volunteers provide us with the support we need to deliver the multiple programs that we do. However, it is also a big job to recruit, induct and facilitate orientation and training, and provide ongoing support. Ideally, we would like to receive funding to make this a paid position.

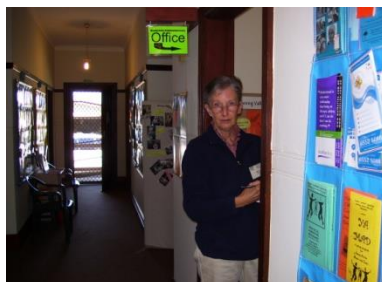
Future Plans

This financial year will see us transitioning into delivering services to new target groups and taking a different approach to service delivery. Our future plans are reliant on developing and delivering activities to our new target groups under the TEI. This is a big change from a whole of community approach and community development. This transition process has involved an enormous amount of preparation, and putting together the required documents for DCJ so that we were certain to progress with our recontracting.

Our new target groups:

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

Finally



A massive thank you to Betty Swaffield who has volunteered for an untold number of years at MVNS. I am guessing it could be close to 25 years. She has been responsible for putting any number of these annual reports together over the years. She has seen a lot of comings and goings, excitement and tears! You have been a great support. Happy retirement 😊

A big shout out to FAMS – the peak body for family services. They provided much needed information and support in relation to the recontracting process, the do's and don'ts, while ensuring DCJ were accountable for their direction and decisions.

Thank you once again to the team that allows this work to happen, staff, Management Committee and other volunteers. Every year poses its own challenges and rewards. There has been a lot of grief and joy in working with those impacted by the fires. The resilience we have seen brings about a whole new perspective. I will be thinking of them all as we lead into the 12-month anniversary of the fires.

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

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

The service has been operating under the SETS Client Services stream for 18 months with this twelve month period focused directly on client services and client based activities. The first six month period operated as expected while the second six month period was significantly affected by COVID.

The service has continued to provide direct settlement services to clients through the provision of information, referral, advocacy and casework assisting clients to be self-reliant, participate equitably in the community both socially and economically. COVID saw changes in client work delivering services primarily by phone, email or online from March. Face to face services were re-introduced as necessary and within safety guidelines.

There was no group information sessions delivered this year. No sessions were delivered in the first six months and then no sessions were able to be delivered with restrictions in place. TAFE ESL classes in all areas have been delivered online from March onwards. Not only has this impacted on group sessions but also prevented informal contact with students to build rapport contributing to a reduction in referrals from March to June.

Promotion of the service to the client group and services is ongoing and challenging with people often dispersed and isolated. Formal and informal attendance at TAFE ESL classes continues to be the most effective way of reaching the client group. The Migrant Support Mid North Coast Facebook page continues to be an effective tool for sharing information and connecting with people. Promotion to services through network and interagency meetings is important for establishing and maintaining relationships for both delivering client services and partnership activities. This has also been significantly impacted by COVID with meetings being held online. While this still allows for meetings to take place it does not provide scope for informal networking which is so important. A number of government agencies have been able to participate due to restrictions around various online meeting platforms. The NSP continues to be beneficial with meetings and training both face to face and via teleconferencing helping to increase knowledge and build relationships with other members.





Client based activities have been delivered with external funding and partnerships. These include:

- Language Café focusing on conversational English and social integration ran from July and ceased in December due to low attendance.
- Multicultural Women's Group ran fortnightly from July – December 2019 in partnership with the Manning Regional Art Gallery and Mission Australia who provided a worker to run children's activities. The art based group focused on social integration and conversational English. The women who attended formed new social connections and increased their participation in the community with 1 of the women independently registered with the gallery to volunteer at the start of 2020. Unfortunately the program did not restart in 2020 with funding from Multicultural NSW ceasing in February 2020
- Fostering Integration Grant (FIG) funded two pilot employment training programs over the year. All participants have improved employment outcomes with training, qualifications, work experience and increased confidence behind them.
 - In Port Macquarie 7 clients participated in the Introduction to Individual Support program run through the Community College from July 2019 – June 2020. Sessions continued through COVID with online classes and all work placements completed once restrictions allowed.



- In Taree 12 clients participated in the Learn to Run Your Own Food Market Stall course through TAFE, from July to November 2019. This included classroom learning and running two food stalls on campus for work experience.

Key Achievements

The key achievement this year has been the delivery of the FIG employment training programs. Both were pilot programs designed to address identified needs, deliver education and training in a culturally appropriate manner, provide work experience and an employment pathway in a sector identified as having job opportunities. Evaluation by participants confirms the value in programs that are customised to meet the needs of people who are culturally and linguistically diverse. All clients who registered for the programs completed them.

Challenges

Worker capacity in a part-time role continues to be the biggest challenge covering such a large geographical area. COVID was a new challenge faced by everyone. It has been a learning experience expanding how services are delivered and maintaining a profile in the community.

Future Plans

A commitment to providing quality services will see ongoing exploration of additional resources including external funding and partnerships opportunities. NSP Settlement Innovation Funds will be used to develop and deliver employment education workshops to increase client's employment prospects by developing their job seeking skills such as resume and application writing, interview skills and identification of skills and attributes.

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, Fiona and now Marlo who continue to provide much needed laughs and support. This year also sees a fond farewell to Fiona and Betty (who was here when I started at MVNS).

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

Throughout 2019-20 the CLSD partnership has delivered projects in line with the current Action Plan (2017-20) and identified ongoing, unmet and emerging legal needs of the Taree and Forster communities. The priorities of the current Action Plan are:

1. Continued engagement with Aboriginal people.
2. Debt and financial hardship.
3. Enhanced legal services and legal awareness for young people.
4. Assistance, referrals and triage to appropriate services for people in our region.

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

- Taree Naidoc Day Celebrations Legal Hub providing information, advice and referral. (July 2019)
- Police Powers: rights and responsibilities community information session (September 2019)
- Improvement of referral networks with Community Corrections to better assist pre and post release support planning for inmates (initiated February 2020)
- Mid Coast Council hardship policy project is ongoing, a letter was drafted by a pro bono partner which asks council to provide an update (June 2020)
- Discrimination Law Training online events planned to support local advocacy groups (May 2020)
- Proposed renewal for partnership advocacy for MERIT program (May 2020)

Projects deferred in 2020 due to COVID-19, dates TBC:

- Saltwater women's camp – to provide CLSD legal hub.
- Police Powers: rights and responsibilities community CLE in Forster in partnership with the AMS.



- Free legal help days at Taree court house. To include free birth certificates and possibility to include helmet exchange program (RMS).
- Speed networking events Forster and Taree.
- DFV legal and other services update event.

Other activities included:

- Distribution of Legal Aid ADVO booklet to relevant partners.
- Ongoing promotion of all legal and financial services outreach (2019) / online offerings during COVID-19 (2020).
- 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.

Ongoing, Unmet and Emerging Legal Needs

Ongoing, unmet and/or emerging legal issues have regularly been identified during the year. Where appropriate and possible projects will be developed to address them.

These include:

- Unfair application of hardship policy in the Mid Coast Council area is ongoing.
- Debt related issues more generally including bankruptcy, pay day lenders, high electricity bills continue.
- Debt due to unpaid fines through Revenue NSW including Victims Restitution debts.
- Legal and other support for young people involved in local court processes.
- Racial discrimination in the areas of employment, housing, policing and the schooling system (expulsion and back to back suspensions)- ongoing from previous years, particularly in respect of policing.
- Disability discrimination issues similar to above (5), additionally, deficit of support with NDIS, DSP applications and mental health needs arising in legal processes.
- Bushfire recovery related needs (e.g. fines, insurance, hardship and housing).
- General increase in employment, tenancy, welfare and DFV issues this year due to COVID-19.

Challenges Encountered

This year local, national and global crises were felt with first the bushfires in Summer 2019-20 and then the impacts of COVID-19 from March 2020 and ongoing. COVID-19 has been especially disruptive with many events deferred. CLSD activities had to operate remotely and outreach was suspended. Despite this the partnership has seen growing numbers of attendance to quarterly meetings over the year, most of which were run via Zoom. The necessity of remote participation broadened involvement and interest from partners at a distance, who are keen to offer their expertise in specialist areas to the regions where it matters most. We've found new ways of working to carry us forward in an expansive capacity, to share and collaborate with other regions.

Future Plans

The coming year will see the development of a new action plan which will no doubt see some priorities continuing and some new priorities added. The issue of racial discrimination has been a point of discussion at regional meetings for a number of years now and will remain an area of focus.



I would like to thank the CLSD partners for their input and hard work that allow for all our projects to happen. Partner involvement and collaboration is the backbone of the CLSD.

Marlo Slavin

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.

This year has certainly been a year of uncertainty for so many, financially and otherwise. We have seen the best of how communities can support each other in times of crisis. And from a service perspective, we have seen how much red tape, paperwork and accountability is required to be able to assist people in need.

We have been lucky to have 2 very reliable volunteers (Ruben and Anne) to deliver our Emergency Relief funding this year. Having said that, COVID impacted on the demand for our ER service with the increased payments for Job Seeker and Job Keeper seemingly allowing some financial relief across the board. Many other services have said the same. We continue to provide EAPA (ie electricity vouchers), with the State Government tightening up guidelines which makes this process incredibly onerous and time consuming. This could be partly why the total figure for support provided is less than half of what we provided last financial year (\$29,900).

Kerrie has taken on the main support role of providing bushfire affected people with financial support from extra funding received from the Federal Government. We have been lucky to have the initiatives being provided by the Mid Coast Renewal Committee to assist us in tracing and engaging people in order to provide support. There has been a huge gap left by the loss of the Resilience NSW case worker recently.

Once again, the number of clients requesting assistance versus the number we can assist is significant. This year we were able to assist 340 people out of approx 1350 requests ie less than 25%.

This does not mean that we don't provide other ways of assisting clients where possible – our SecondBite program fills a big need along with our Monday lunches, and often generous food donations from the community. We have also received Target vouchers from FRRR to provide support for resources/clothing etc for children returning to school. We also top this up with garden produce and RSPCA donations for the furry side of emergency relief.

For the first time, we are seeing more people needing support who are not reliant on Government payments e.g. in mortgage stress, drought affected etc.



The following table provides a summary of numbers of clients accessing MVCLP service over the last twelve months (2019/2020):

Total funding Provided	ER Assistance 2019/2020	Total client numbers
Department of Social Services Fuel \$8,720 Food \$14,073 Food parcels \$4,027 Medicine \$390 Telephone \$2,161 Other \$7,826 TOTAL = \$37,197	ER Assistance provided <i>Instances of assistance</i> <i>Aboriginal/ATSI clients</i> <i>Women</i> <i>26-45 yo</i> No. of ER clients Unable to Assist	259 514 36% 68% 50% 1350 (approx)
Monday lunches and take aways		Approx 400
Second Bite	Approx 50 per week	Approx 2250
Telstra Vouchers \$1,100		
Electricity Vouchers = \$21,350	Assistance provided <i>Instances</i>	70 clients 79 instances
TOTAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDED \$58,547	An increase of approx 20% in value compared to 2018/2019	

Challenges Encountered/Future plans

Our SecondBite program has provided a challenge both in terms of accessing data, as we have had to place the food outside since COVID began. Coming into summer will provide extra challenges in ensuring food does not suffer and spoil from the heat.

For many years we have seen the need for a generalist case worker/advocate who can work more intensively with those clients who we are seeing more often with complex issues. These cannot necessarily be addressed within the context of an ER assessment or appointment.

Volunteers necessarily come and go, and we often experience feast or famine. However, it is very rare that we are not able to meet the needs of any client at any particular point in time.

Future plans will include providing outreach in Taree. We will also stretch our assistance further by utilising Good360, GIVIT and Foodbank. The issue we face is storage for non-perishables.

Food from the Heart

Secondbite Food-rescue program

The Secondbite Food-rescue program is a collaborative project facilitated by MVNS and Coles Supermarket at Wingham. This project commenced in November 2012. As with many of our programs, it relies on volunteers to ensure it remains functional and sustainable. This last 12 months Ken and Bruce have been our reliable volunteers who pick up and deliver bread and vegies 3 days a week. Since COVID we have also been receiving regular food deliveries from ALDI. A significant amount of fresh food is saved from going to landfill through this program.



The SecondBite food-rescue program supplies healthy food to the community by making available fresh nutritious food that would otherwise go to waste and redistributing it to people who are homeless, living in disadvantaged circumstances or experiencing food security issues within the community. Due to COVID, we have had to place the food outside, so we are not aware of the current numbers of people accessing this program.

Monday lunches

This program also commenced in 2012. Once again it is an unfunded project and relies on volunteers. Our Tuesday craft group ladies provide significant resources towards this initiative, making it an extremely cost effective project. Once again, due to COVID, we had to cancel the regular Monday lunches and provide frozen meals instead. Thanks again, especially to Julie, Jean, Anne, Kim, Doreen, Alison, Rebecca and Ken. Volunteers are encouraged to incorporate produce from the Manning Valley Community Gardens Project and Secondbite food-rescue. Thank you also to the Wingham Uniting church for their generous donations.

Work for the Doles, and Work & Development Orders (WDO)

People who are required to participate in mutual obligation or are finding it difficult to pay off their fines with the State Debt Recovery Office due to financial difficulties have the opportunity to participate in volunteer activities facilitated by MVNS.

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

Midwaste workshops

Thank you to Midwaste for partnering with us to provide these fabulous, educational and value for money workshops. This year they have been limited due to COVID. Our partnership with Midwaste gets more interesting as they initiate more avenues for community education around recycling, composting and reducing waste.

Midcoast Compost Crusade

This is an initiative of Midcoast Council and Midwaste to encourage households to reduce the amount of kitchen scraps from going to landfill by bringing them to our garden and depositing them in established compost bins. In turn we can use this compost to fertilise our garden.

Sales

Sales from our own propagation and the shade house continue to be a major source of fundraising – so please come along and buy something 😊

Thank you

Thank you to Gary for taking on the mammoth issue of the watering system and its cantankerous nature!! The fantastic and numerous volunteers. Thank you to the multiple members of community for all of their donations of soil, plants books and more!

Caron Watkins

Manager



Manning River Turtle Conservation Group

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.

This year, our regular activities were restricted by COVID19 and we were unable to hold the Annual Lantern Walk in June. However, we have continued to work with the community, other stakeholders and agencies.

A Challenging Period but with new learnings and hope

The severe drought of 2019 (about a third of our normal annual rainfall was received and this fell predominantly in the first half of the year) was followed by disastrous wildfires through October to December. These events impacted the turtle by drastically reducing water flow and quality and exposing the turtles to predators. Their breeding season was delayed until the first rains of early 2020.



Aussie Ark undertook monitoring and rescued turtles from stagnant pools. These were taken to the Reptile Park to become part of an insurance population / breeding program. A nest was also reported. The site was at risk from inundation and foxes and the eggs were collected and incubated. This was very significant. 20 hatchlings are now ready for release back into the Manning.

Our Group also supported additional surveys for the turtles, which provided knowledge of the species distribution and habitat. We learnt that they eat fruits from rainforest trees that drop into the water. This means rainforest regeneration in stream banks is very important.

Our Activities

1. The MRTCG has continued its work applying for grants and helping coordinate funding.
2. We have continued to be active on social media, local newspaper articles and ABC radio.
3. We held education days at Bobin Public School and Taree and District Preschool.
4. In July, the MRTCG took part in a webinar hosted by MidCoast Council. It was very successful. We also took part in a meeting of stakeholders interested in the health of the Manning River, as part of Councils new Catchment Management Plan.
5. In September, we co-hosted (with state government funding) an event as part of Threatened Species Month. At the Manning Regional Art Gallery, local felt artist Gemma Cross taught a group on how to make hatchling Manning River Turtles. The participants then photographed their felt turtles near a river or creek and posted the





image on Instagram. This campaign promoted the turtle and encouraged people to see their waterways as important part of the ecosystem (*#mrtinthewild*)

What Next?

We will work with MidCoast2Tops Landcare through OzFish, who were successful in securing funds for riparian works such as erosion management, weeding and revegetation at priority sites. This grant will assist other projects being run by Hunter Local Land Services and local landholders to help improve turtle habitat.

We hope that 2021 will allow us to resume our regular activities such as attendance at markets, the lantern walk with a beanie competition, more school education programs and art workshops. We are very grateful to MVNS for supporting our group's activities.

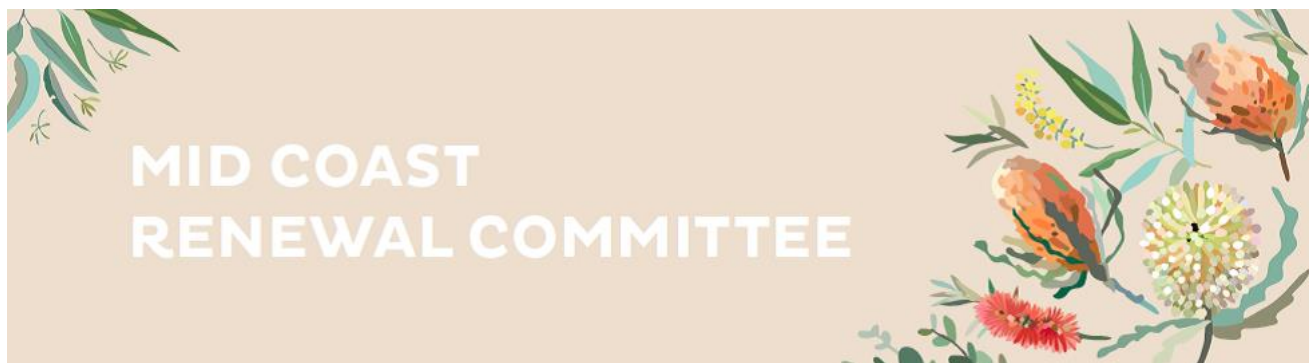
Clare Rourke
Chairperson

Claire Rourke

MRTCG Committee Member



The MidCoast Renewal Committee (MCRC)



The MidCoast Renewal Committee (MCRC) has had a year of unexpected events but we have still managed to deliver valuable information, education and events to our wider community. We have been grateful for the guidance and help from Manning Valley Neighbourhood Centre who continue to support us in our ideas and practical logistics. We are also thankful to the Public Health Network (PHN) and Department of Primary Industries (DPI) whose funding has made most of the activities listed below a possibility. The community is grateful to have access to such wonderful support.

With the covid-19 pandemic affecting most of the planned activities we had scheduled this year, MCRC had to think 'outside the box' when engaging with their community. The MCRC worked alongside local skilled artisans to create a range of resources that residents could access during their time of isolation, as well as to help in their ongoing recovery from a range of drought and/or bushfire damage. Most of our residents were still trying to 'process' their trauma from the bushfires and/or drought when covid-19 restrictions came into place, which only compounded their grief and trauma by not being able to socialise in-person. Hence we created the following initiatives for our wider community....

DIY Kits

A series of "kits" were put together by local community members that residents could pick up "contactless" at the front desk of Manning Valley Neighbourhood Services. A support worker was seated a few metres behind the desk which meant that people could still have some socialisation while we could 'check in' on them without posing a health risk. The kits and chats were well received ☺

- DIY Gardening kits by Taycee Jones
- Kids Art Packs by Taycee Jones
- Card making kits by Arona Gibbons (Gaia Natures Essentials)
- Bracelet-making for kids by Arona Gibbons (Gaia Natures Essentials)
- Finger puppet making by Arona Gibbons (Gaia Natures Essentials)
- Bath/Foot Soak kits by Julie Garlick (True Nature Therapies)
- Chest rub kits by Julie Garlick (True Nature Therapies)
- "Happy Days" perfume roller kits by Julie Garlick (True Nature Therapies)
- Cross stitch kits by Taycee Jones

Book Club

The new Book Club for our region is a collaboration between Taree Literary Institute, by locals and membership grows each month. Numbers are currently limited due to covid-19.



Taree Literary Institute has facilitated the event, providing a space to hold the book club meetings and giving out the books each month. This has been a successful way to engage our community in conversation and create “safe spaces” where they can share their views on life, bushfires, death and everything in between. Life issues and stressors are discussed around each book, with a variety of titles so far like “Tuesdays with Morrie” and “Life is so Good”. We are excited to see this continue.

Under Fire Pottery Workshops - Steve Williams at Dollys Flat Studio

Each pottery workshop has been well attended and supported by our bushfire affected locals. Over 60 residents have taken part so far with more workshops being planned after requests by the community to have more. Feedback from the workshops are overwhelmingly positive, with many participants stating that it was “exactly what I needed” and “was so good to get away and not have to think about anything else for a few hours”. They loved that it was nature-based and that Steve uses his surroundings for inspiration.



During the workshops Steve talks in-depth about the science behind firing the clay in the kiln and how fire can create something beautiful. His personal practise is fuelled by his fascination with wood ash, which is all that remains in the kiln after the firing process. This interested a lot of the participants and gave them a new respect for the creative power of fire. Steve has had "open times" when he fires their works in the woodfire kiln so that participants can stay involved in the process of their creations. Each participant made four pieces during the Introduction day, learning basic pottery skills as they went. The follow-up workshops are scheduled for October and November so that they can continue to build on these skills and create more works of art.



Oil Painting Kits

Donna Rankin from Heart to Heart Australia

Donna made up 20 art (specifically oil painting) kits that were designed for and distributed to fire-affected individuals. Donna created a private Facebook group called "Sunflowers" where she uploaded a series of video tutorials to provide support.

The video tutorials provided step-by-step instructions on how to use the kits to paint a own rendition of Van Gogh's "Sunflowers". This has been a fantastic resource which could be accessed again and again. We did find, however, that while some participants have engaged with the online group, others have struggled (mainly due to lack of internet reception at their remote properties).



After discussion with participants we decided to have a "Meet the Artist" day where participants could bring along their kits and their painting, no matter where they are up to in the process, to get help and support from Donna and her team in person. This is



also a great opportunity for them to socialise and engage with others in their community who are doing the same project as them.

Art & Craft Afternoons

These events are held regularly each month at the Manning Valley Neighbourhood Centre, facilitated by Jennifer Dayment from "Sweet Pea & Mumma". This regular event grew out of suggestions from residents who had attended other workshops and felt they would benefit from a regular, casual gathering where they could all engage in and share their love for art/craft. This event has been well received, with the conversations being surprisingly open and cathartic. As most of the attendees were fire-affected their stories are shared openly and without judgement. Jennifer has provided a range of activities for them to engage with each month and they are also welcome to bring things from home to work on.

As well as regular events we have also helped facilitate and fund the following:

- Slow Stitching Workshop by Arona Gibbons
- Needle Felting Workshop by "Scraps of Happiness"
- Support for 'The Wholesome Collective' cooking demonstrations
- "Coffee & a Chat" events at Bent on Food, Wingham



We also provide regular updates and helpful information to the community via social media, email, flyers and word of mouth. We developed relationships with hall committees, government agencies, charities and other community-based bodies while our relationship with our local residents continues to grow in positive ways. We prefer to engage with local businesses so that we are spending and reinvesting funds locally. This helps us to keep funding within our community and it also helps to maintain positive relationships.





We have lots of exciting things planned for the end of 2020 and the next year. We can't wait to see what wonderful things are still to happen and we are grateful to be on this journey with our community.

Taycee-lee Jones and Lucinda Fischer

Mid Coast Renewal Committee



2019/2020 Special Thanks

Volunteers & Supporters

- Our FANTASTIC volunteers - office, Bushland Tukka, garden, Garden Kitchen, Second Bite, Tax Help, fundraising and Management Committee
- Ayesha Hilton
- Rhonda Futterleib – Essential Accounting Services
- Wingham RSPCA
- Judy Peach – Milliways Consulting
- Hunter New England Area Health Service
- Uniting Church Wingham
- Midcoast Council
- Resilience NSW – Ruth Hurrell
- Services NSW – Jo Mountney
- Resonate Church – Jenny Brewer and Tim Willis
- Northern Settlement Services team
- Pauline Smith - MNC Financial Counsellor
- MNC Community Legal Centre
- SecondBite Food Rescue Program in partnership with Coles Wingham
- St Vincent de Paul Wingham
- North Coast Institute TAFE (Kempsey, Port Macquarie, Taree and Tuncurry)
- Manning Regional Art Gallery
- Swags for the Homeless
- Tuesday Craft Group ladies
- Mission Australia – Communities for Children
- Legal Aid MNC
- Uniting

Funding Bodies

Special thanks also to our funding bodies:

- **NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ)**
- **Justice NSW**
- **Legal Aid NSW**
- **Department of Social Services**
- **Department of Human Services**
- **Settlement Services International**
- **Energy NSW – EAPS vouchers**
- **Telstra**, through the Telstra Bill Assistance Certificate (TBAC) Program
- FRRR

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



Appendix A: 2019 – 2020 Financial Reports

Please see attachments.

