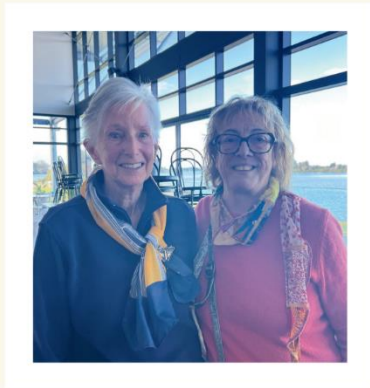




43RD Annual Report 2024

MANNING VALLEY NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES INC.



Farewelling Caron Watkins after 23 years of community service to the Manning Valley and beyond



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Our Vision

Strong and resilient communities where individuals, families and communities have increased capability, interconnections and partnerships

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.

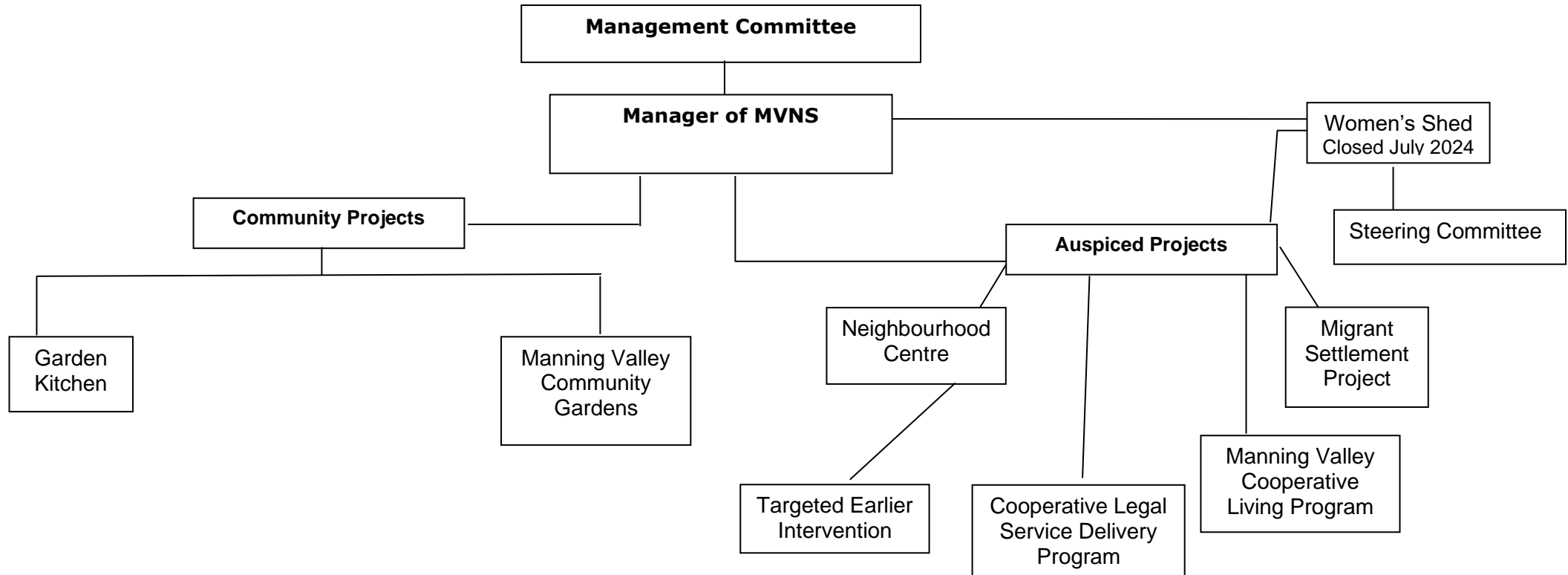


MVNS Activities Umbrella

<p>Neighbourhood Centre</p> <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 	<p>The Women Kind Collective</p> <p>Closed July 2024 – This was a space where rural women impacted by the bushfires could 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</p>	<p>Garden Kitchen</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>Manning Valley Cooperative Living Program</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial assistance and support 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. 	<p>Manning Valley Community Gardens</p> <p>Development and maintenance of a sustainable garden for the community by the community</p>
			<p>Migrant Settlement Project Worker</p> <p>MVNS facilitates the Migrant Settlement Service. This service operates from Manning Valley Neighbourhood Services in Wingham with outreach work on the Mid North Coast, including Kempsey, Port Macquarie, Gloucester, Taree and Forster.</p>	<p>Cooperative Legal Service Delivery</p> <p>Building cooperative & strategic networks of key legal services and community organisations</p>



MVNS Organisational Chart and Overview





Chairperson's Report

The Year 2024 has seen many changes.

Contained within the 43rd Annual Report is a chronicling of the many programs and policies and some of the ways in which we are changing.

Please read this report as it will give you a very comprehensive idea of what MVNS is about and what we do. Much time and effort has gone into making these reports. Remember one individual report can be a year's work.

This year started with the early announcement by our Manager Caron Watkins that she intended to finalise her employment with MVNS by the end of June 2024. After 23 years Caron was going to have a well-deserved break. We were so grateful that she gave us so much lead in time and provided an overlap period for the new manager. Caron has put her body and soul into the Neighborhood Centre and we are still here and are thriving due to her dedication. Her Farewell lunch in early August showed how appreciated she is – lots of friends, staff and community, speeches and presents. It has been a pleasure for us (The Board) to have Caron as our lighthouse.

Early this year the Management Committee developed a Strategic Plan for 2024 – 2028. Our main priorities are to deliver funded programs that align with our VISION, MISSION and PRINCIPLES, and the needs and requirement of our community. We need to strengthen financial sustainability to ensure the viability of self-funded community development programs in the long term.

By mid-year we had to finalise the highly successful Women's Kind Collective as funding had ceased and no other funding (despite many grant submissions) was able to be procured.

Much time and effort was contributed by the Board to find a suitable manager for MVNS. This process took place over several months. We considered many candidates and Kate Darnell was offered the position after interview and mandatory checks. Welcome Kate.

Once again I can only reiterate that our success is dependent on volunteers and community involvement. At MVNS we are lucky to have a really good team. Please support us by becoming a member, a volunteer or attend and take part in our programs. Seek help if you need it. You can catch us on social media, our newsletter or community notice board.

I would like to acknowledge the Board, Manager/s, and staff of MVNS. A THANK YOU to Adrienne Greene who has been with us since 2007 in different capacities and as of now has resigned from the Management Committee (The Board).

Susan Ballard

Chairperson, Management Committee

*The secret of change is to focus all of your energy not
on fighting the old but on building the new.*
SOCRATES





Treasurer's Report

For the financially minded a copy of our latest audit is available.

At 30 June 2024 the Association has current assets (\$187,673) in excess of current liabilities (\$129,935). This position (in conjunction with other factors) means the auditor considers whether the Association is able to pay its debts when due and payable, The Auditor consider whether the Association is a going concern at the date of the audit report. MVNS is a "going concern".

Significant changes in the balance sheet have occurred in the following areas when compared to 2023:

- Cash & Cash Equivalent
- Financial Assets – a decrease of \$150k due to the redemption of the investment of funds during the year – this equates to the level of carry forward funding from 2023
- Plant & Equipment – a decrease of \$31k. This is a result of the net of depreciation of \$31k. There were no additions
- Employee Entitlements – an increase of \$12,201
- Deferred Income – this reflects deferred funding carried forward to the 2025 year.
- Financial Liabilities – this reflects the future lease payments on the Courthouse property. As the Isabella premises are no longer leased and the Courthouse lease expires at the end of the 2025 year this balance has dropped significantly compared to 2023

A comprehensive report was given to the Board by the Auditor Rhonda Futterleib and an active discussion has provided a plan for checks and balances to ensure a favorable audit in 2025.

As there have not been any major changes throughout the financial year in senior personnel and procedures and controls, the risk associated with the audit of the Association in 2024 as low.

The MVNS Board has responsibility for the Financial Report. The Association's Committee are responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of the financial report in accordance with Australian Accounting Standards and the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012.

Susan Ballard

Chairperson, 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.

As always, our mission and our vision guide our activities and services.

This year, we continued to meet the expectations set by our funding bodies, including contributions from one-off funders, to address various needs in the Manning Valley community.

Neighbourhood Centre Impact

The Neighbourhood Centre remains a pivotal resource for the community, serving over 7,000 people with information, advocacy, and referrals and direct service delivery. Kerrie, our project workers (see separate reports) and our volunteers have been instrumental in helping us achieve these outcomes. The Centre also fosters community connections, providing a venue for outreach services in Wingham, helping meet essential support needs.

Extra Projects and Programs Funded through Generous Philanthropists

Volunteering for Change

Funded through FRRR, this project was a great success, offering local volunteer organizations a platform to promote themselves while engaging potential volunteers. The event, celebrated with stalls and entertainment, facilitated a stronger connection between volunteers and the organizations that rely on them. Thanks to Kate and her team for making this possible.

Good Food Good Cents

Thanks to funding from Matana, we successfully completed a full year (four courses) of this valuable program. Young participants learned essential food preparation and cooking skills. Thanks goes to Kate, Shelley and Hanna for their efforts in this initiative.

Real Talk

With support from the Primary Health Network, we delivered a unique program called "Real Talk" in Taree and Wingham. This program provided a neutral space for young people to engage, play games, and share experiences. A big thank you to Brendan and Kate for their work in facilitating this much-needed program.

Migrant Support Program

We were fortunate to secure another three years of funding for our longstanding Migrant Support Program, which we've been delivering for nearly 30 years. Sundus took over coordination of the program early this year. Due to changes in the funding model, we are no longer part of the Settlement Services International consortium, which supported us for the past decade. We are well positioned to continue making a meaningful impact.

Late in the financial year, we also received federal funding to support a new target group, those eligible for the Pacific Engagement Visa (PEV). Despite confusing





parameters around the funding, Sundus and Kate successfully reached out to over 100 potential PEV holders, generating significant activity toward the end of the financial year!

Volunteer and Community Training:

This year, we were able to offer training to both our own volunteers and other volunteer organisations.

In partnership with Midcoast Council, we provided free training on volunteer management and strategic fundraising (to around 50 participants).

Additionally, we hosted two critical community training sessions for community workers:

- **Accidental Counsellor Workshop** (15 participants)
- **Safe Talk Training** (14 participants)

Our Board members also received training in governance, financial management, and organisational capacity building. We concluded the year by reviewing and updating our strategic plan, setting clear goals and direction for the next three years.

Challenges

This year presented several significant challenges.

Funding Constraints:

Securing appropriate funding continues to be a major hurdle. Despite the success of projects like the **Women Kind Collective**, which brought together women from across the Manning Valley and highlighted the ongoing need for support in regional and rural communities, the availability of relevant funding remains limited. This challenge is especially pronounced in addressing the unique needs of these communities.

Overheads and Financial Pressure:

Like many NGOs, we face rising operational costs, and our program funding struggles to keep pace with increasing overheads. This has put additional pressure on our ability to maintain and expand our services.

Gaps in Target Group Coverage:

A growing concern is our inability to provide services to community members who no longer fall within the target groups defined by our funding bodies. This limitation strains our resources, as we strive to support these individuals as best we can, often beyond the scope of funded programs. As mentioned in last year's report, we continue to explore alternative ways to bridge this gap.

Ending Affiliated Group Support:

Another difficult decision this year was to cease our support for affiliated groups. This choice was driven by administrative capacity within an already existing administrative overload and concerns about managing insurance risks. While this decision was necessary, it marked a significant change for some community groups who benefited from this support.

Governance:

Small organisations are the foundation and life blood of small communities. They are connected and responsive in a way that larger organisations cannot be. Like many small, not-for-profit organisations they struggle to find appropriate, qualified volunteers to serve as board members, especially in a small community.





FINALLY

This past year has been yet another extremely busy and successful one, as reflected in the accompanying reports.

For over 20 years, this role has kept me engaged and fascinated, but most importantly, it has been fulfilling and rewarding to work in a position focused on the needs of our communities. Also, the flexibility and creativity afforded to this role, and other worker roles enables us to deliver meaningful outcomes with passion and dedication.

While I have briefly mentioned Kerrie and the front office volunteers in the MVCLP report, I need to articulate that MVNS could not provide the care or breadth of support to our communities without them. The last 5 years in particular will linger in my mind as I remember the extent of support MVNS provided through fires, floods and COVID; being one of the only key services remaining open to the community throughout this time. We know this meant so much to our communities.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks and congratulations to all the staff, volunteers, and Management Committee members who have continuously supported and nurtured MVNS. Together, we've built a truly one-of-a-kind organisation that continues to make a lasting impact.

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

Description

The Migrant Settlement Service (MSS) aims to equip and empower humanitarian entrants, other eligible permanent migrants, and their communities to address their settlement needs, 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:
Provision of casework, information, advocacy, and referral to address settlement needs.
Conduct group information sessions for multicultural residents.
Promotion and provision of service to local and outreach areas.
Provide community advocacy and develop and maintain networks with agencies.

Outputs

The 2023-24 period was the final period of the 2022-2024 Activity Work Plan and funding cycle. It saw an increase in the KPIs. The funding for 2024-2027 was successful.

Outcomes for the 2023-24 period include:

Client work: There were steady referrals throughout the year. There were 27 new clients in the reporting period. There were 347 sessions, including both medium and low-intensity clients. There were 71 external and internal referrals to other services during the reporting period. All KPIs were exceeded.

Domestic and family violence: This saw a significant increase in KPIs. Group work was added, and this was delivered through healthy relationship sessions and IARC information sessions. The DFV component also includes pre- and post-intervention casework, development, and distribution of resources, and stakeholder engagement





including services. As part of the Mid Coast DV Monitoring committee, I assisted with the organisation and attended 2 events as part of the 16 Days of Activism. Engagement with the multicultural community remains a priority and primarily takes place through proactive outreaches to TAFE English classes and the delivery of Healthy Relationships talks at Taree, Port Macquarie, and Kempsey.

Group work: In July 2023, Gilbert + Tobin law firm delivered an online presentation on Enduring Guardianship and Power of Attorney to students at the Port Macquarie TAFE English class.

The Volunteer Conversational English Program finished up in January 2024 due to our last students no longer requiring the service. The program will be explored if the need arises. A big thank you to our volunteers.

The Multicultural Youth Exchange Trip in partnership with Mosaic, Newcastle Multicultural Neighbourhood Centre, and our partnering schools was able to run again. See key achievements below.

Stakeholder engagement: I continue to attend interagency and networking meetings where possible. Jane continued in the position of secretary until February for the Mid Coast DV Monitoring Committee meeting. I continued to attend meetings in my role. In August 2023, I participated in an online meet and greet with 491 visa holders as part of a Regional Development Australia MNC orientation.

Training: Online training continues to offer opportunities to access specialised training in areas including DFV, and child safety. I attended two-day DV-Alert training for frontline workers. In partnership with IARC, education sessions on DFV and Immigration Law for community workers were delivered in Taree and Port Macquarie. This also included an information session for TAFE English students on visas, DFV, and where to get help. These sessions also included information on citizenship. As part of the NSP, I participated in the data working group, SETS CoP, DFV CoP, and DFV Peer Support and attended quarterly, regional, and managers NSP meetings.

Key Achievements

- **Multicultural Youth Exchange Trip:** In November 2023, 16 students from Newcastle High School came to the MNC for the 3-day exchange trip. Students visited Hastings High School with a coastal walk and surf lifesaving talk. Camden Haven High School (first time) included STEM activities and a visit to the Ag Plot. Furthermore, the visit to Taree High School included informal group time with students, an Aboriginal cultural experience, and lunchtime soccer. The trip received positive feedback from the Newcastle students and workers, Surf Life Saving, Port Macquarie and Taree High Schools.
- **Belonging Project:** In response to a decrease in referrals over the past two years Jane applied for funding through Multicultural NSW to deliver a community development program to raise the service profile. In partnership with the Manning Regional Art Gallery, MNVS were successful in gaining \$20,000 to deliver The Belonging Project. Planning was undertaken from January to June 2023, with delivery from July to December 2023. The project aimed to build community connections and included targeted cultural workshops for migrants and First Nations people, cultural walks open to all the community and a long table lunch for the participants.
- **The Belonging Project:** With funding from Multicultural NSW, and in partnership with Manning Regional Art Gallery 13 activities were run to build community



connections between our migrant, First Nations, and the broader community, fostering a sense of belonging and social cohesion. From July to December 2023, 10 cultural workshops with 130 people and 3 guided cultural walks with 178 people were delivered. Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive as people enjoyed the opportunity to share and learn about culture with others in an informal and comfortable environment. Feedback from facilitators was also very positive as they watched people engage with each other and share, inquire, and talk about culture.

- **IARC DFV and Immigration Law sessions:** In May 2024 IARC presented education sessions to workers in Taree and Port Macquarie to upskill them when working with migrant clients on temporary visas experiencing DFV. IARC also delivered an information session to English students in Port Macquarie and Taree on IARC services, immigration, DFV, and citizenship.
- **Pacific Engagement Visa (PEV):** The Government of Australia started a new visa stream for the Pasifika community. MVNS received funds from SSI for staff capacity building and community consultation. Pacific community consultative and information sessions were held in Wingham, Taree, Port Macquarie, and Kempsey. These sessions were attended by a total of 90 participants. Pacific community members were assisted in the registration process for the visa.
- **SIF Driving program (January to June 2024):** The SIF funding was used to provide driving lessons for migrant women. Each participant was given 3 lessons. Overall, 13 women participated in the project and a total of 39 driving lessons were delivered. Some of the women who participated in the program continued their driving lessons in a private capacity to obtain NSW licenses. Two women were successful in getting their NSW license.

Challenges

As always worker capacity in a part-time role continues to be the biggest challenge covering such a large geographical area. At the time of writing this report, there has been an increase in client work which has been difficult to fit within the hours.

Future

This year, the new SETS funding and program was announced. The migrant services hours were increased. The 5-year eligibility criteria were not changed but support can be provided to clients with complex needs if they do not fit within 5-year arrival criteria.

I would like to thank the partners who continue to be supportive, collaborative, and reliable year after year, including NSP colleagues, our fabulous volunteers, and committee members, Caron, Kerrie, Hanna, and Kate.

Sundus Jamil

Migrant Settlement Project Worker





Cultural Walk at Manning River, The Belonging Project



Cultural walk at Saltwater, The Belonging Project





The Belonging Project, flower arrangement workshop and lino printing workshop



Multicultural Youth Exchange Program Port Macquarie





Multicultural Youth Exchange Program Taree High School





Pacific Engagement Visa Community Consultations



IARC DFV and Immigration Law session Taree





IARC DFV and Immigration Law session Port Macquarie



Harmony Day talk and cooking demonstration, Taree High School



Targeted Earlier Intervention Program 2023/2024

The Targeted Earlier Intervention Program (TEI) is funded through the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ). The program works with four identified target groups within our community, namely:

- 0-5 year olds
- Young parents
- Young people
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

The program aims to improve the overall well-being of children, young people and families in these target groups, through creating and delivering flexible and responsive programs that address the needs and challenges of the people in these target groups.

The last 12 months have been an incredibly rewarding, busy and successful year for the TEI program. Building on the groundwork that was established in the previous 12 months, the TEI program has continued to gain momentum and has now established itself as a well-known, valuable program that offers a variety of high-quality workshops, groups and programs to the community.

The TEI data over the past 12 months has revealed excellent engagement and retention rates in our programs and we have either met or exceeded the various data requirements set by DCJ in our TEI contract.

Through TEI programs and networking opportunities, valuable and collaborative partnerships have been formed with various community stakeholders including First Steps Count Child and Community Centre, Taree Public School Connected Beginnings, Catholic Care, Yulinbal College and Wingham High School. This has meant greater access to the use of community spaces, opportunities to co-facilitate groups with other services and higher numbers of referrals from community service providers to our program. These partnerships are an integral part to the success of our TEI program and efforts will continue to be made to maintain and further strengthen these relationships.

In the last 12 months, the TEI program was also successful in securing additional funding through program grants. MVNS received Holiday Break funding from the Office of Regional Youth which resulted in 9 fun, interactive and inclusive school holiday workshops for young people and were run over the January school holiday period. MVNS also received funding from the Inger Rice Foundation to implement a program developed by the MVNS TEI Worker called the "Growing Together" program, as well as a one-off donation from the Regional Australia Bank.

We will continue to seek external funding opportunities to help boost the TEI budget and expand the suite of programs we can offer the community.

The following is an overview of the programs and workshops that were delivered under the TEI program over the past 12 months.



0-5 Year Olds and Young Parents:

- Growing Together program
- Niingalbaa Family Fun Day
- Holiday activities at First Steps Count Child and Community Centre
- Nature Play after school sessions at First Steps Count Child and Community Centre
- What's Cooking For Kids at First Steps Count Child and Community Centre and Biripi Playgroup

Young People:

- Good Food Good Cents cooking and nutrition program
- Under The Bonnet basic car maintenance program
- Job Ready workshops
- Art project with Wingham High School
- School Holiday activities
- Art workshops
- Sunnyside Equine Assisted Learning program

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People:

- Parent's/Carer's First Aid Course
- Women's Well-being group at the Niingalbaa space
- Women's Well-being group at First Steps Count Child and Community Centre
- Good Food Good Cents workshop in partnership with TIDE
- Under The Bonnet workshop in partnership with TIDE
- All School's NAIDOC event

Along with program development and delivery, as the TEI worker I have also attended various professional development opportunities and community events throughout the year as well as continuing my efforts to network and build partnerships with relevant services and stakeholders by attending interagency meetings, strategic planning meetings and numerous meetings with individual community service workers.

Highlights for the year have definitely been the opportunity to provide some more unique programs that are filling a need in the community such as the Sunnyside Equine Facilitated Learning program and the Under The Bonnet program aimed specifically at teenage girls. Other highlights have been young people engaging in and attending our workshops multiple times, case worker's giving direct feedback about how well their client's engage in our programs and TEI workshops and programs filling to capacity - often within a day or two of being advertised to community.

For me personally, two major highlights have been the high number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and families that have attended our programs and also witnessing firsthand the increase in engagement, skills and confidence in a number of young people who have regularly attended a number of our workshops.

Having worked in the program now for two years, I feel very strongly about the importance of the MVNS TEI program in our community. We have established and cemented our place amongst the other various programs available to community members. We are also in a unique and very valuable position whereby we are able to develop, adapt and change the programs we offer according to the needs of our target groups. This means that our programs remain relevant, valued, flexible and most importantly, able to meet the needs of our community.



It has been a great privilege to again lead the MVNS TEI program over the last 12 months and I look forward to continuing to provide high quality, diverse and engaging programs that meet the needs of our community.

Lastly, I would like to offer my heart-felt gratitude to my fellow MVNS colleagues who provide wonderful support, ideas and guidance and make working at MVNS an absolute pleasure!!

Hanna Deer

**Child Youth and Family Engagement Worker
Targeted Earlier Intervention Program**



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:

Throughout 2023-24 the CLSD partnership has delivered projects in line with the 2023-2025 Action Plan which was developed in August 2023 and identifies ongoing, unmet, and emerging legal needs of the Taree and Forster communities.

The priorities of the current Action Plan are:

1. Fines and Debts

- a. Investigate the WDO Mentoring program for people under the age of 25 years, and how to increase this activity in the region.

2. Housing and Homelessness

- a. Training for community workers on tenancy laws including for tenants experiencing family and domestic violence.
- b. Share information about how the law regulates real estate agents' use of apps to apply for rentals and for rent payments and use of bonds/holding fees.
- c. Provision of legal services on Fridays at homelessness hub at Taree Uniting Church.
- d. CLSD coordinator to attend Mid Coast Homelessness interagency.

3. Referrals, access to legal services and sharing information

- a. Prepare and share flyer of free legal assistance outreach clinics in Taree/Forster
- b. Maintain Guide to Free Legal Services
- c. Birth registrations and certificates:
- d. Sharing information on BDM fee-waiver policies
- e. Information sharing at hospitals re: birth registration.

4. Community Legal Education

- a. Family-law related: CLE with case studies and panel with Legal Aid, WDVCS, Police
- b. Young people leaving care: CLE for workers who support young people leaving care, who need support to access entitlements and understand civil law issues.
- c. Domestic and Family violence: CLE for workers on Coercive Control and AVO's
- d. Birth Certificates, Fine days and Community Days



Events and Partnerships

Regular attendance, input and involvement from partners has allowed for the delivery of several projects across the region including:

- **Birth Certificates Days**
 - October 2023 Taree – Included a fines day which was supported by Legal Aid, MNCLC and Revenue. 70 certificate applications taken, several birth registrations and fines assistance given.
 - May 2024 Forster – 45 people acquired Birth Certificates and a further five community members registered their birth through the coordination of the Tobwabba Birth Certificate event at Tobwabba
 - August 2023 Taree Community Connect Homelessness Hub 25 Birth Certificates and 6 Birth Registrations with more applications still being submitted (Via First Steps Count and Taree High School)
 - October 2024 Port Macquarie Homelessness Hub; we aim to deliver 30 Birth Certificates at this event.
- **Wills Clinics**
 - Forster Will's Clinic - 3 Lawyers from GILBERT + TOBIN attended the Forster Wills Clinic at Tobwabba Medical Centre to support 19 people in completing their wills. A Legal Aid lawyer legal advice and support in writing and storing their wills.
- **Community Days**
 - July 2024 CLSD attended all SCHOOLS NAIDOC Week
 - August 2024 CLSD Community Connect – Homelessness Hub
 - October 2023 CLSD attending Port Macquarie Homelessness Hub
- **Community Legal Education**
 - Work and Development Order Information Session - September 2023 Taree
 - Youth Focus Quarterly Meeting – Guest Speaker Tania Slacksmith “Youth On Track” Program - May 2024
 - Victim Services and Coercive Control Information session delivered Taree - September 2024

Other activities included:

- Guide to Free Legal Services – regularly updated throughout the year.
- Homelessness and housing are a standard item at quarterly meetings and worker attends the Homelessness Interagency regularly.
- 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.

Ongoing, Unmet and Emerging Legal Needs

There are several legal issues that have regularly been identified during the year, these are not new and have been on the CLSD radar previously and include:

- Supporting Seniors require their power of attorney to be completed so that they can access a place at an aged care facility.
- Supporting Youth with birth certificates and support in legal issues.
- Continued increasing financial stress with the cost-of-living crisis with increases in rents and interest rates leading to debt, rental arrears, food insecurity and general stress.



CLSD Future and Thank Yous

The 2023-2025 Action Plan will continue to guide future projects and our quarterly meetings with partners no doubt will include the legal needs already noted above. Thank you to all CLSD partners especially CLSD Coordinator Winne Baker and Manager Kate Halliday from Legal Aid, Mel Kallmier from Mid North Coast Legal Centre and Caron Watkins and Kerrie McTaggart from MVNS for their ongoing input and hard work that allow for our projects to happen. Partner involvement and collaboration is at the heart of the CLSD program.

Jane O'Dwyer (2023- March 2024) and *Kate Darnell* (May 2023- Present)
Taree/Forster Regional Coordinator



CLSD Participation in 2024 Community Events –Taree Community Connect and All School's Naidoc Day Celebration





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.

I started last year's report saying it was time the Government overhauled their Emergency Relief support funding and processes. While this is starting to take shape it's unlikely to reduce the amount of red tape required to facilitate this program.

I also said in last year's report, "As this report is based on the financial year we are yet to see what impacts the current economic situation will have on our ER service in coming months." However, as you will see from the table, even with a couple of top ups earlier this year we actually received less funding than the year before while seeing around the same number of clients.

Again this year, we have been lucky to receive top up ER support from the Hunter based Samaritans. This year we received \$18,410 and delivered it to another 163 clients. This data is not a part of our outputs visible in the Government reporting system.

The above table provides a summary of numbers the of clients accessing MVCLP service over the last twelve months (2023/2024) in comparison to the previous 12 months.

There are around another 1500 enquiring about this service or being assessed and receiving support and referrals from the front office team.

Once again thank you to Anne for her incredible commitment to her role as the Emergency Relief volunteer. And of course Kerrie and front office volunteers who offer incredible levels of support to people presenting in the first instance with a vast range of needs.

We have also received some generous donations this year from Good360, DineSmart, Rotary which has allowed us to purchase backpack beds, nappies with other donations of sleeping bags, sheets etc. from elsewhere.



Total funding Provided 2023/2024	ER Assistance 2023/2024	Total client numbers 2023/2024	Total funding provided 2022/2023	Total client numbers 2022/2023
Department of Social Services Fuel \$8,180 Food \$23,380 Food parcels \$2,345 Medicine \$15 Misc \$4,035 Other \$30 TOTAL = \$37,985	ER Assistance provided (no. of clients) <i>Instances of assistance</i> <i>Aboriginal/ATSI clients</i> <i>Women</i> <i>26-55 yo</i> No. of ER clients Unable to Assist	324 637 20% 64% 51%	Department of Social Services Fuel \$10,640 Food \$22,565 Food parcels \$1,840 Medicine \$135 Misc \$3,745 Other \$440 TOTAL = \$39,505	340 830 56% ATSI 65% Women 70% 26-55yo
Department of Energy Electricity Vouchers = \$40,750	Assistance provided <i>Instances</i>	94 clients 96 instances	Electricity Vouchers = \$30,500	86 clients 86 instances
TOTAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDED \$78,735		TOTAL Clients 418	TOTAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDED \$70,005	Total Clients 426
Samaritans funding TOTAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDED \$18,410	ER Assistance provided <i>Instances of assistance</i>	163 188	Samaritans funding TOTAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDED \$1,450	18 Clients



Food from the Heart

Secondbite Food-rescue program and meals

Thank you to all of our volunteers who help out in some way or another to ensure the system for this program runs as smoothly as possible. A special thanks to Tim and now Bruce who took over most of the deliveries in the past few months.

This last 12 months we have seen an even bigger increase in people seeking to access this program which has also meant a tightening up of the process for accessing the food to ensure better equity and also better safety measures.

Once again, a conservative estimate of Second Bite numbers accessing this service is around 2500.

Ongoing thanks to Wendy for cooking up delicious meals for people to access.

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 now have a new name and logo. Old Courthouse Community Gardens!



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 the garden volunteers; Wendy, Cam, Di and Anna who continue to plant, grow and weed amongst all of the other challenges with watering systems and anything else thrown our way!

Caron Watkins

Manager



Women Kind Collective Project

Women Kind Collective

The Women Kind Collective (WKC) was established after receiving funding from the Commonwealth Government's 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.

Opening in August 2022, WKC successfully connected and supported hundreds of women and non-binary people throughout 2023-2024 by offering free and subsidized workshops, community markets, the WKC Store and partnerships with other community organizations.

Two community members summed up the vibrancy that WKC brought to our community:

"Life before WKC was plain"
WKC Participant 2024

"I accidentally stumbled across the Women Kind Collective and I felt so welcomed. WKC gave me a safe place to go. It gave me confidence to get a job and to be who I am."
WKC Participant



Classes and Workshops throughout the year included:

- An Art Class with Angela
- Are you alright Mate - Author Visit
- Blooming Surprise Crochet Classes
- Body Mind and Soul Event
- Colourful Pots Kids Workshop
- Community Afternoon Tea and Celebrations
- Community Markets
- Connect Reconnect and Recover Morning Tea
- Drumming Circles
- Dry Felt Earring Workshops
- Embroidery Class
- Halloween Community Disco
- Home Herbalism
- International Women's Day Afternoon Tea
- International Women's Day Film Night
- International Women's Day Morning Tea
- Kid's Art Classes
- Kindy Mum Care
- Laughter Yoga
- LGBTQIA+ Meetups
- Lifeline Community Connect Morning Tea
- Macramé Workshop
- Meditation Classes
- Mum and Kids create a canvas
- Paint, Sip and Snack Fundraiser
- Photo Editing
- Pottery Class
- Print Making Classes
- Resin Class
- Self Defense Classes
- Small Business Information Sessions
- Start Strong Connected Playgroup
- Trivia Night
- Under The Bonnet - Basic Car Maintenance
- Water Colour Workshop
- Women's Circles



The WKC Store

our store continued to showcase ten local women owned businesses and made consistent sales throughout the year. The WKC final evaluation highlighted micro economic benefits that came from the establishment and saw flourishing of microbusiness, avoiding costs and increasing employment opportunities while also providing an opportunity for community to spend money on local goods and services.

Drop-in days supported many community members and included Free Counselling with many residents of the Manning Valley accessing free counselling thanks to two professional counsellors who volunteered their time and expertise.



Our final evaluation highlighted evidence that the WKC has made huge difference in the lives and financial wellbeing of the women and non-binary people who have accessed the WKC. This direct impact has a flow on positive impact on the local and broader economy.

In March 2024, The Women Kind Collective hosted an International Women’s Day breakfast as well as a movie night and afternoon tea. Our end of funding celebrations included a Mind Body Soul Weekend where over 30 community members engaged in drumming, empowerment sessions, yoga and sound healing.

WKC was able to secure the generous offer of Free Rent which enabled us to remain open for a further two months beyond the funding completion in March. At the end of July, the hard decision was made to move out of the Old NAB Bank in Wingham; we erected a Garden Shed at MVNS with the aim to utilize MVNS Community Gardens for future activity and events. While the Women Kind Collective has been unsuccessful in securing further funding, we feel positive that the community connections, conversation and support has been an invaluable asset to The Manning Valley community. We are hopeful that our current goodbye won’t be forever.

I would like to thank the passionate WKC community, volunteers and engaged Steering Committee as well as the MVNS Management Committee, MVNS Staff with special mention to Kerrie McTaggart and Caron Watkins for their commitment to making The Women Kind Collective an inclusive, engaging and above all a safe space for bush fire effected women and non-binary people to reconnect, thrive and prosper.



A snapshot of some classes and events throughout the year - Drumming – Trivia – Laughter Yoga and a Felt Earring Workshop.

Kate Darnell

Coordinator of the Women Kind Collective (June 2023 – June 2024)



Thank You to Caron Watkins



Manning Valley Neighbourhood Services farewelled a true icon this year. After 23 years of service to MVNS we would like to take this opportunity to thank Caron for all she has given to Manning Valley Neighbourhood Services.

Caron, we are so thankful for your unwavering commitment and the 23+ years of service which included "invisible" community development, grant applications acquittals and so much more. We are all so thankful for all you have made happen for the Manning Valley (and beyond!) not to forget your commitment to policy implementation and keeping our community safe as Manager at MVNS!

In a nutshell it was calculated that Caron attended:

- 220 plus management committee meetings
- 21 AGM's
- 60 plus programs/jobs and auspiced groups
- 46 plus staff members and interview panels
- 1000 plus volunteers
- 48 Management Committee members that I can remember.
- Over 4000 meetings, an average of 4 per week.
- Countless funding applications
- Countless acquittals
- Countless emails, phone calls
- Over 50 policies and procedures.

Caron has been described as a community development legend and we will be forever grateful for all you have done in ensuring that MVNS is the joyous, diverse and inclusive space it's here.

On behalf MVNS Management Committee, Staff and Volunteers (past and present!) and the thousands of community members you have helped, we wish you the very best in all that is next for you; and look forward to having you back for visits from time to time!



2023/2024 Special Thanks

MVNS continues to deliver quality support thanks to our Management Committee, dedicated workers and incredible volunteers. We would like to thank our FANTASTIC volunteers – Front Office, Women Kind Collective, Garden, Garden Kitchen, Second Bite, Tax Help, and Management Committee for their dedication and hours of support they generously give to us at MVNS.

A huge thank you also goes to those who have kindly made donations throughout 2023/2024.

Donors

L. Walters
 S. Brown
 MSR Entertainment
 Regional Australia bank
 Wingham Rotary Club
 Wingham Uniting Church
 Wingham Rotary Club
 Judy Peach
 Midcoast Council
 Coles Wingham
 Correctional Services Taree
 Rapid Relief Team
 Quota Taree
 Wingham CWA
 Samaritans Hunter
 SecondBite
 Spalding Basketballs
 Wingham Nursery and Florist
 Good 360
 Share the Dignity
 Streetsmarts
 Bunnings, Taree

Funding Bodies

NSW Department of Community and Justice
 Legal Aid NSW
 Department of Social Services
 Settlement Services International
 Department of Home Affairs
 Energy NSW
 Primary Health Network
 Foundation for Rural and Regional
 Renewal
 Matana Foundation
 Street Smart
 Dept. Regional NSW
 Inger Rice Foundation

Monthly Donations
 Monthly Donations
 Once off donation
 CPP
 Donation
 Donation
 For ER
 Milliways Consulting

 Second Bite Program
 Lawnmowing
 Food Parcels
 Donation
 Nappies
 Coles vouchers for ER
 Regular food program
 Basketballs
 Seedlings
 Sheets and Towles, items for kids and families
 Sanitary Items and Handbags
 Towles, Sheets, items for families
 Garden Tools & Shade Sail

 ER

 EAPA vouchers
 Real Talk
 Volunteering for change

 Cooking for Young People
 Community grant
 Holiday Break Funding
 Growing Together

If we've accidentally forgotten you – our apologies – please let us know so that we can publicly thank you! We deeply appreciate the efforts and considerations that these individuals and organisations provide in keeping MVNS as a pillar of community support, service and development!





Appendix A: 2023-2024 Financial Reports

Please see attachments.

