



## MVNS' 44TH ANNUAL REPORT

# 2025

## MANNING VALLEY NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES INC.

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



## Contents

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Acknowledgement to Country _____	2
Our Vision _____	2
Our Mission _____	2
MVNS Activities Umbrella _____	3
MVNS Organisational Chart and Overview _____	4
Chairperson & Treasurer’s Report _____	5
Treasurer’s Report _____	6
Manager’s Report _____	7
Migrant Settlement Service _____	11
Targeted Earlier Intervention Program _____	18
Cooperative Legal Service Delivery (CLSD) - Taree/Forster _____	21
Manning Valley Cooperative Living Program (MVCLP) _____	24
Special Thanks _____	28
Appendix A: 2024-2025 Financial Reports _____	29



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## Acknowledgement to Country

MVNS acknowledges and pays our respects to the traditional owners and custodians on whose land we walk, work, play and live – the Biripi people.

## 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

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### Neighbourhood Centre

- 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

### 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.

### 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.

### Migrant Settlement Project Worker

MVNS facilitates the Migrant Settlement Service. This service operates from Manning Valley Neighbourhood Services in Wingham for 21 hours per week with outreach work on the Mid North Coast, including Kempsey, Port Macquarie, Gloucester, Taree and Forster areas.

### Cooperative Legal Service Delivery

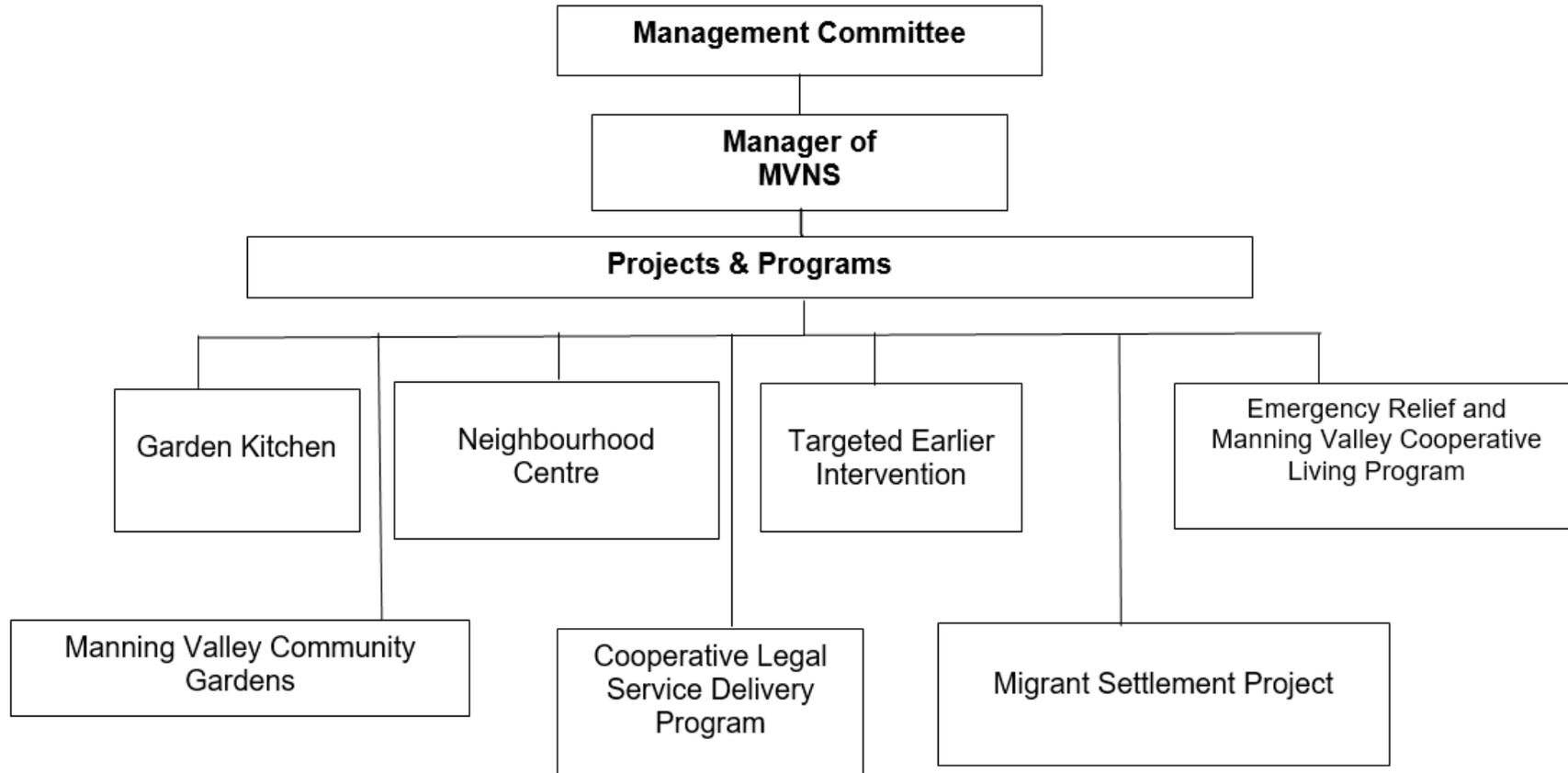
Building cooperative & strategic networks of key legal services and community organisations

### Manning Valley Community Gardens

Development and maintenance of a sustainable garden for the community by the community



## MVNS Organisational Chart and Overview





## Chairperson & Treasurer's Report

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This last reporting year 2024-2025 started well for Manning Valley Neighborhood Services with a new and invigorated team. Our management team consisted of our new Manager, Kate Darnell, and four new Board members.

Welcome to Janine Friedrich, Lisa Hort, Helen Kemp and Ben McLaughlin. Thank you to Angela Pink and Lucinda Fischer for continuing to stay on the Board of MVNS.

Over the last twelve months, Kate has done an amazing job. As the face of MVNS, the Board could not be prouder. Kate is the drive behind our programs, and she is unstoppable. What an induction her first year has been.

With over 14 different programs to deliver we had a very comprehensive program ahead of us. These programs have reports embedded in this document so please read on to find out we have been up to. All of these programs are being delivered to enrich the lives of our local community members.

Unfortunately, that old adage "*Life wasn't meant to be easy*" has reared its ugly face with catastrophic flooding in the Manning Valley in May this year 2025. No living person in the Manning Valley had experienced a flood like this. No person in our community was spared by its impact. That impact will continue for several years to come.

MVNS will be a lighthouse in this storm. MVNS has been able to secure funding from the Recovery Support service which means for the next couple of months two dedicated Recovery Workers will ensure that our impacted community has support via GIVIT and community donations, DRG and housing applications, referrals to Mental Health support and much more.

Community support has been inspiring. Many individuals, groups, businesses and our volunteers, despite being affected themselves have given money, goods, services, time, a listening ear or even a much needed hug.

At this time, I would like to end with our mission statement:

***MVNS believes in ensuring we develop **Strong and Resilient communities where individuals, families and communities have increased capability, interconnections and partnerships.*****

*Susan Ballard*

**Chairperson & Treasurer, Management Committee**





## Treasurer's Report

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As previous treasurer for part of the 2024-2025 Financial year I would like to introduce our present treasurer Mr. Ben McLaughlin.

MVNS has been audited for this past financial year by Essential Assurance Services Pty Ltd.

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 2026.

The audit was conducted in accordance with Australian Accounting Standards and the requirements of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012 and Charitable Fundraising Act 1991.

A budget has been drawn up and approved for 2025-2026 and the audit confirms that we will receive government funding for the next twelve months to enable the MVNS to continue to meet its debts as and when they are due and payable.

At 30<sup>th</sup> June 2025, the service has current assets (\$149,658) in excess of current liabilities (\$124,580). This position (in conjunction with other factors) means the auditor considers MVNS is a going concern at the date of this audit.

In the area of income, we have a loss of \$44,561 (2024 Loss was \$25,704) There has been a 28.65% decrease in income due to the transfer of funding of \$79,672 to the following 2026 financial year and a reduction in grant income plus less service revenue.

There has been compensation in there is 25.20% reduction in expenses. We experienced a decrease in funds for operation of \$16,752 and less cash on hand.

Any further questions or concerns can be directed to the Treasurer or the Manager.

We would like to thank Kerrie McTaggart (Office Administrator) for her assistance in the preparation of monthly financial reporting and the yearly Audit report.

*Susan Ballard*

**Chairperson & Former Treasurer, Management Committee**

*Ben McLaughlin*

**Treasurer, Management Committee**



## Manager's Report

### Manning Valley Neighbourhood Services Inc.

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

As always, our mission and our vision is to guide our joyous, inclusive and diverse 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 8000 people with information, advocacy, and referrals and direct service delivery. Admin and Accounts Queen Kerrie and our Project Workers - Hanna, Beata and Kate and each of our extraordinary volunteers have been instrumental in helping us achieve these outcomes. MVNS fosters community connections, providing a venue for outreach services in Wingham, helping meet essential support needs. MVNS is a truly exceptional space, and it is the amazing efforts of our team, including our energetic and engaging Management Committee, our staff and volunteers are at the heart of all what MVNS gets to deliver via our joyous and abundant space.

### Extra Projects and Programs funded through generous philanthropists:

#### Community Cuppa

Towards the end of 2024 Hanna and her creative team from Wingham High School reinvigorated the "MVNS Food Van" and with the support of her youth-projects and engaged community members we were able to begin bringing fortnightly community cuppas to the MVNS. Shortly afterwards we secured a \$25000 Community Grant with ETC where we have been able to serve weekly tea and coffee at our Tuesday Community Cuppa Events. Shortly we will have finished plumbing in our coffee machine and will begin training This money has also helped up support This project would not have been possible without Hanna's energy or two very wonderful volunteers – Misty generously gives her Tuesdays to MVNS and has fostered a magical Community Cuppa morning and Hannah Rees, who has joined us as our Volunteer Community Engagement Officer and has gone above and beyond in delivering quality support to our community.





### **Australian Chinese Charity**

We were fortunate to receive \$6800 from the Australian Chinese Charity; Hanna speaks more to this funding in the TEI report, but this has been a valuable contribution ensuring an increase in community accessing the unique Engage with Equine program delivered via MVNS with Sunnyside Equine Facilitated Learning.

### **Recovery Authority Recovery Support Service**

When the East Coast Low shocked the Mid North Coast, Manning Valley Neighbourhood Services worked hard to ensure we could meet community needs and support impacted families within our capacity. We remained steadfast in not becoming an immediate disaster response space while ensuring we could be a consistent and professional place and meet people where they were at in recovery, offering support while continuing to build resilience. In July 2025 we were approached by the Recovery Authority and successful in applying for Recovery Support Service Immediate Assistance program and I look forward to providing a full report on this in 2026.

## **CHALLENGES**

Such is the nature of most NGOs several significant challenges will continue to arise.

### **Funding Constraints**

Securing appropriate funding continues to be a major hurdle and not being a successful candidate for the 2025 Federal Government's Department of Social Services Financial Wellbeing and Emergency Relief funding will come as a huge loss to MVNS.

### **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 continued growing concern includes 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.

### **Hello from Kate**

It has been a delight to guide and support such a dedicated and committed team through my first year of management at Manning Valley Neighbourhood Services. From the support of our growing Management Committee to the Permaculture yarns outside, snacks and chats by the kettle in the kitchen, weekly financial meetings with Kerrie (Coffee and Pancakes a must!) or the many engaging and passionate conversations I get to have with my intelligent and hard working staff and volunteers, I can wholeheartedly confirm that it is a joy to manage this unique and magical place that I get to call my "work".

In my first three months as Manager, MVNS has experienced significant transitions and challenges. We farewelled our dedicated Migrant Support Worker, Sundus, and welcomed Beata into the role. Shortly after, we faced challenge of applying for DSS funding and began actively pursuing new sources of support.

Simultaneously, we've been preparing for future DCJ negotiations for new contracts to begin in 2026 while responding to the impact of a natural disaster. These events have demanded agility and resilience from our team.



Despite the pace and pressure, my focus remains clear: to serve our communities with passion and deliver meaningful outcomes. This commitment continues to guide every decision and action we take at MVNS.

I feel very thankful to have had such a thorough and supportive handover from Caron, MVNS Icon – I have often reiterated to people that my transition into this role was made all the easier for the policy and procedure that came before me and am I thankful every day to be managing such a reputable and professional neighbourhood service.

To echo's Caron's 2024 report, *we've built a truly one-of-a-kind organisation that continues to make a lasting impact.* I am so thankful for the efforts of our team and community as we continue to thrive despite any setback. Here's to an enriching and abundant 2026!

*Kate Darnell*

**Manager**

*Wait...I cannot go without mentioning one of our biggest and best accomplishments of 2025...Our new annual fundraiser (which has become so much more than a fundraiser!)*



A snapshot of our first every ONA Community Gathering!



## Our Neighbourhood Art Project (ONA!)

**Project Launch and Overview** MVNS launched the Our Neighbourhood Art Project (ONA!) in early May, just one week prior to the region's devastating flooding and weather event. Despite the timing, the initiative has proven to be a vibrant and uplifting gift to the community, fostering joy, creativity, and connection during a challenging period.

**Inspiration and Concept** The concept was inspired by the popular Sydney art show INCOGNITO, MVNS staff saw the potential to replicate the idea locally on a smaller scale. The goal was to create an inclusive platform for artistic expression across all ages and abilities.

**Community Participation and Exhibition** While the project did not receive thousands of submissions, it successfully gathered 317 artworks from community members. All of the pieces were proudly displayed at The Old Courthouse in Wingham, showcasing the diverse talents of our region.

**Showcase Event** A one-night-only community showcase was held on Thursday, 25 September from 6:00 PM. Attendees were invited to select an artwork in exchange for a minimum \$10 donation. The event featured live music by Jack The Bread Guy, refreshments in the garden, and the opportunity to view and purchase unique creative works.

**Impact and Outcomes** Our Neighbourhood Art Project (ONA!) has significantly strengthened community connections and underscored the value of accessible, grassroots arts initiatives. It offered a vibrant platform for self-expression and celebration—especially meaningful in the aftermath of recent natural disasters.

The event raised over \$3,000 in donations and received an overwhelmingly positive response from attendees. Given its success, MVNS is committed to making ONA! an annual celebration of creativity and community spirit.



## Migrant Settlement Service

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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

### SET Description

The purpose of the SETS program is to equip and empower humanitarian entrants, other vulnerable migrants, and their communities with the knowledge and tools to address their settlement needs to improve social participation, economic well-being, independence, personal well-being, and community connectedness for all eligible clients in the Mid North Coast regions, including Kempsey, Port Macquarie, Taree, Forster, and Gloucester. This is achieved through casework, referrals, information, advocacy and by working together and supporting other services to do the same.

The 2024-25 financial year was the first period of the 2024-2027 Activity Work Plan and funding cycle. We saw an increase in the KPIs.

### Key Objectives

The objectives of the project over the last year included:

- Assist eligible clients to integrate into society and to develop independence, self-efficacy, and personal well-being.
- Foster a whole-of-community approach to achieve settlement and integration outcomes (Strengthen relationships with other settlement and mainstream services).
- Provide support based upon a holistic approach and client strengths.
- Promotion and provision of service to local and outreach areas.
- Provide community advocacy, develop and maintain networks with other agencies (collaborate with settlement and mainstream service providers).
- Provision and delivery of medium and low-intensity case management and support to clients, information, advocacy, and referral to address settlement needs.
- Conduct and deliver group information, cultural and educational sessions for multicultural migrant residents.



## Outcomes for the 2024-25 Period

Here are some of the outcomes we have achieved over 2024-25 period.

### Client Work

There was a steady stream of external and self-referrals throughout the year, with a 25% increase in new client intakes compared to the last reporting period (27 vs 34 new clients): with one-off support and ongoing case management of low and medium-intensity cases. There were many external and internal referrals to other services during the reporting period. These included referrals to Victim Services, IARC, Legal Aid, The Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS), Child Protection Counselling Services (CPCS) - NSW Health, Vinnies ER, MVNS ER, Manning Base Hospital and GP, Link2home Homelessness and Liberty DFV.

Clients received support in a range of areas, including but not limited to: employment and job searches, support with legal and migration matters (visa applications, child care and property settlement, will and estate), relocation, moving houses, TAFE AMEP, relationship breakdown, divorce, Domestic and Family violence situations, counselling, safety, refuge, financial support, school enrolment for children, medical appointments, Centrelink matters, applications and appointments, driving tests and licenses as well as wellbeing. All KPIs were met and exceeded.

### Group Work

Several group sessions have been conducted and successfully delivered. These include:

- Two information sessions, one in Port Macquarie and one in Kempsey with the Pacific community about the Pacific Engagement Visa (PEV).
- TAFE Kempsey: information session about Migrant Support Services (resulting in referrals)
- TAFE TAREE: two sessions on healthy relationships/coercive control and two information sessions about Migrant Settlement Support (resulting in referrals)
- Harmony Day at Taree High School in collaboration with the MVNS Youth Worker (introduction of a new country/culture)

### Domestic and Family Violence

DFV continues to affect many of the clients referred to us for support and case management, where appropriate support has been provided. The Migrant Support Worker continues to work collaboratively with local services such as Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service (WDVCAS) and the Taree Women's Refuge to ensure the safety and well-being of affected clients and their children and to meet their immediate, short-term, and long-term needs while providing a holistic approach. The Migrant Support Worker participated in the local Safety Action Meetings to collaboratively support specific high-risk clients in DFV situations. DFV component also includes pre- and post-intervention casework, development, and distribution of resources, Referral to MVNS ER, stakeholder engagement and collaboration with service providers.

### Stakeholder engagement and networking:

The Migrant Support Worker continued to attend interagency and networking meetings in person and online as appropriate and continued to explore opportunities for collaboration in supporting the migrant community. Also engaged with the Convenor of Great Lakes Rural Australians for Refuges (RAR), the Local Connector from Regional Development Australia MidNorth Coast (RDAMNC) and Mid North Coast Refuge Support Group (MNCRSRG) in addition to the to the regular interagency and networking meetings. Regular meetings included:



- MidCoast Child & Family Interagency meeting
- DV Monitoring Committee Meeting
- SETSCoP Domestic & Family Violence Meeting
- Safety in Settlement CoP meeting
- Data Work Group Meeting
- Hastings Community Network meetings
- Kempsey Community Services Interagency

### Training

Online training continues to offer opportunities to access specialised training in areas including mental health, coercive control, legal/legislative and immigration topics, DFV, child safety and more. Other face to face and online training attended over the reporting period include:

- Suicide Prevention training
- Attended Coercive Control Workshop
- Safety Action Meeting Training
- Culturally Responsive Practice with Pasifika Community Training
- Hanna's story (coercive control training)
- Combatting Economic Coercive Control
- Services Australia Promotion & Education; F&DV Visa information session
- Legal Issues & Domestic & Family Violence for Community Workers

The Migrant Support Worker is committed to ongoing personal and professional development to further develop skills and knowledge in any, and all areas that helps to support the vulnerable migrant community and to better understand client strengths and needs.

### Other

Engagement with the migrant/multicultural community remains a priority and primarily takes place through proactive outreaches and collaboration with TAFE AMEP coordinators in Taree, Port Macquarie and Kempsey campuses, cooperation and engagement with other services and through promoting Migrant Support Services on social media and other platforms as well as promoting and participating in community events.

The relevant website is regularly monitored and updated with relevant information, the Migrant Settlement Service Brochure has been updated and is available on the website. Brochures and business cards are distributed at events, meetings and information sessions.

### Case Studies

The following two case studies show the outcomes achieved by SETS clients/community members.

#### Case study 1 - Phikul

(Note: Consent received to share this story and photo)

Phikul has been provided with ongoing medium-intensity case work over the past year. She reached out to our organisation after her Australian husband passed away after a short battle with cancer, and she became the victim of family and domestic violence by his family. Phikul has low English language skills, with limited qualifications; she was unemployed and only held a class L driver's license at the time. She is also the sole and only remaining parent to her 7-year-old son with additional needs, who is an Australian citizen by birth.



Phikul was really lost and scared for her own and her son's future at the time. She had no family support or social connections as she had only recently moved to the area to be closer to her husband's family, who turned completely against her, abused and violated her, told her to go back to Thailand and leave her son behind (single over guardianship) as well as everything that the husband left behind (her inheritance and estate).

She had very little confidence, knowledge of the Australian systems, her legal rights (regarding husband's will, estate and even her rights as a parent against husband's family)

She came to us for help. Over time, we supported her in many areas, including:

- Referral to Legal Aid as well as advocacy and representation by the migrant support worker, where she received ongoing legal support with all legal matters related to the husband's will, her inheritance and the Estate. Attended and supported her through meetings with lawyers, understanding court orders and legal procedures.
- Enrolment to English language classes through the AMEP program with TAFE, she continues to work on her language skills and is committed to be successful in the course.
- Driving lessons, online and face-to-face tests, understanding driving test outcomes and next steps
- School meetings – representing and supporting Phikul and her son Ezera during meetings with the teacher and principal to discuss the son's needs and ongoing support.
- Australian systems – Centrelink for financial support, Medicare for Medicare card and other processes (completing forms, collecting supporting documents, submitting applications and understanding eligibility criteria and outcomes, ATO – regarding income and tax return, understanding letters and communications received as well as her obligations
- GP – completing forms, making and attending appointments.
- Utilities – selecting and connecting utilities and services (changing over to her name from her late husband and during/after relocation)
- Bank accounts and finances – setting up bank accounts, direct debits, paying bills and invoices.
- Relocation – finding and organising a removalist, finding and securing temporary private rental accommodation, signing a lease, completing reports for the real estate agent, making rent payments.
- School enrolment – finding a new primary school for her son and supporting Phikul through the enrolment process.



Through our support and help Phikul got through some very difficult and challenging times and situations. She was successful in working with the lawyer to negotiate and achieve a positive outcome with the late husband's estate and is now awaiting to receive her share of the Estate, which will provide future security for her and her son and will be in a secure financial position and accommodation.

Phikul was living in an isolated location, with no access to shops and social connections or the community and had no income. With our help, she has been receiving financial



support from Centrelink, which is sufficient to support herself and her son for a short time, until she gets her driver's license (currently working towards a P plate) and gains employment. 5 weeks ago, with our help and support, she relocated to a new area/suburb within walking distance to most services, including a medical centre, local shops, supermarkets and a primary school for her son.

There are also employment opportunities, which she is currently exploring. She has gained knowledge about living independently in Australia, navigating systems, built confidence and is now hopeful for a positive future.

The new location provides an opportunity for a much more positive lifestyle, where they can go on bike rides, walks, go to the beach, engage in community events and activities, build social connections and enjoy life to the fullest. There are also plenty of after-school activities for her son, such as soccer, tennis, karate, swimming lessons and many outdoor activities, and the option to play with her school friends.

We will continue supporting Phikul and her son; however, she is on the right path towards independence and is currently considering applying for Australian citizenship shortly, once she has received her inheritance and purchased her own home (hopefully within the next 6 months). A picture of Phikul (consent signed).

### Case study 2 (Unidentified Client)

Client arrived in Australia in 2024 with her two children, a short time after her husband passed away while living in Jordan. She is a citizen of Jordan and was married for 17 years to her husband, who was an Australian citizen; however, they lived overseas (Jordan, Lebanon, Africa) during their marriage. Both of her children were born overseas but are Australian citizens by birth.

Living in Jordan, which is an Islamic/Muslim country, was very difficult for the client, because her children were not citizens of the country and she was a single mum with no husband. There are many rules around marriage, women's rights and citizenship. The client decided to move to Australia with the children, where they are citizens, and will have better opportunities in education, employment and hope for a better future.

The client is highly educated with a bachelor's and a master's degree, speaking fluent English. She thought she would easily find a suitable job, have secure employment, find suitable accommodation/rent and be able to provide for herself and her children.

Initially, they moved in with the only living family member in the Forster area – accommodation in a one bedroom self-contained granny flat for the 3 of them - slightly isolated on a farm, but had access to a car and the school bus was running nearby to take the kids to school (late husband's sister's husband – the husband's sister also died a few years ago) he was happy to support them, until they can live independently.

Unfortunately, things didn't go as hoped, and the client came across many obstacles, such as being unable to make social connections, lack of cultural and religious representation in the community, lack of a Muslim church, lack of religious and cultural events, ethnic support/social groups and activities.

In addition, despite being educated and speaking fluent English, she could not find employment, and there were no visa options for her to legally remain in Australia, regardless of raising two Australian children. Eventually, the only option for her was to apply for a protection visa, and she is currently on a Bridging visa awaiting the outcome of the main visa application, which may take years.



Support provided in the following areas:

- Referring to Legal Aid and IARC for migration and visa advice, representation and advocacy during meetings, and support with completing forms, collecting supporting documents and submitting a visa application.
- Navigating and learning about Australian systems – Medicare – applying for a Medicare card for herself and her children, completing and submitting forms. Centrelink – appointments, interviews, finding relevant payments, completing forms and applications, supporting through the process, following up and advocacy. Workforce Australia- connecting with employment agency and employment opportunities. Providing information and education on processes and options available.
- Employment – help with resume and cover letter writing, job search, job readiness, and interview preparation. Information and advice on requirements, legal rights and obligations
- Support and advocacy with local MP (member of the parliament)– helped organize a meeting, attended as a support person and advocate for her during the meeting with the local member of the parliament – to present her situation and request assistance in raising awareness of her situation (and others in similar or same situations) and the gaps in the government/immigration systems.
- Support with relocation – helped secure accommodation and employment through support letters.
- Connected to Migrant Settlement Support in the new location. Contacted the local organisation and made a referral for migrant support.

With our support, the client applied for the only relevant/available visa (protection visa) and obtained Bridging visa with work rights. She was approved for financial support for her children by Centrelink (special benefit) and received a Medicare card for herself and her two children, secured a job and moved into a rental property - with rent assist (additional financial support from Centrelink) and relocated to Newcastle, where she has better community support and access to cultural and religious events, groups, social events and activities. She is now attending church and can practice her faith. Through the referral to the local organisation, she continues receiving migrant Settlement Support.

My last contact with her was to connect a new client with her (after permission was provided) from the same cultural and religious background, who also decided to move to Newcastle for the same reason as her, better access to social, cultural and community support as well as employment and accommodation. She was happy to connect and offered moral and social support and was only happy to introduce her to the local Muslim community.

## Challenges

As always worker capacity in a part-time role continues to be the biggest challenge covering such a large geographical area, which has an impact on providing face to face support to clients in Port Macquarie and Kempsey, which would often be more beneficial and needed then just over the phone and online.

*Beata McLean*

**Migrant Settlement Project Worker**





## Targeted Earlier Intervention Program

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

- 0-5 year olds
- Young parents
- Young people who may be at risk of or disengaged from community and/or education
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

MVNS is funded for the "Community Strengthening" stream of TEI funding where the main goal is to improve the overall well-being of children, young people and families in these target groups. This is achieved through creating and delivering flexible and responsive programs that aim to empower and address the needs and challenges of the people in these target groups.

Throughout the past 12 months MVNS has continued to deliver the TEI program with great success. We have built on the lessons learnt and momentum from the previous few years and continue to adapt, respond to and address the varying needs of our target groups. This has all been done with passion, heart, skill, knowledge and the genuine desire to provide safe, relevant and empowering opportunities to improve well-being and support to our community.

We have continued to develop and deliver a wide range of empowering and enriching programs across all four target groups. Below is an overview of the programs and workshops we have delivered over the past 12 months:

### 0-5 year olds and Young Parents

- Growing Together program
- Holiday activities at First Steps Count Child and Community Centre
- Nature Play afternoon sessions at First Steps Count Child and Community Centre
- Women's Well-being groups at First Steps Count Child and Community Centre
- Pre-school's community garden visit and activities

### Young People

- Good Food Good Cents cooking and nutrition program
- Under The Bonnet introductory car maintenance workshops
- Barista skills introductory workshops
- Engage with Equine program
- School holiday activities
- Art and creativity workshops
- Community Cuppa work experience
- Community lunches work experience
- Street Tunes Wingham Youth Festival

### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

- Women's well-being groups in partnership with TIDE and Biripi
- Good Food Good Cents in partnership with TIDE
- Under The Bonnet in partnership with TIDE





- Biripi Boori (baby) Show
- Women's therapeutic art group at TAFE

Through the TEI program, MVNS have been an active member of the local community services network, and we have had a notable increase in the number of services wanting to partner with MVNS on programs. This has been a direct result of the on-going efforts made to network, collaborate, promote MVNS and attend relevant interagency meetings and community events.

We continue to enjoy close working partnerships with First Steps Count Child and Community Centre, Catholic Cate, Mission Australia, Biripi Community Services, Sunnyside Equine Assisted Learning and Yulinbal College. In addition, we have formed new partnerships over the past 12 months with Wingham High School, TAFE, TIDE and Saint's Care Street Tunes. These partnerships are an integral part of the success of our TEI program, and both enrich and expand the programs we can offer and add to the number of community members we can engage and support.

We have also had a successful year in regard to securing additional funding to further expand our TEI programs. Additional funding we received for the 24-25 financial year included:

- \$5,680 from the NSW Department of Regional Youth's Holiday Break funding to deliver a range of school holiday activities to young people.
- \$6,800 from the Chinese Charities Foundation which has enabled us to continue our Engage with Equine program for a further 12 months.
- \$1,480 from MidCoast Council to run two Youth Week events.
- \$25,000 from ETC Australia, to be used to develop and enhance our Community Cuppa initiative, including providing work experience opportunities, barista skills training and food handling/service qualifications and experience to young people.

There has also been a notable increase in the number of community events that MVNS have been involved in as part of the TEI program. These events are an excellent way to network with other service providers and engage with community members. These events often act as a "soft" entry point for people to access our service and are a valuable opportunity to break down initial barriers with community and provide them with information about MVNS's programs and support.

The community days MVNS have attended include:

- All Schools NAIDOC Day
- Combined Preschools NAIDOC Day
- Yulinbal College NAIDOC Celebrations
- Wingham High School Services Day
- Child Protection Week event
- Niingalbaa Community Day
- Taree High School Harmony Day celebrations

There have also been various interagency, community meetings and professional development opportunities I have participated in such as the Child, Youth and Family Interagency meetings, Youth Collaboration meetings, Child Safety Forum, Resilience Doughnut Facilitator training, Food Safety Supervisor training and the Youth Planning and Collaboration forum.



A notable highlight over the past 12 months has been the unfolding confidence and growth from a young person who first participated in our Good Food Good Cents program 2 years ago. At the time, she presented as a very shy, disengaged and unconfident teenager. This young person has continued to participate in a wide range of our TEI programs and workshops and over the past 2 years, we have witnessed her skill development, confidence, communication skills and overall sense of well-being improve dramatically.

She now has her driver's license, has secured her first casual job, volunteers at MVNS weekly for Community Cuppa and is being supported by MVNS to begin her own micro business! This is an excellent example of the real-life difference our TEI program can have on at-risk community members.

Another notable highlight was the enormous success of our first Wingham Youth Fest event held in partnership with Saint's Care Street Tunes. The event was held on the grounds of MVNS and despite some poor weather, over 150 young people attended the event enjoying free music, food, activities and positive connections with their peers. The feedback from the event was extremely positive and showed us that there is a definite need for safe, youth-focused events in our area. We are already planning another similar event for Spring!!

The MVNS TEI program has now cemented itself as a well-regarded and important member in the local community services space. We continue to diversify as needed and provide relevant, high quality, unique and valuable programs and support to vulnerable community members. Working in this program and alongside my amazing colleagues and MVNS volunteers, continues to fill my heart with gratitude, joy and motivation to serve and support our beautiful, diverse community. It truly is a privilege to work for this amazing community organization!

## *Hanna Deer*

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





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.

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### Taree Forster Region Priorities

Throughout 2024-25 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. This plan was updated in March 2025.

The priorities of the 2024-2025 Action Plan were:

#### 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 events
- 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 allows for the delivery of several projects across the region including:

- **Birth Certificates Days**
  - Port Macquarie Homelessness Hub October 2024
  - Forster BC and Legal Clinic Day March 2025
  - Port Macquarie BC Day May 2025
- **Virtual Cuppas**

Manning Valley BC and Legal Support delivered weekly at MVNS Community Cuppas.
- **Legal Clinics**

CLSD also attended and presented CLSD Justice Partnership information with Tobwabba's Carers Camp May 2025.
- **Community Days**
  - October 2024 and March 2025 CLSD Community Connect – Homelessness Hub
  - July 2025 CLSD attended all SCHOOLS NAIDOC Week
  - August 2025 CLSD attending Wingham High School Services Day
- **Community Legal Education**
  - Victim Services and Coercive Control Information session delivered Taree - September 2024
  - NSW Fair Trading –Let's Talk Taree Road Show Financial Counselling, Fines and Debt and Tenancy Law presentations – October 2024
  - MNCLC and Wesley Mission Presented "Planning Ahead" Information sessions Taree, Harrington and Wingham - March 2025



## Other Activities

- 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:

1. Supporting community with legal support post May's weather event
2. Supporting young families with birth registrations and fine debt
3. 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 You's

The 2025-2027 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 Coordinators Winne Baker and Tanya Finneran and Acting Manager Holly Graham from Legal Aid. For your wisdom and guidance, Mel Kallmier and Nat Gentle from Mid North Coast Legal Centre and Heidi Campbell from Legal Aid. MVNS accounts and admin queen - Kerrie McTaggart it is with ALL your efforts and support that allow our projects to happen.

Partner involvement and collaboration is at the heart of the CLSD program.

*Kate Darnell*

**Taree/Forster Regional Coordinator**





## Manning Valley Cooperative Living Program (MVCLP)

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

The MVCLP 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, mutual obligation and Centrelink hosting, and orientation and training of volunteers involved with ER service, community garden, and kitchen programs.

As the cost-of-living crisis continues and the Manning Valley experiences an increase in natural disasters so does the growing need of our MVCLP program.

***Our vulnerable community continues to become increasingly vulnerable.***

In 2024-2025 we fulfilled our final full year of current Emergency Relief funding through the Department of Social Services. In December 2024 we applied for this funding to continue and after a 7-month wait for the outcome AND despite having an ER contract with DSS for over a decade, we received the disappointing outcome of not being successful. DSS assured us that this was highly competitive, with over 700 applications received and more than \$3.3 billion in funding requested. Unfortunately, larger agencies that service larger LGAs were more successful in securing the funding.

While the small budget each year has ensured that we could deliver personal and supportive emergency relief the biggest "cost" or "loss" of this outcome will go to our community as MVNS has always striven to directly support community and local businesses.

Like last year, despite less funding, we continued to see the same number of clients this time with a significant increase in clients requiring assistance after May's Weather event. An even bigger increase in people seeking to access our ER program makes the lack of secured and future funding come at an even bigger blow to our community.

There are around 2000 community members enquiring about this service or being assessed and receiving support and referrals from the front office team.

Our Emergency Relief Delivery would not have been possible without Anne's wisdom and expertise, thank you Anne for your outstanding commitment to your role as the Emergency Relief volunteer. Once again, Kerrie and our front office volunteers offer incredible levels of support to people presenting in the first instance with a vast range of needs – Katherine, Aby, Lyn, Hannah and Toni you are each extraordinary.





We are so thankful to have continued to receive some generous donations this year from GIVIT, Essential Energy, DineSmart, Rotary, Quota, The Lions Club, CWA, Karitane as well as additional funding through our GIVENOW Donations which has allowed us to purchase backpack beds, nappies with other donations of sleeping bags, sheets, towels and offer additional food and fuel vouchers.

## Food from the Heart

### Secondbite Food-rescue program and meals



Thank you to all our volunteers who help to ensure the collection and distribution process for this program runs as smoothly as possible. This year we farewelled Ken who had been doing Secondbite on his own for three days a week rain, hail or 38 Degree Shine and we were fortunate to welcome a

much larger team.

***Welcome and thank you for your commitment to MVNS  
Emma, Terrey, Darren, Sarah, Brian, and Phillip.***





With our local Coles closing after being impacted by the May Flooding, we had to pause the delivery of Secondbite; Terrey and Emma have stepped in to help us distribution of our Coles "First-Bite" program where we have been doing a \$500 shop each week, purchasing fresh fruit, vegetables and bread thanks to the generous donation of \$10000 Grocery Credit donated to us from Coles.

Once again, a conservative estimate of Second Bite numbers accessing this service is around 3,000.



Ongoing thanks to Wendy for cooking up nutritious and delicious meals for people to access and thanks to Birch who brought the beginning of Community Lunches back to MVNS with the hope that these will continue to grow.



This year we also welcomed Katie and Kelsey from the University of Newcastle who were in their final year studying Dietitian and Nutrition, they created a practical and engaging community cookbook for our MVCLP Community. Thanks Katie and Kelsey.



## Old Court House Community Gardens



Our beautiful Old Courthouse Community Gardens continue to provide a vibrant and engaging avenue of connection for community members and other volunteers who wish to contribute something to their community.

Community members are most welcome to come and utilize the space and make the most of what is available. Donations for plants continue to be our main source of fund raising.

All our THANKS goes to our enthusiastic and hardworking garden volunteers; Di, Wendy, Cam and Anna and welcome to the team Malcome and Lawrence. You each continue to plant, grow, weed and harvest despite all the challenges with weather, watering systems and sneaky reptiles that are often thrown into the garden mix! *"There are never garden mistakes – only experiments!"*



## Special Thanks

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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, Garden, Garden Kitchen, Second Bite, and Management Committee for their dedication and hours of support they generously give to us at MVNS.

### Funding Bodies

- NSW Department of Communities & Justice
- Legal Aid NSW
- Department of Social Services
- Department of Home Affairs
- Energy NSW - EAPA vouchers
- Mid Coast Council
- ETC Community Support Fund
- Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
- Australian Chinese Charity Foundation

### Donors

A huge thank you also goes to those who have kindly made donations throughout 2024/2025.

Linda Walters  
 Stephanie Brown  
 Wingham Uniting Church  
 Regional Australia Bank  
 Taree Quota Club  
 Wingham CWA  
 J Waters  
 McTaggart Family  
 C Watkins  
 Mid Coast Council  
 Community of Christ Sewing Group  
 Laura Davidson  
 Ashlea Road Fashion Parade  
 D & J Longstaff  
 M Watters  
 T Osborne  
 R & M Rankin  
 Gillian Stone  
 C Stewart

Jenny Halliday  
 Pies to the Max Maryville  
 Michael from the Central Coast  
 GIVENOW  
 Coles Wingham  
 SecondBite  
 Correctional Services Taree  
 Wingham Nursery & Florist  
 Share The Dignity  
 Wingham Rotary Club  
 Streetsmart  
 Bunnings Taree  
 Wingham Pizza & More  
 Catholic Care  
 RSPCA  
 Faith in Action  
 Resilience Lismore & Lismore CWA  
 Manning River Rugby Union Club  
 Essential Energy

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: 2024-2025 Financial Reports

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Please see attachments.

