



## Exploring COVID-19 impacts

FRRR has partnered with the Australian Government to provide funding to assist not-for-profit community groups in remote, rural and regional Australia in their recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic. The grants are offered through the [Rebuilding Regional Communities](#) (RRC) stream of our Strengthening Rural Communities (SRC) program. This document provides clarity about what “impacted by COVID-19” means in terms of who can apply and what kinds of projects can be supported by the program.

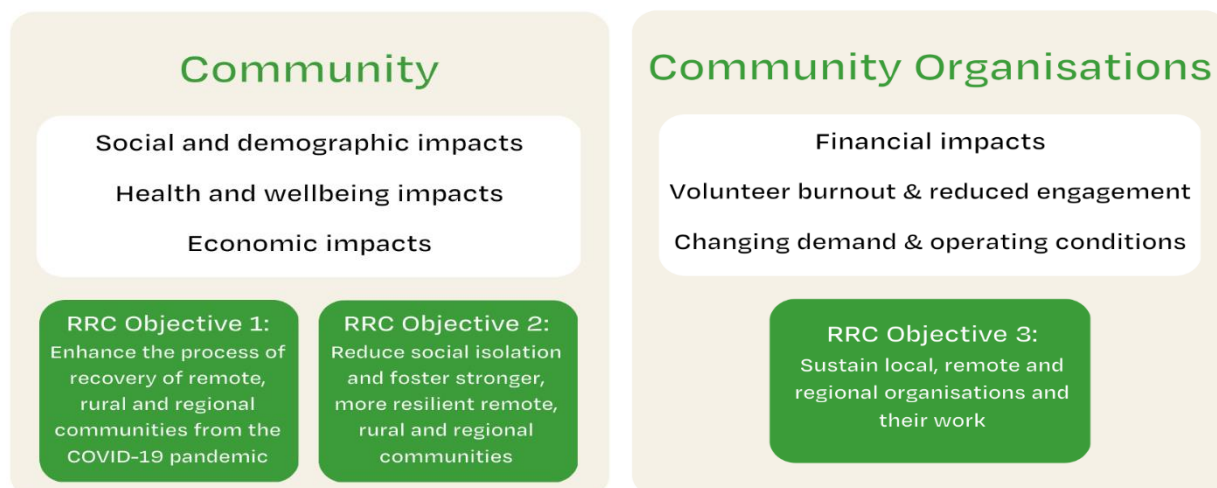
To recap, the RRC program has three objectives:

1. Enhance the process of recovery of remote, rural and regional communities from the COVID-19 pandemic;
2. Reduce social isolation and foster stronger, more resilient remote, rural and regional communities; and/or
3. Sustain local remote, rural and regional organisations and their work.

While we accept applications for all projects, those that meet at least one of the three objectives will be given priority.

The diagram below shows the broad categorisations of the impacts (discussed in more depth later in this document) and how they connect to the objectives of the RRC program.

If your project is responding to one or more of the impacts shown below, we encourage you to align it toward one of the objectives to meet our priorities – noting that these categorisations are a guide only and your project may well link to more than one objective.





There is no ‘one size fits all’ answer to the question of how COVID-19 has impacted people in remote, rural and regional Australia. The effects of the pandemic on the community and the local organisations that support it are varied, nuanced and interconnected. But in our experience, most remote, rural and regional communities across Australia have been affected in some form.

For example:

- Communities that endured **persistent or repeated lockdowns** experienced extreme harms in economic, social and wellbeing indicators, as did **border community** residents who found themselves cut off from schools, places of work and essential services;
- Reductions in visitor numbers in **tourist towns** and the curtailing of movement for **seasonal workers** created community wide **economic and downstream social impacts**; and
- Regional communities across Australia were cut off from their normal networks and connections creating **social and economic isolation**, with downstream impacts across the community, particularly in localities with high numbers of vulnerable residents.

In many cases, the pandemic magnified existing issues, but some new trends emerged too.

- Previous - and ongoing - **natural disasters** caused cumulative stress in communities, for the residents, as well as for the community-led organisations that underpin them.
- The **digital divide** was starkly highlighted as Australians stayed home - with work, education, socialisation and the running of community organisations hindered by inadequate internet access across much of regional Australia.
- Ongoing **inequities in access** to essential health, transport and social services for rural and regional communities placed further pressure on those outside of metropolitan Australia.

On the following pages, we share some of the impacts FRRR has seen to date in the community groups we’ve already supported. Your community or organisational needs might fall within or outside of the categories below or might cut across them. Simply because your situation isn’t listed here doesn’t mean that it wasn’t a type of impact and you aren’t potentially eligible for support. It may just be that we haven’t yet heard about it.

We’ve also shared a snapshot of how some community groups have responded to the impacts raised.



## Community impacts

- **Social and demographic impacts** might include reduced social engagement, homelessness and changing migration patterns.  
[\*Squid Theatre Inc – Saturday Theatre\*](#)
- **Health and wellbeing impacts** on individuals include reduced access to primary and tertiary healthcare services, increased demand for mental health services, rehabilitation and domestic and family violence services.  
[\*Human Nature Adventure Therapy Ltd - Wellbeing Sessions with a Therapeutic Mentor\*](#)
- **Economic impacts** such as reduced tourism and visitor numbers, reduction in migrant workers for key industries and professional services, business closures, supply and labour chain breakdowns and financial stress at the household level. It also affected local food security, particularly in isolated towns.  
[\*Broome Community Information Resource Centre - Broome CIRCLE Community Nursery and Universally Accessible Garden\*](#)

## Community organisation / local NFP group impacts

- **Financial impacts** on community groups might be through reduced sales, pandemic restrictions limiting fundraising activities or because normal sources of funding – such as local businesses – are unable to contribute. Did reduced income or ability to fundraise limit your ability to fund an important community project?  
[\*Bribie Island Gem & Fossicking Club Inc - Training Members to be Next Generation Tutors\*](#)
- **Volunteer burnout** following the cumulative stress of droughts, bushfires, COVID-19 and floods is very common. In some cases, the people who would most often volunteer are still not comfortable returning to the community. Added to this, the challenge of running community organisations remotely may have led to a drop off in engagement or challenges in recruiting or supporting volunteers.  
[\*Clunes Neighbourhood House Inc - Rebuilding Capacity through Volunteering\*](#)
- **Changing demand and operating conditions** – either more demand, such as for food relief or mental health support, or a decline in numbers say for your childcare service, which you can link to either a direct or indirect impact of the pandemic. Other impacts might be a labour or workforce shortage as a result of a lack of housing in your community, following ‘tree-changers’ taking affordable accommodation – for example. These impacts can be many and varied, so if in doubt, give our team a call.  
[\*The Nintirri Centre Inc - Midwife Services\*](#)

If your community needs support to respond to any of these impacts – or others that have affected either the people you support or your organisation’s operations - we’d love to hear about it. Email [covidsupport@frrr.org.au](mailto:covidsupport@frrr.org.au) or call the team on 1800 170 020 to see if you are eligible for support.



## Squid Theatre Inc.

### - Saturday Radio Theatre 2023

Squid Theatre Incorporated is a community theatre company based in Wynyard in north-west Tasmania. Most of the towns in the predominantly agricultural region have fewer than 1,000 people and have high proportions of ageing residents.

Local arts and cultural activities were significantly impacted during the pandemic, with restrictions limiting the number of live stage productions in the last two years. Squid Theatre responded to these restrictions by partnering with Coast FM, a community-based radio station in Wynyard, to broadcast a weekly radio show called Saturday Radio Theatre.

While live theatre is making a recovery with the lifting of pandemic restrictions, anecdotally many people, especially older people and those who are frail, unwell, or immunocompromised are wary of gathering in public indoor venues. The Radio Theatre Show has provided community members with high quality, locally produced drama that can be easily accessed on the radio, computer, or mobile phone. It acts as a link to their community with the familiar voices of people promoting a feeling of connection for listeners who may otherwise feel isolated.

Squid Theatre Inc. sought funding to expand the format from one-act plays (40 minutes or less) to full length plays and to increase the number of Tasmanian writers and well-known Australian playwrights featured in their productions. The radio station provides in-kind venue hire and technician support, and theatre company members volunteer their time to act in and produce the shows.





## Human Nature Adventure Therapy Ltd

### - Wellbeing Sessions with a Therapeutic Mentor

The Northern Rivers region of NSW is an area of stark contrasts and extreme events. From the ultra-wealthy residents of Byron Bay to the smaller, less affluent townships such as Casino, it has significant inter-town and intra-town inequalities. Added to this, the region has suffered through bushfires, floods, and repeated COVID-19 lockdowns.

Many residents are experiencing significant stress and emotional fatigue, particularly the youth – a vulnerable cohort for whom recent studies have found psychological distress is 21 percent higher than pre-pandemic levels. Traumatized by multiple catastrophic events, this group is at particular risk of long-term anxiety and serious mental health issues.

Human Nature Adventure Therapy's programs bridge the gap between youth work and crisis mental health interventions by providing mentoring, individual and group mental health support, skill-building, and physical adventure activities that focus on building resilience and recovering from personal and community challenges. Young people are partnered with their own pair of mental health professionals, consisting of a psychologist or social worker, and a therapeutic mentor (an experienced youth worker). This therapeutic partnership provides participants with tailored support to address their complex needs while also supporting them to develop positive future pathways.

Human Nature Adventure Therapy sought support to lead a series of 65 intervention sessions, working with youth to overcome the mental health challenges following the catastrophic events of the last few years. Through this innovative approach young people can safely learn to develop positive coping mechanisms, increase physical activity and time in nature, reconnect with their peers after the extensive lockdowns, and engage meaningfully in their wider community.



## Broome Community Information Resource Centre - CIRCLE Community Nursery and Universally Accessible Garden

Located in the far northwest of WA, Broome is a remote coastal town and tourist destination known as Rubibi by the Yawuru traditional owners. It is a hub for many First Nations groups in the Kimberley and Pilbara regions.

The WA border closures severely impacted the tourism sector during the pandemic. COVID-19 exacerbated the region's existing food insecurity, which relates to the town's remoteness, socio-economic disparities and supply challenges caused by annual highway closures during cyclones, heavy rain and flooding events. The pandemic also heightened social isolation with limited opportunities for socialising and taking part in activities, particularly for disabled people and those with mobility challenges.

The Broome Community Information Resource Centre and Learning Exchange (CIRCLE) runs community development programs, a childcare service and financial counselling support. Funding was sought to establish an accessible garden, and community nursery and seedbank at their new facility, the Broome Empowerment Circle (BEC) in central Broome. The group has secured funding for a shade house, which complements a donated garden shed and shade sails.

FRRR funding will be used to develop paved wheelchair paths, an accessible seedling propagation area and raised garden beds. Strong partnerships exist with volunteer-run Incredible Edible Broome (IEB) who co-manage the program, run workshops and provide equipment and expertise. The garden is open to community members, NDIS providers and their clients, as well as local aged care providers, and affordable seedlings are made available to the public. The project will be sustained through established partnerships with IEB, Far North Community Services, Broome Food Co-op, Broome Volunteer Resource Centre, and The Artist Away from Home First Nations program.





## Bribie Island Gem and Fossicking Club - Training Up Next-Generation Tutors

The Bribie Island Gem and Fossicking Club is an inclusive, volunteer-run organisation with 45 members across all age groups, physical abilities and skill levels. Members meet to go gem fossicking, cut and facet stones and undertake silversmithing to set the stones into jewellery.

Before COVID-19, the club offered courses and instruction to the local high school and U3A. Once COVID-19 restrictions started to ease in Queensland, membership numbers in the club increased significantly as community members reached out to the club as a place of reconnection. Much of the equipment used by the group was over two decades old and no longer fit for purpose and/or up to current safety standards, making the job of tutors even more difficult. While the increase in interest is heartening, the pandemic severely restricted the organisation's ability to fundraise to upgrade equipment and train up the next generation of tutors.



In 2022 the club applied to FRRR for funds to purchase several items of new equipment (including a trim saw, jewellers press and a kiln) to ensure the sustainability of the club, particularly in its ability to attract and retain a new generation of tutors to teach the club members specialised skills, as well as to provide the community with an ongoing place of connection.





## Clunes Neighbourhood House Inc.

### – Rebuilding Capacity Through Volunteering

The Clunes Neighbourhood House works with residents, businesses and other community groups to contribute to the liveability of the town by providing activities, classes and a place for the community to connect.

Volunteering offers a way for local people to connect, gain skills and contribute to their neighbourhood. Pre-COVID-19, Clunes had close to a third of people volunteering. However, volunteering decreased during the pandemic, in line with national trends that suggested one in three people haven't returned to their roles.

Clunes Neighbourhood House connected with nine community groups in the district to map and document the local situation and develop a strategy to encourage and promote volunteering in Clunes. The new strategy includes upgrading the hardcopy Volunteer Skills Bank to an online directory, incorporating every community group in the district; running a campaign to encourage volunteering; and holding quarterly community events to raise awareness and engage existing and new volunteers. This project is supported by an RRC small grant.

## The Nintirri Centre Inc.

### – Midwife Services

There are many barriers to equitable health access for Indigenous women and unfortunately, for the women of Tom Price, Paraburdoo, Wakathuni and Bellary in remote WA, the local hospital does not have a maternity ward. Instead, it's a seven-hour return trip to attend a 30-minute antenatal appointment – particularly in the context of remote communities' experiences during the pandemic. High-risk pregnancies often see families relocate to Perth, 16 hours' drive away, in the four weeks – or earlier – before their due date.

Antenatal care and midwifery support during pregnancies is known to reduce the incidence of miscarriages, preeclampsia, premature labour, infections, gestational diabetes and stillbirth. A local midwife was providing antenatal and postnatal care until late 2021. However, that person left the community mid-pandemic and they have been unable to attract another suitably qualified person for the role. In 2022, a FIFO service was established with start-up funding from WA Country Health. The FIFO midwife normally sees 18-30 clients over four days each month, as well as attending local mother's support groups to provide advice and information.

While the program is funded by WA Country Health, due to cost increases a funding gap exists. In 2022 the Nintirri Centre applied to FRRR for funding for the midwife's flight costs to enable the continuation of the program while the organisation secures long-term funding. This means women in these remote communities can still access life-saving health services.