

Investing in Not-for-Profit Capacity in Regional NSW



Taree and Wingham

Investing in Not-for-Profit Capacity in Regional NSW was a place-based program that ran in three communities affected by the Black Summer bushfires. Local NFPs came together to identify solutions to address diverse needs based around four strategic pillars: people, systems, strategies and sector efficiencies. This extract from the Community Insights Report focuses on Taree / Wingham.

Community consultation workshop

Program activities for Taree and Wingham were delayed as the community again found itself responding to disaster, this time widespread flooding. By August 2021, community feedback was positive about learning more about the INFPC program. In October 2021 the program was launched via a virtual workshop, together with the opening of the Capacity Building Grants inviting locally governed NFP organisations to apply for funds.

There was strong attendance at the workshop and a highly engaged group that discussed many themes including:

- The community uncertainty and fatigue in responding to successive disasters;
- Challenges in accessing funding and associated red tape;
- Lack of volunteers and general skill shortage in the region;
- Concern for housing, homelessness and food security;
- Interest in collective approaches and collaboration, and sharing of resources across organisations where appropriate;
- Need for strategic planning and governance training within some organisations;
- Interest in harnessing local leaders as mentors, support on topics such as governance training, broader cultural diversity, and involving young people; and
- Challenges in maintaining positive mental health and wellbeing across the community in general under difficult circumstances of the past months and years.



Activities

In November 2022, two workshops were held for local community groups taking a deeper dive into some key priorities:

1. Governance skills – Building your Board’s confidence & capacity

This was a chance for organisation representatives to learn more about the roles and responsibilities of Boards, covering topics such as how to maintain a skilled and informed Board or Committee. With 14 local groups represented at the session, and several with more than one representative, there was great diversity of experience and sector representation. The feedback was affirming with comments including *“Fantastic to have an opportunity to learn about this in a community where Board experience is minimal, and we are all learning as we go. I would have loved my whole Board to have attended.”*

2. Engaging and sustaining volunteers – Recruitment, retention & management strategies

Representatives from 15 different organisations joined this workshop to tackle the common issue of volunteer retention and ways to establish an enthusiastic and committed volunteer cohort to enhance their operations. A lively discussion resulted in new ideas to be immediately applied within their organisations.

“I’d love the rest of my Board to benefit, I’d love more training in relation to meetings, minutes, strategy formulation and risk management. It made a huge difference to me that this was local.”

“As someone who is new to being a Board member, I found the lack of jargon in the presentation to be very helpful. It meant I could process the information without first having to translate it into real world terms.”

“I’ve already started working on a ‘hook’ and looking at a more structured roll out of volunteer recruitment.”

“I took away the importance of team / task-based learning to develop skills rather than formal training or relying on networking.”



Grants awarded

Five organisations in Taree / Wingham were awarded grants spanning the four strategic pillars of strategy, systems, people and efficiencies. They represented community-led solutions along the themes of strategic and operational planning, marketing, revenue strategy and a digital solution to support volunteers and NFP organisations. The projects demonstrated the unwavering commitment to bringing positive change to the region and to becoming more prepared in the days ahead. They contributed to the organisations' ability to scale operations and continue to provide essential services to their community as they recover from successive disasters.

Organisation	Project and Description	Grant
Circartus Incorporated	<p>Making the Most of What We Have</p> <p>Boost the capacity and future sustainability of local circus school, Circartus Inc, through the development of a strategic plan and webpage design.</p>	\$10,152
First Steps Count Incorporated	<p>Genuine Co-design with Community</p> <p>Engage community in the development of the operational plan for a new community hub servicing children and families in Taree by resourcing a Co-Design Coordinator role.</p>	\$25,000
Mid Coast Outreach Incorporated	<p>Office and Marketing Support</p> <p>Grow the capacity and profile of newly established organisation, Mid Coast Outreach, through support for human resources, branding and marketing, and IT infrastructure.</p>	\$34,000
Mission Australia	<p>Mid Coast 4 Kids Revenue Strategy</p> <p>Boost the operational capacity of 'Mid Coast 4 Kids' collective impact project seeking positive social outcomes for children, young people and families, through the development of a revenue strategy.</p>	\$6,500
Wingham Chamber of Commerce	<p>Not-for-Profit Portal</p> <p>Build the capacity of not-for-profit organisations in Taree and Wingham through consultation and development of shared digital tools to improve volunteer efficiency and effectiveness, and overall organisational capacity.</p>	\$74,500



Grants in action

Grant Amount:
\$6,500

Organisation Details:

Mission Australia

Project Title:

Mid Coast 4 Kids Revenue Strategy

Project Locations:

Taree NSW

Wingham NSW

Mid Coast 4 Kids (MC4K) is a highly successful initiative, making a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of children and young people on the Mid Coast. MC4K attributes its success to robust community partnerships and is an initiative supported by Communities for Children. As the Communities for Children facilitating partner, Mission Australia received funds to enable MC4K to develop a Revenue Strategy.

With the MC4K initiative operating at capacity due to the limited number of funded backbone staff, planning for sustainability and scale is crucial, with partners committed to continuing their work and furthering their impact. While MC4K had already started working through their strategic planning process, MC4K used funds through the INFPC grant to engage a highly skilled consultant to develop a revenue strategy. This involved exploring various funding models to assess feasibility and viability to enable plan delivery and reviewing MC4K's financial position and future aspirations impartially. The process itself was inclusive and provided an opportunity to ensure all members had a mutual understanding of the funding challenges as well as input into the proposed solutions.

Both the Strategic Plan and the Revenue Strategy have been collaborative exercises that will support Mid Coast 4 Kids to articulate a clear strategic vision, supported by strong ideas, tactics and programs. This will enable the group to scale its impact and build sustainability over time, improving health and wellbeing outcomes for families with children and young people aged 0-24 years in the region in both the short and long-term.



“This was a meaningful contribution to the sustainability of the initiative that will help ‘future proof’ Mid Coast 4 Kids, while supporting the collaborative to scale its impact.”

Grant
Amount:
\$25,000

Organisation Details:

First Steps Count Incorporated

Project Title:

Genuine Co-design with Community

Project Locations:

Taree NSW

First Steps Count (FSC) Child and Community Centre is a community hub for children (aged 0-12) and their families in Taree, on the NSW Mid Coast. The journey to bring this space to the community began 12 years ago and excitedly, the centre has recently completed Stage One of construction and is now open to the public. The need for this Centre has been driven by local families and the intent has remained for community to be involved in the design, as well as the ways of working, to ensure FSC meets the needs of the community.

Authentic community co-design takes time and First Steps Count required increased capacity to be able to implement this plan effectively. With co-design an integral part of the First Steps Count approach, they received a \$25,000 grant to engage the community with the design and development of the operational plan for the centre.

The funding enabled the organisation to employ a part-time Co-Design Coordinator to support the work already initiated and maintain momentum established with already engaged families, as well as identify and overcome barriers that are preventing the least engaged families from participating in co-design work. Activities included coordinating a Community Partnerships group, made up of 10 local parents, working together to form a key component of the leadership team at FSC. Other innovative engagement activities included organising a coffee truck which offered free barista coffee in exchange for community ideas and input, particularly on ways the Centre could be safe and welcoming, and what services would be appropriate. An ice-cream truck was also arranged, offering

after school ice-creams in exchange for ideas from children and young people, specifically asking them to identify suitable names for the rooms in the Centre. FSC gave away 126 ice-creams in 45 minutes! Broader engagement and consultation activities were undertaken through social media, information stalls in educational settings and participating in community days such as NAIDOC Week and R U OK? Day events.

From the outset, FSC recognised the importance and value of close collaboration with children and families in designing this community facility as well as contributing to how it will work best. The result is a warm, welcoming centre that is truly embedded within the local community.



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“We recognise the value of family and community involvement in establishing this amazing place-based hub in Taree. This level of community engagement requires an intensity of time and resources that we would never have been able to achieve without this grant opportunity from FRRR in partnership with Paul Ramsay Foundation. The flexibility in the use of the funds to achieve our aim made a significant difference to our organisation. We are so proud of what we have achieved together with the community.”

Learnings and next steps

Taree and Wingham have strong, resilient and committed community groups and leaders. However, successive disasters have taken their toll and brought fatigue and vulnerability – for services, employees and volunteers. Supporting the health and wellbeing of all community members is front of mind as the impacts of the past years are deeply felt.

The INFPC program has brought a spark of momentum to community groups across Taree and Wingham. It has enabled cross sector conversations, helped generate new ideas, and improved capacity for some organisations through timely, flexible funding. Local leaders have responded with positivity and enthusiasm and a clear willingness for ongoing opportunities to grow and connect, share and learn. Localised funding now is vital to capture this energy and ultimately effect positive and ongoing change.

Next steps and opportunities for NFP's and community groups in Taree and Wingham include:

- ▶ Continued focus on growing the skills of NFP Board members, staff and volunteers through greater exposure into topics including governance and Board skills, grant writing, volunteerism, strategic planning, building and maintaining a digital presence, and fundraising to help groups to strengthen and boost their capacity.
- ▶ Boosting Board and Committee member diversity, experience, skills and retention through deepening networks and integrating a focus on succession planning.
- ▶ Continued sharing of stories, including successes and challenges and how organisations have overcome these, both in Taree and Wingham, and also more broadly with other communities with similar experiences.
- ▶ Prioritising the health and wellbeing of employees, volunteers and community members by developing strategies for regular check-ins, creating space for meaningful connections, and encouraging professional support when appropriate.
- ▶ Investigating networking and collaboration across local organisations and in partnership with local government to share and develop new actions.
- ▶ Encouraging new and diverse perspectives by engaging the voices of young people in local organisations.
- ▶ Reconsidering traditional volunteer roles and seeking to incorporate new ways to engage with local people to attract and encourage broader diversity and skills in community groups.
- ▶ Advocating for multi-year funding opportunities allowing organisations to test new strategies and address sustainability issues with time on their side.
- ▶ Resourcing to support a 'community connector' on the ground who is not aligned to one organisation but can take a whole-of-community approach to identifying and supporting opportunities for meaningful collaboration and new ways forwards.

**For more insights,
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